

Birmingham

By

Jerome K. Jerome

Birmingham

CHAPTER I

Arthur sprang himself upon her a little before Christmas. He was full of a great project. It was that she and her father should spend Christmas with his people at Birmingham. Her father thought he would like to see his brother; they had not often met of late, and Birmingham would be nearer for her than Liverpool.

Joan had no intention of being lured into the Birmingham parlour. She thought she could see in it a scheme for her gradual entanglement. Besides, she was highly displeased. She had intended asking her father to come to Brighton with her. As a matter of fact, she had forgotten all about Christmas; and the idea only came into her head while explaining to Arthur how his impulsiveness had interfered with it. Arthur, crestfallen, suggested telegrams. It would be quite easy to alter everything; and of course her father would rather be with her, wherever it was. But it seemed it was too late. She ought to have been consulted. A sudden sense of proprietorship in her father came to her assistance and added pathos to her indignation. Of course, now, she would have to spend Christmas alone. She was far too busy to think of Birmingham. She could have managed Brighton. Argument founded on the length of journey to Birmingham as compared with the journey to Brighton she refused to be drawn into. Her feelings had been too deeply wounded to permit of descent into detail.

But the sinner, confessing his fault, is entitled to forgiveness, and, having put him back into his proper place, she let him kiss her hand. She even went further and let him ask her out to dinner. As the result of her failure to reform Mrs. Phillips she was feeling dissatisfied with herself. It was an unpleasant sensation and somewhat new to her experience. An evening spent in Arthur's company might do her good. The experiment proved successful. He really was quite a dear boy. Eyeing him thoughtfully through the smoke of her cigarette, it occurred to her how like he was to Guido's painting of St. Sebastian; those soft, dreamy eyes and that beautiful, almost feminine, face! There always had been a suspicion of the saint about him even as a boy: nothing one could lay hold of: just that odd suggestion of a shadow intervening between him and the world.

It seemed a favourable opportunity to inform him of that fixed determination of hers: neverin all probabilityto marry: but to devote her life to her work. She was feeling very kindly towards him; and was able to soften her decision with touches of gentle regret. He did not appear in the least upset. But 'thought' that her duty might demand, later on, that she should change her mind: that was if fate should offer her some noble marriage, giving her wider opportunity.

She was a little piqued at his unexpected attitude of aloofness. What did he mean by a “noble marriage” to a Duke, or something of that sort?

He did not think the candidature need be confined to Dukes, though he had no objection to a worthy Duke. He meant any really great man who would help her and whom she could help.

She promised, somewhat shortly, to consider the matter, whenever the Duke, or other class of nobleman, should propose to her. At present no sign of him had appeared above the horizon. Her own idea was that, if she lived long enough, she would become a spinster. Unless someone took pity on her when she was old and decrepit and past her work.

There was a little humorous smile about his mouth. But his eyes were serious and pleading.

“When shall I know that you are old and decrepit?” he asked.

She was not quite sure. She thought it would be when her hair was grey or rather white. She had been informed by experts that her peculiar shade of hair went white, not grey.

“I shall ask you to marry me when your hair is white,” he said. “May I?”

It did not suggest any overwhelming impatience. “Yes,” she answered. “In case you haven’t married yourself, and forgotten all about me.”

“I shall keep you to your promise,” he said quite gravely.

She felt the time had come to speak seriously. “I want you to marry,” she said, “and be happy. I shall be troubled if you don’t.”

He was looking at her with those shy, worshipping eyes of his that always made her marvel at her own wonderfulness.

“It need not do that,” he answered. “It would be beautiful to be with you always so that I might serve you. But I am quite happy, loving you. Let me see you now and then: touch you and hear your voice.”

Behind her drawdown lids, she offered up a little prayer that she might always be worthy of his homage. She didn’t know it would make no difference to him.

She walked with him to Euston and saw him into the train. He had given up his lodgings and was living with her father at The Pines. They were busy on a plan for securing the cooperation of the workmen, and she promised to run down and hear all about it. She would not change her mind about Birmingham, but sent everyone her love.

She wished she had gone when it came to Christmas Day. This feeling of loneliness was growing upon her. The Phillips had gone up north; and the Greysons to some relations of theirs: swell country people in Hampshire. Flossie was on a sea voyage with Sam and his mother, and even Madge had been struck homesick. It happened to be a Sunday, too, of all days in the week, and London in a drizzling rain was just about the limit. She worked till late in the afternoon, but, sitting down to her solitary cup of tea, she felt she wanted to howl. From the basement came faint sounds of laughter. Her landlord and lady were entertaining guests. If they had not been, she would have found some excuse for running down and talking to them, if only for a few minutes.

Suddenly the vision of old Chelsea Church rose up before her with its little motherly old pewopener. She had so often been meaning to go and see her again, but something had always interfered. She hunted through her drawers and found a comparatively sobercoloured shawl, and tucked it under her cloak. The service was just commencing when she reached the church. Mary Stopperton showed her into a seat and evidently remembered her. "I want to see you afterwards," she whispered; and Mary Stopperton had smiled and nodded. The service, with its need for being continually upon the move, bored her; she was not in the mood for it. And the sermon, preached by a young curate who had not yet got over his Oxford drawl, was uninteresting. She had half hoped that the wheezy old clergyman, who had preached about Calvary on the evening she had first visited the church, would be there again. She wondered what had become of him, and if it were really a fact that she had known him when she was a child, or only her fancy. It was strange how vividly her memory of him seemed to pervade the little church. She had the feeling he was watching her from the shadows. She waited for Mary in the vestibule, and gave her the shawl, making her swear on the big key of the church door that she would wear it herself and not give it away. The little old pewopener's pink and white face flushed with delight as she took it, and the thin, workworn hands fingered it admiringly. "But I may lend it?" she pleaded.

They turned up Church Street. Joan confided to Mary what a rotten Christmas she had had, all by herself, without a soul to speak to except her landlady, who had brought her meals and had been in such haste to get away.

"I don't know what made me think of you," she said. "I'm so glad I did." She gave the little old lady a hug. Mary laughed. "Where are you going now, dearie?" she asked.

“Oh, I don’t mind so much now,” answered Joan. “Now that I’ve seen a friendly face, I shall go home and go to bed early.”

They walked a little way in silence. Mary slipped her hand into Joan’s. “You wouldn’t care to come home and have a bit of supper with me, would you, dearie?” she asked.

“Oh, may I?” answered Joan.

Mary’s hand gave Joan’s a little squeeze. “You won’t mind if anybody drops in?” she said. “They do sometimes of a Sunday evening.”

“You don’t mean a party?” asked Joan.

“No, dear,” answered Mary. “It’s only one or two who have nowhere else to go.”

Joan laughed. She thought she would be a fit candidate.

“You see, it makes company for me,” explained Mary.

Mary lived in a tiny house behind a strip of garden. It stood in a narrow side street between two publichouses, and was covered with ivy. It had two windows above and a window and a door below. The upstairs rooms belonged to the churchwardens and were used as a storehouse for old parish registers, deemed of little value. Mary Stopperton and her bedridden husband lived in the two rooms below. Mary unlocked the door, and Joan passed in and waited. Mary lit a candle that was standing on a bracket and turned to lead the way.

“Shall I shut the door?” suggested Joan.

Mary blushed like a child that has been found out just as it was hoping that it had not been noticed.

“It doesn’t matter, dearie,” she explained. “They know, if they find it open, that I’m in.”

The little room looked very cosy when Mary had made up the fire and lighted the lamp. She seated Joan in the worn horsehair easychair; out of which one had to be careful one did not slip on to the floor; and spread her handsome shawl over the back of the dilapidated sofa.

“You won’t mind my running away for a minute,” she said. “I shall only be in the next room.”

Through the thin partition, Joan heard a constant shrill, complaining voice. At times, it rose into an angry growl. Mary looked in at the door.

“I’m just running round to the doctor’s,” she whispered. “His medicine hasn’t come. I shan’t be long.”

Joan offered to go in and sit with the invalid. But Mary feared the exertion of talking might be too much for him. “He gets so excited,” she explained. She slipped out noiselessly.

It seemed, in spite of its open door, a very silent little house behind its strip of garden. Joan had the feeling that it was listening.

Suddenly she heard a light step in the passage, and the room door opened. A girl entered. She was wearing a large black hat and a black boa round her neck. Between them her face shone unnaturally white. She carried a small cloth bag. She started, on seeing Joan, and seemed about to retreat.

“Oh, please don’t go,” cried Joan. “Mrs. Stopperton has just gone round to the doctor’s. She won’t be long. I’m a friend of hers.”

The girl took stock of her and, apparently reassured, closed the door behind her.

“What’s he like tonight?” she asked, with a jerk of her head in the direction of the next room. She placed her bag carefully upon the sofa, and examined the new shawl as she did so.

“Well, I gather he’s a little fretful,” answered Joan with a smile.

“That’s a bad sign,” said the girl. “Means he’s feeling better.” She seated herself on the sofa and fingered the shawl. “Did you give it her?” she asked.

“Yes,” admitted Joan. “I rather fancied her in it.”

“She’ll only pawn it,” said the girl, “to buy him grapes and port wine.”

“I felt a bit afraid of her,” laughed Joan, “so I made her promise not to part with it. Is he really very ill, her husband?”

“Oh, yes, there’s no makebelieve this time,” answered the girl. “A bad thing for her if he wasn’t.”

“Oh, it’s only what’s known all over the neighbourhood,” continued the girl. “She’s had a pretty rough time with him. Twice I’ve found her getting ready to go to sleep for the night by sitting on the bare floor with her back against the wall. Had sold every stick in the place and gone off. But she’d always some excuse for him. It was sure to be half her fault and the other half he couldn’t help. Now she’s got her ‘reward’ according to her own account. Heard he was dying in a dosshouse, and must fetch him home and nurse him back to life. Seems he’s getting fonder of her every day. Now that he can’t do anything else.”

“It doesn’t seem to depress her spirits,” mused Joan.

“Oh, she! She’s all right,” agreed the girl. “Having the time of her life: someone to look after for twentyfour hours a day that can’t help themselves.”

She examined Joan awhile in silence. “Are you on the stage?” she asked.

“No,” answered Joan. “But my mother was. Are you?”

“Thought you looked a bit like it,” said the girl. “I’m in the chorus. It’s better than being in service or in a shop: that’s all you can say for it.”

“But you’ll get out of that,” suggested Joan. “You’ve got the actress face.”

The girl flushed with pleasure. It was a striking face, with intelligent eyes and a mobile, sensitive mouth. “Oh, yes,” she said, “I could act all right. I feel it. But you don’t get out of the chorus. Except at a price.”

Joan looked at her. “I thought that sort of thing was dying out,” she said.

The girl shrugged her shoulders. “Not in my shop,” she answered. “Anyhow, it was the only chance I ever had. Wish sometimes I’d taken it. It was quite a good part.”

“They must have felt sure you could act,” said Joan. “Next time it will be a clean offer.”

The girl shook her head. “There’s no next time,” she said; “once you’re put down as one of the standoffs. Plenty of others to take your place.”

“Oh, I don’t blame them,” she added. “It isn’t a thing to be dismissed with a toss of your head. I thought it all out. Don’t know now what decided me. Something inside me, I suppose.”

Joan found herself poking the fire. “Have you known Mary Stopperton long?” she asked.

“Oh, yes,” answered the girl. “Ever since I’ve been on my own.”

“Did you talk it over with her?” asked Joan.

“No,” answered the girl. “I may have just told her. She isn’t the sort that gives advice.”

“I’m glad you didn’t do it,” said Joan: “that you put up a fight for all women.”

The girl gave a short laugh. “Afraid I wasn’t thinking much about that,” she said.

“No,” said Joan. “But perhaps that’s the way the best fights are fought without thinking.”

Mary peeped round the door. She had been lucky enough to find the doctor in. She disappeared again, and they talked about themselves. The girl was a Miss Ensor. She lived by herself in a room in Lawrence Street.

“I’m not good at getting on with people,” she explained.

Mary joined them, and went straight to Miss Ensor’s bag and opened it. She shook her head at the contents, which consisted of a small, flabby-looking meat pie in a tin dish, and two pale, flat mince tarts.

“It doesn’t nourish you, dearie,” complained Mary. “You could have bought yourself a nice bit of meat with the same money.”

“And you would have had all the trouble of cooking it,” answered the girl. “That only wants warming up.”

“But I like cooking, you know, dearie,” grumbled Mary. “There’s no interest in warming things up.”

The girl laughed. “You don’t have to go far for your fun,” she said. “I’ll bring a sole next time; and you shall do it au gratin.”

Mary put the indigestible-looking pasties into the oven, and almost banged the door. Miss Ensor proceeded to lay the table. "How many, do you think?" she asked. Mary was doubtful. She hoped that, it being Christmas Day, they would have somewhere better to go.

"I passed old 'Bubble and Squeak,' just now, spouting away to three men and a dog outside the World's End. I expect he'll turn up," thought Miss Ensor. She laid for four, leaving space for more if need be. "I call it the 'Cadger's Arms,'" she explained, turning to Joan. "We bring our own victuals, and Mary cooks them for us and waits on us; and the more of us the merrier. You look forward to your Sunday evening parties, don't you?" she asked of Mary.

Mary laughed. She was busy in a corner with basins and a saucepan. "Of course I do, dearie," she answered. "I've always been fond of company."

There came another opening of the door. A little hairy man entered. He wore spectacles and was dressed in black. He carried a paper parcel which he laid upon the table. He looked a little doubtful at Joan. Mary introduced them. His name was Julius Simson. He shook hands as if under protest.

"As friends of Mary Stopperton," he said, "we meet on neutral ground. But in all matters of moment I expect we are as far asunder as the poles. I stand for the People."

"We ought to be comrades," answered Joan, with a smile. "I, too, am trying to help the People."

"You and your class," said Mr. Simson, "are friends enough to the People, so long as they remember that they are the People, and keep their proper place at the bottom. I am for putting the People at the top."

"Then they will be the Upper Classes," suggested Joan. "And I may still have to go on fighting for the rights of the lower orders."

"In this world," explained Mr. Simson, "someone has got to be Master. The only question is who."

Mary had unwrapped the paper parcel. It contained half a sheep's head. "How would you like it done?" she whispered.

Mr. Simson considered. There came a softer look into his eyes. "How did you do it last time?" he asked. "It came up brown, I remember, with thick gravy."

“Braised,” suggested Mary.

“That’s the word,” agreed Mr. Simson. “Braised.” He watched while Mary took things needful from the cupboard, and commenced to peel an onion.

“That’s the sort that makes me despair of the People,” said Mr. Simson. Joan could not be sure whether he was addressing her individually or imaginary thousands. “Likes working for nothing. Thinks she was born to be everybody’s servant.” He seated himself beside Miss Ensor on the antiquated sofa. It gave a complaining groan but held out.

“Did you have a good house?” the girl asked him. “Saw you from the distance, waving your arms about. Hadn’t time to stop.”

“Not many,” admitted Mr. Simson. “A Christmassy lot. You know. Sort of crowd that interrupts you and tries to be funny. Dead to their own interests. It’s slow work.”

“Why do you do it?” asked Miss Ensor.

“Damned if I know,” answered Mr. Simson, with a burst of candour. “Can’t help it, I suppose. Lost me job again.”

“The old story?” suggested Miss Ensor.

“The old story,” sighed Mr. Simson. “One of the customers happened to be passing last Wednesday when I was speaking on the Embankment. Heard my opinion of the middle classes?”

“Well, you can’t expect ’em to like it, can you?” submitted Miss Ensor.

“No,” admitted Mr. Simson with generosity. “It’s only natural. It’s a fight to the finish between me and the Bourgeois. I cover them with ridicule and contempt and they hit back at me in the only way they know.”

“Take care they don’t get the best of you,” Miss Ensor advised him.

“Oh, I’m not afraid,” he answered. “I’ll get another place all right: give me time. The only thing I’m worried about is my young woman.”

“Doesn’t agree with you?” inquired Miss Ensor.

“Oh, it isn’t that,” he answered. “But she’s frightened. You know. Says life with me is going to be a bit too uncertain for her. Perhaps she’s right.”

“Oh, why don’t you chuck it,” advised Miss Ensor, “give the Bourgeois a rest.”

Mr. Simson shook his head. “Somebody’s got to tackle them,” he said. “Tell them the truth about themselves, to their faces.”

“Yes, but it needn’t be you,” suggested Miss Ensor.

Mary was leaning over the table. Miss Ensor’s fourpenny veal and ham pie was ready. Mary arranged it in front of her. “Eat it while it’s hot, dearie,” she counselled. “It won’t be so indigestible.”

Miss Ensor turned to her. “Oh, you talk to him,” she urged. “Here, he’s lost his job again, and is losing his girl: all because of his silly politics. Tell him he’s got to have sense and stop it.”

Mary seemed troubled. Evidently, as Miss Ensor had stated, advice was not her line. “Perhaps he’s got to do it, dearie,” she suggested.

“What do you mean by got to do it?” exclaimed Miss Ensor. “Who’s making him do it, except himself?”

Mary flushed. She seemed to want to get back to her cooking. “It’s something inside us, dearie,” she thought: “that nobody hears but ourselves.”

“That tells him to talk all that twaddle?” demanded Miss Ensor. “Have you heard him?”

“No, dearie,” Mary admitted. “But I expect it’s got its purpose. Or he wouldn’t have to do it.”

Miss Ensor gave a gesture of despair and applied herself to her pie. The hirsute face of Mr. Simson had lost the foolish aggressiveness that had irritated Joan. He seemed to be pondering matters.

Mary hoped that Joan was hungry. Joan laughed and admitted that she was. “It’s the smell of all the nice things,” she explained. Mary promised it should soon be ready, and went back to her corner.

A short, dark, thickset man entered and stood looking round the room. The frame must once have been powerful, but now it was shrunken and emaciated. The shabby, threadbare clothes hung loosely from the stooping shoulders. Only the head seemed to have retained its vigour. The face, from which the long black hair was brushed straight back, was ghastly white. Out of it, deep set beneath great shaggy, overhanging brows, blazed the fierce, restless eyes of a fanatic. The huge, thinlipped mouth seemed to have petrified itself into a savage snarl. He gave Joan the idea, as he stood there glaring round him, of a hunted beast at bay.

Miss Ensor, whose bump of reverence was undeveloped, greeted him cheerfully as Boanerges. Mr. Simson, more respectful, rose and offered his small, grimy hand. Mary took his hat and cloak away from him and closed the door behind him. She felt his hands, and put him into a chair close to the fire. And then she introduced him to Joan.

Joan started on hearing his name. It was one well known.

“The Cyril Baptiste?” she asked. She had often wondered what he might be like.

“The Cyril Baptiste,” he answered, in a low, even, passionate voice, that he flung at her almost like a blow. “The atheist, the gaol bird, the pariah, the blasphemer, the antiChrist. I’ve hoofs instead of feet. Shall I take off my boots and show them to you? I tuck my tail inside my coat. You can’t see my horns. I’ve cut them off close to my head. That’s why I wear my hair long: to hide the stumps.”

Mary had been searching in the pockets of his cloak. She had found a paper bag. “You mustn’t get excited,” she said, laying her little workworn hand upon his shoulder; “or you’ll bring on the bleeding.”

“Aye,” he answered, “I must be careful I don’t die on Christmas Day. It would make a fine text, that, for their sermons.”

He lapsed into silence: his almost transparent hands stretched out towards the fire.

Mr. Simson fidgeted. The quiet of the room, broken only by Mary’s ministering activities, evidently oppressed him.

“Paper going well, sir?” he asked. “I often read it myself.”

“It still sells,” answered the proprietor, and editor and publisher, and entire staff of The Rationalist.

“I like the articles you are writing on the History of Superstition. Quite illuminating,” remarked Mr. Simson.

“It’s many a year, I am afraid, to the final chapter,” thought their author.

“They afford much food for reflection,” thought Mr. Simson, “though I cannot myself go as far as you do in including Christianity under that heading.”

Mary frowned at him; but Mr. Simson, eager for argument or not noticing, blundered on:

“Whether we accept the miraculous explanation of Christ’s birth,” continued Mr. Simson, in his best streetcorner voice, “or whether, with the great French writer whose name for the moment escapes me, we regard Him merely as a man inspired, we must, I think, admit that His teaching has been of help: especially to the poor.”

The fanatic turned upon him so fiercely that Mr. Simson’s arm involuntarily assumed the posture of defence.

“To the poor?” the old man almost shrieked. “To the poor that he has robbed of all power of resistance to oppression by his vile, submissive creed! that he has drugged into passive acceptance of every evil done to them by his false promises that their sufferings here shall win for them some wonderful reward when they are dead. What has been his teaching to the poor? Bow your backs to the lash, kiss the rod that scars your flesh. Be ye humble, oh, my people. Be ye poor in spirit. Let Wrong rule triumphant through the world. Raise no hand against it, lest ye suffer my eternal punishments. Learn from me to be meek and lowly. Learn to be good slaves and give no trouble to your taskmasters. Let them turn the world into a hell for you. The grave the grave shall be your gate to happiness.

“Helpful to the poor? Helpful to their rulers, to their owners. They take good care that Christ shall be well taught. Their fat priests shall bear his message to the poor. The rod may be broken, the prison door be forced. It is Christ that shall bind the people in eternal fetters. Christ, the lackey, the jackal of the rich.”

Mr. Simson was visibly shocked. Evidently he was less familiar with the opinions of The Rationalist than he had thought.

“I really must protest,” exclaimed Mr. Simson. “To whatever wrong uses His words may have been twisted, Christ Himself I regard as divine, and entitled to be spoken of with reverence. His whole life, His sufferings”

But the old fanatic's vigour had not yet exhausted itself.

"His sufferings!" he interrupted. "Does suffering entitle a man to be regarded as divine? If so, so also am I a God. Look at me!" He stretched out his long, thin arms with their clawlike hands, thrusting forward his great savage head that the bony, wizened throat seemed hardly strong enough to bear. "Wealth, honour, happiness: I had them once. I had wife, children and a home. Now I creep an outcast, keeping to the shadows, and the children in the street throw stones at me. Thirty years I have starved that I might preach. They shut me in their prisons, they hound me into garrets. They jibe at me and mock me, but they cannot silence me. What of my life? Am I divine?"

Miss Ensor, having finished her supper, sat smoking.

"Why must you preach?" she asked. "It doesn't seem to pay you." There was a curious smile about the girl's lips as she caught Joan's eye.

He turned to her with his last flicker of passion.

"Because to this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth," he answered.

He sank back a huddled heap upon the chair. There was foam about his mouth, great beads of sweat upon his forehead. Mary wiped them away with a corner of her apron, and felt again his trembling hands. "Oh, please don't talk to him any more," she pleaded, "not till he's had his supper." She fetched her fine shawl, and pinned it round him. His eyes followed her as she hovered about him. For the first time, since he had entered the room, they looked human.

They gathered round the table. Mr. Baptiste was still pinned up in Mary's bright shawl. It lent him a curious dignity. He might have been some ancient prophet stepped from the pages of the Talmud. Miss Ensor completed her supper with a cup of tea and some little cakes: "just to keep us all company," as Mary had insisted.

The old fanatic's eyes passed from face to face. There was almost the suggestion of a smile about the savage mouth.

"A strange supperparty," he said. "Cyril the Apostate; and Julius who strove against the High Priests and the Pharisees; and Inez a dancer before the people; and Joanna a daughter of the rulers, gathered together in the house of one Mary a servant of the Lord."

“Are you, too, a Christian?” he asked of Joan.

“Not yet,” answered Joan. “But I hope to be, one day.” She spoke without thinking, not quite knowing what she meant. But it came back to her in after years.

The talk grew lighter under the influence of Mary’s cooking. Mr. Baptiste could be interesting when he got away from his fanaticism; and even the apostolic Mr. Simson had sometimes noticed humour when it had chanced his way.

A message came for Mary about ten o’clock, brought by a scared little girl, who whispered it to her at the door. Mary apologized. She had to go out. The party broke up. Mary disappeared into the next room and returned in a shawl and bonnet, carrying a small brown paper parcel. Joan walked with her as far as the King’s Road.

“A little child is coming,” she confided to Joan. She was quite excited about it.

Joan thought. “It’s curious,” she said, “one so seldom hears of anybody being born on Christmas Day.”

They were passing a lamp. Joan had never seen a face look quite so happy as Mary’s looked, just then.

“It always seems to me Christ’s birthday,” she said, “whenever a child is born.”

They had reached the corner. Joan could see her bus in the distance.

She stooped and kissed the little withered face.

“Don’t stop,” she whispered.

Mary gave her a hug, and almost ran away. Joan watched the little childlike figure growing smaller. It glided in and out among the people.

CHAPTER II

In the spring, Joan, at Mrs. Denton's request, undertook a mission. It was to go to Paris. Mrs. Denton had meant to go herself, but was laid up with sciatica; and the matter, she considered, would not brook of any delay.

"It's rather a delicate business," she told Joan. She was lying on a couch in her great library, and Joan was seated by her side. "I want someone who can go into private houses and mix with educated people on their own level; and especially I want you to see one or two women: they count in France. You know French pretty well, don't you?"

"Oh, sufficiently," Joan answered. The one thing her mother had done for her had been to talk French with her when she was a child; and at Girton she had chummed on with a French girl, and made herself tolerably perfect.

"You will not go as a journalist," continued Mrs. Denton; "but as a personal friend of mine, whose discretion I shall vouch for. I want you to find out what the people I am sending you among are thinking themselves, and what they consider ought to be done. If we are not very careful on both sides we shall have the newspapers whipping us into war."

The perpetual Egyptian trouble had cropped up again and the Carleton papers, in particular, were already sounding the tocsin. Carleton's argument was that we ought to fall upon France and crush her, before she could develop her supposed submarine menace. His flaming posters were at every corner. Every obscure French newspaper was being ransacked for "Insults and Pinpricks."

"A section of the Paris Press is doing all it can to help him, of course," explained Mrs. Denton. "It doesn't seem to matter to them that Germany is only waiting her opportunity, and that, if Russia comes in, it is bound to bring Austria. Europe will pay dearly one day for the luxury of a free Press."

"But you're surely not suggesting any other kind of Press, at this period of the world's history?" exclaimed Joan.

"Oh, but I am," answered the old lady with a grim tightening of the lips. "Not even Carleton would be allowed to incite to murder or arson. I would have him prosecuted for inciting a nation to war."

"Why is the Press always so eager for war?" mused Joan. "According to their own account, war doesn't pay them."

“I don’t suppose it does: not directly,” answered Mrs. Denton. “But it helps them to establish their position and get a tighter hold upon the public. War does pay the newspaper in the long run. The daily newspaper lives on commotion, crime, lawlessness in general. If people no longer enjoyed reading about violence and bloodshed half their occupation, and that the most profitable half would be gone. It is the interest of the newspaper to keep alive the savage in human nature; and war affords the readiest means of doing this. You can’t do much to increase the number of gruesome murders and loathsome assaults, beyond giving all possible advertisement to them when they do occur. But you can preach war, and cover yourself with glory, as a patriot, at the same time.”

“I wonder how many of my ideals will be left to me,” sighed Joan. “I always used to regard the Press as the modern pulpit.”

“The old pulpit became an evil, the moment it obtained unlimited power,” answered Mrs. Denton. “It originated persecution and inflamed men’s passions against one another. It, too, preached war for its own ends, taught superstition, and punished thought as a crime. The Press of today is stepping into the shoes of the medieval priest. It aims at establishing the worst kind of tyranny: the tyranny over men’s minds. They pretend to fight among themselves, but it’s rapidly becoming a close corporation. The Institute of Journalists will soon be followed by the Union of Newspaper Proprietors and the few independent journals will be squeezed out. Already we have German shareholders on English papers; and English capital is interested in the St. Petersburg Press. It will one day have its International Pope and its school of cosmopolitan cardinals.”

Joan laughed. “I can see Carleton rather fancying himself in a tiara,” she said. “I must tell Phillips what you say. He’s out for a fight with him. Government by Parliament or Government by Press is going to be his war cry.”

“Good man,” said Mrs. Denton. “I’m quite serious. You tell him from me that the next revolution has got to be against the Press. And it will be the stiffest fight Democracy has ever had.”

The old lady had tired herself. Joan undertook the mission. She thought she would rather enjoy it, and Mrs. Denton promised to let her have full instructions. She would write to her friends in Paris and prepare them for Joan’s coming.

Joan remembered Folk, the artist she had met at Flossie’s party, who had promised to walk with her on the terrace at St. Germain, and tell her more about her mother. She

looked up his address on her return home, and wrote to him, giving him the name of the hotel in the Rue de Grenelle where Mrs. Denton had arranged that she should stay. She found a note from him awaiting her when she arrived there. He thought she would like to be quiet after her journey. He would call round in the morning. He had presumed on the privilege of age to send her some lilies. They had been her mother's favourite flower. "Monsieur Folk, the great artist," had brought them himself, and placed them in her dressingroom, so Madame informed her.

It was one of the halfdozen old hotels still left in Paris, and was built round a garden famous for its mighty mulberry tree. She breakfasted underneath it, and was reading there when Folk appeared before her, smiling and with his hat in his hand. He excused himself for intruding upon her so soon, thinking from what she had written him that her first morning might be his only chance. He evidently considered her remembrance of him a feather in his cap.

"We old fellows feel a little sadly, at times, how unimportant we are," he explained. "We are grateful when Youth throws us a smile."

"You told me my coming would take you back thirtythree years," Joan reminded him. "It makes us about the same age. I shall treat you as just a young man."

He laughed. "Don't be surprised," he said, "if I make a mistake occasionally and call you Lena."

Joan had no appointment till the afternoon. They drove out to St. Germain, and had déjeuner at a small restaurant opposite the Château; and afterwards they strolled on to the terrace.

"What was my mother doing in Paris?" asked Joan,

"She was studying for the stage," he answered. "Paris was the only school in those days. I was at Julien's studio. We acted together for some charity. I had always been fond of it. An American manager who was present offered us both an engagement, and I thought it would be a change and that I could combine the two arts."

"And it was here that you proposed to her," said Joan.

"Just by that tree that leans forward," he answered, pointing with his cane a little way ahead. "I thought that in America I'd get another chance. I might have if your father hadn't come along. I wonder if he remembers me."

“Did you ever see her again, after her marriage?” asked Joan.

“No,” he answered. “We used to write to one another until she gave it up. She had got into the habit of looking upon me as a harmless sort of thing to confide in and ask advice of which she never took.”

“Forgive me,” he said. “You must remember that I am still her lover.” They had reached the tree that leant a little forward beyond its fellows, and he had halted and turned so that he was facing her. “Did she and your father get on together. Was she happy?”

“I don’t think she was happy,” answered Joan. “She was at first. As a child, I can remember her singing and laughing about the house, and she liked always to have people about her. Until her illness came. It changed her very much. But my father was gentleness itself, to the end.”

They had resumed their stroll. It seemed to her that he looked at her once or twice a little oddly without speaking. “What caused your mother’s illness?” he asked, abruptly.

The question troubled her. It struck her with a pang of selfreproach that she had always been indifferent to her mother’s illness, regarding it as more or less imaginary. “It was mental rather than physical, I think,” she answered. “I never knew what brought it about.”

Again he looked at her with that odd, inquisitive expression. “She never got over it?” he asked.

“Oh, there were times,” answered Joan, “when she was more like her old self again. But I don’t think she ever quite got over it. Unless it was towards the end,” she added. “They told me she seemed much better for a little while before she died. I was away at Cambridge at the time.”

“Poor dear lady,” he said, “all those years! And poor Jack Allway.” He seemed to be talking to himself. Suddenly he turned to her. “How is the dear fellow?” he asked.

Again the question troubled her. She had not seen her father since that weekend, nearly six months ago, when she had ran down to see him because she wanted something from him. “He felt my mother’s death very deeply,” she answered. “But he’s well enough in health.”

“Remember me to him,” he said. “And tell him I thank him for all those years of love and gentleness. I don’t think he will be offended.”

He drove her back to Paris, and she promised to come and see him in his studio and let him introduce her to his artist friends.

“I shall try to win you over, I warn you,” he said. “Politics will never reform the world. They appeal only to men’s passions and hatreds. They divide us. It is Art that is going to civilize mankind; broaden his sympathies. Art speaks to him the common language of his loves, his dreams, reveals to him the universal kinship.”

Mrs. Denton’s friends called upon her, and most of them invited her to their houses. A few were politicians, senators or ministers. Others were bankers, heads of business houses, literary men and women. There were also a few quiet folk with names that were historical. They all thought that war between France and England would be a world disaster, but were not very hopeful of averting it. She learnt that Carleton was in Berlin trying to secure possession of a wellknown German daily that happened at the moment to be in low water. He was working for an alliance between Germany and England. In France, the Royalists had come to an understanding with the Clericals, and both were evidently making ready to throw in their lot with the warmongers, hoping that out of the troubled waters the fish would come their way. Of course everything depended on the people. If the people only knew it! But they didn’t. They stood about in puzzled flocks, like sheep, wondering which way the newspaper dog was going to hound them. They took her to the great music halls. Every allusion to war was greeted with rapturous applause. The Marseillaise was demanded and encored till the orchestra rebelled from sheer exhaustion. Joan’s patience was sorely tested. She had to listen with impassive face to coarse jests and brutal gibes directed against England and everything English; to sit unmoved while the vast audience rocked with laughter at senseless caricatures of supposed English soldiers whose knees always gave way at the sight of a French uniform. Even in the eyes of her courteous hosts, Joan’s quick glance would occasionally detect a curious glint. The fools! Had they never heard of Waterloo and Trafalgar? Even if their memories might be excused for forgetting Crecy and Poitiers and the campaigns of Marlborough. One evening it had been a particularly trying one for Joan there stepped upon the stage a woodenlooking man in a kilt with bagpipes under his arm. How he had got himself into the programme Joan could not understand. Managerial watchfulness must have gone to sleep for once. He played Scotch melodies, and the Parisians liked them, and when he had finished they called him back. Joan and her friends occupied a box close to the stage. The woodenlooking Scot glanced up at her, and their eyes met. And as the applause died down there rose the first low warning strains of the Pibroch. Joan sat up in her chair and her lips parted. The savage music quickened. It shrilled and skrealed. The blood came surging through her veins.

And suddenly something lying hidden there leaped to life within her brain. A mad desire surged hold of her to rise and shout defiance at those three thousand pairs of hostile eyes confronting her. She clutched at the arms of her chair and so kept her seat. The pibroch ended with its wild sad notes of wailing, and slowly the mist cleared from her eyes, and the stage was empty. A strange hush had fallen on the house.

She was not aware that her hostess had been watching her. She was a sweetfaced, whitehaired lady. She touched Joan lightly on the hand. "That's the trouble," she whispered. "It's in our blood."

Could we ever hope to eradicate it? Was not the survival of this fighting instinct proof that war was still needful to us? In the sculptureroom of an exhibition she came upon a painted statue of Bellona. Its grotesqueness shocked her at first sight, the red streaming hair, the wild eyes filled with fury, the wide open mouthone could almost hear it screamingthe white uplifted arms with outstretched hands! Appalling! Terrible! And yet, as she gazed at it, gradually the thing grew curiously real to her. She seemed to hear the gathering of the chariots, the neighing of the horses, the hurrying of many feet, the sound of an armouring multitude, the shouting, and the braying of the trumpets.

These cold, thinlipped calculators, arguing that "War doesn't pay"; those lankhaired cosmopolitans, preaching their "International," as if the only business of mankind were wages! War still was the stern school where men learnt virtue, duty, forgetfulness of self, faithfulness unto death.

This particular war, of course, must be stopped: if it were not already too late. It would be a war for markets; for spheres of commercial influence; a sordid war that would degrade the people. War, the supreme test of a nation's worth, must be reserved for great ideals. Besides, she wanted to down Carleton.

One of the women on her list, and the one to whom Mrs. Denton appeared to attach chief importance, a Madame de Barante, disappointed Joan. She seemed to have so few opinions of her own. She had buried her young husband during the FrancoPrussian war. He had been a soldier. And she had remained unmarried. She was still beautiful.

"I do not think we women have the right to discuss war," she confided to Joan in her gentle, highbred voice. "I suppose you think that out of date. I should have thought so myself forty years ago. We talk of 'giving' our sons and lovers, as if they were ours to give. It makes me a little angry when I hear pampered women speak like that. It is the men who have to suffer and die. It is for them to decide."

“But perhaps I can arrange a meeting for you with a friend,” she added, “who will be better able to help you, if he is in Paris. I will let you know.”

She told Joan what she remembered herself of 1870. She had turned her country house into a hospital and had seen a good deal of the fighting.

“It would not do to tell the truth, or we should have our children growing up to hate war,” she concluded.

She was as good as her word, and sent Joan round a message the next morning to come and see her in the afternoon. Joan was introduced to a Monsieur de Chaumont. He was a soldierly-looking gentleman, with a grey moustache, and a deep scar across his face.

“Hanged if I can see how we are going to get out of it,” he answered Joan cheerfully. “The moment there is any threat of war, it becomes a point of honour with every nation to do nothing to avoid it. I remember my old duelling days. The quarrel may have been about the silliest trifle imaginable. A single word would have explained the whole thing away. But to utter it would have stamped one as a coward. This Egyptian Tralala! It isn’t worth the bones of a single grenadier, as our friends across the Rhine would say. But I expect, before it’s settled, there will be men’s bones sufficient, bleaching on the desert, to build another Pyramid. It’s so easily started: that’s the devil of it. A mischievous boy can throw a lighted match into a powder magazine, and then it becomes every patriot’s business to see that it isn’t put out. I hate war. It accomplishes nothing, and leaves everything in a greater muddle than it was before. But if the idea ever catches fire, I shall have to do all I can to fan the conflagration. Unless I am prepared to be branded as a poltroon. Every professional soldier is supposed to welcome war. Most of us do: it’s our opportunity. There’s some excuse for us. But these men Carleton and their lot: I regard them as nothing better than the Ménades of the Commune. They care nothing if the whole of Europe blazes. They cannot personally get harmed whatever happens. It’s fun to them.”

“But the people who can get harmed,” argued Joan. “The men who will be dragged away from their work, from their business, used as ‘cannon fodder.’”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Oh, they are always eager enough for it, at first,” he answered. “There is the excitement. The curiosity. You must remember that life is a monotonous affair to the great mass of the people. There’s the natural craving to escape from it; to court adventure. They are not so enthusiastic about it after they have tasted it. Modern warfare, they soon find, is about as dull a business as science ever invented.”

There was only one hope that he could see: and that was to switch the people's mind on to some other excitement. His advices from London told him that a parliamentary crisis was pending. Could not Mrs. Denton and her party do something to hasten it? He, on his side, would consult with the Socialist leaders, who might have something to suggest.

He met Joan, radiant, a morning or two later. The English Government had resigned and preparations for a general election were already on foot.

"And God has been good to us, also," he explained.

A wellknown artist had been found murdered in his bed and grave suspicion attached to his beautiful young wife.

"She deserves the Croix de Guerre, if it is proved that she did it," he thought. "She will have saved many thousands of lives for the present."

Folk had fixed up a party at his studio to meet her. She had been there once or twice; but this was a final affair. She had finished her business in Paris and would be leaving the next morning. To her surprise, she found Phillips there. He had come over hurriedly to attend a Socialist conference, and Leblanc, the editor of *Le Nouveau Monde*, had brought him along.

"I took Smedley's place at the last moment," he whispered to her. "I've never been abroad before. You don't mind, do you?"

It didn't strike her as at all odd that a leader of a political party should ask her "if she minded" his being in Paris to attend a political conference. He was wearing a light grey suit and a blue tie. There was nothing about him, at that moment, suggesting that he was a leader of any sort. He might have been just any man, but for his eyes.

"No," she whispered. "Of course not. I don't like your tie." It seemed to depress him, that.

She felt elated at the thought that he would see her for the first time amid surroundings where she would shine. Folk came forward to meet her with that charming air of protective deference that he had adopted towards her. He might have been some favoured minister of state kissing the hand of a youthful Queen. She glanced down the long studio, ending in its fine window overlooking the park. Some of the most distinguished men in Paris were there, and the immediate stir of admiration that her entrance had created was unmistakable. Even the women turned pleased glances at her; as if willing to recognize in her their representative. A sense of power came to her that

made her feel kind to all the world. There was no need for her to be clever: to make any effort to attract. Her presence, her sympathy, her approval seemed to be all that was needed of her. She had the consciousness that by the mere exercise of her will she could sway the thoughts and actions of these men: that sovereignty had been given to her. It reflected itself in her slightly heightened colour, in the increased brilliance of her eyes, in the confident case of all her movements. It added a compelling softness to her voice.

She never quite remembered what the talk was about. Men were brought up and presented to her, and hung about her words, and sought to please her. She had spoken her own thoughts, indifferent whether they expressed agreement or not; and the argument had invariably taken another plane. It seemed so important that she should be convinced. Some had succeeded, and had been strengthened. Others had failed, and had departed sorrowful, conscious of the necessity of "thinking it out again."

Guests with other engagements were taking their leave. A piquante little woman, outrageously but effectively dressed she looked like a drawing by Beardsley drew her aside. "I've always wished I were a man," she said. "It seemed to me that they had all the power. From this afternoon, I shall be proud of belonging to the governing sex."

She laughed and slipped away.

Phillips was waiting for her in the vestibule. She had forgotten him; but now she felt glad of his humble request to be allowed to see her home. It would have been such a big drop from her crowded hour of triumph to the long lonely cab ride and the solitude of the hotel. She resolved to be gracious, feeling a little sorry for her neglect of him but reflecting with satisfaction that he had probably been watching her the whole time.

"What's the matter with my tie?" he asked. "Wrong colour?"

She laughed. "Yes," she answered. "It ought to be grey to match your suit. And so ought your socks."

"I didn't know it was going to be such a swell affair, or I shouldn't have come," he said.

She touched his hand lightly.

"I want you to get used to it," she said. "It's part of your work. Put your brain into it, and don't be afraid."

"I'll try," he said.

He was sitting on the front seat, facing her. "I'm glad I went," he said with sudden vehemence. "I loved watching you, moving about among all those people. I never knew before how beautiful you are."

Something in his eyes sent a slight thrill of fear through her. It was not an unpleasant sensation rather exhilarating. She watched the passing street till she felt that his eyes were no longer devouring her.

"You're not offended?" he asked. "At my thinking you beautiful?" he added, in case she hadn't understood.

She laughed. Her confidence had returned to her. "It doesn't generally offend a woman," she answered.

He seemed relieved. "That's what's so wonderful about you," he said. "I've met plenty of clever, brilliant women, but one could forget that they were women. You're everything."

He pleaded, standing below her on the steps of the hotel, that she would dine with him. But she shook her head. She had her packing to do. She could have managed it; but something prudent and absurd had suddenly got hold of her; and he went away with much the same look in his eyes that comes to a dog when he finds that his master cannot be persuaded into an excursion.

She went up to her room. There really was not much to do. She could quite well finish her packing in the morning. She sat down at the desk and set to work to arrange her papers. It was a warm spring evening, and the window was open. A crowd of noisy sparrows seemed to be delighted about something. From somewhere, unseen, a blackbird was singing. She read over her report for Mrs. Denton. The blackbird seemed never to have heard of war. He sang as if the whole world were a garden of languor and love. Joan looked at her watch. The first gong would sound in a few minutes. She pictured the dreary, silent diningroom with its few scattered occupants, and her heart sank at the prospect. To her relief came remembrance of a cheerful but entirely respectable restaurant near to the Louvre to which she had been taken a few nights before. She had noticed quite a number of women dining there alone. She closed her dispatch case with a snap and gave a glance at herself in the great mirror. The blackbird was still singing.

She walked up the Rue des Sts. Pères, enjoying the delicious air. Half way across the bridge she overtook a man, strolling listlessly in front of her. There was something familiar about him. He was wearing a grey suit and had his hands in his pockets.

Suddenly the truth flashed upon her. She stopped. If he strolled on, she would be able to slip back. Instead of which he abruptly turned to look down at a passing steamer, and they were face to face.

It made her mad, the look of delight that came into his eyes. She could have boxed his ears. Hadn't he anything else to do but hang about the streets.

He explained that he had been listening to the band in the gardens, returning by the Quai d'Orsay.

"Do let me come with you," he said. "I kept myself free this evening, hoping. And I'm feeling so lonesome."

Poor fellow! She had come to understand that feeling. After all, it wasn't altogether his fault that they had met. And she had been so cross to him!

He was reading every expression on her face.

"It's such a lovely evening," he said. "Couldn't we go somewhere and dine under a tree?"

It would be rather pleasant. There was a little place at Meudon, she remembered. The plane trees would just be in full leaf.

A passing cab had drawn up close to them. The chauffeur was lighting his pipe.

Even Mrs. Grundy herself couldn't object to a journalist dining with a politician!

The stars came out before they had ended dinner. She had made him talk about himself. It was marvellous what he had accomplished with his opportunities. Ten hours a day in the mines had earned for him his living, and the night had given him his leisure. An attic, lighted by a tallow candle, with a shelf of books that left him hardly enough for bread, had been his Alma Mater. History was his chief study. There was hardly an authority Joan could think of with which he was not familiar. Julius Caesar was his favourite play. He seemed to know it by heart. At twentythree he had been elected a delegate, and had entered Parliament at twentyeight. It had been a life of hardship, of privation, of constant strain; but she found herself unable to pity him. It was a tale of strength, of struggle, of victory, that he told her.

Strength! The shaded lamplight fell upon his fearless kindly face with its flashing eyes and its humorous mouth. He ought to have been drinking out of a horn, not a wine glass that his wellshaped hand could have crushed by a careless pressure. In a winged helmet

and a coat of mail he would have looked so much more fitly dressed than in that soft felt hat and ridiculous blue tie.

She led him to talk on about the future. She loved to hear his clear, confident voice with its touch of boyish boastfulness. What was there to stop him? Why should he not climb from power to power till he had reached the end!

And as he talked and dreamed there grew up in her heart a fierce anger. What would her own future be? She would marry probably some man of her own class, settle down to the average woman's "life"; be allowed, like a spoilt child, to still "take an interest" in public affairs: hold "drawingrooms" attended by cranks and political nonentities: be President, perhaps, of the local Woman's Liberal League. The alternative: to spend her days glued to a desk, penning exhortations to the people that Carleton and his like might or might not allow them to read; while youth and beauty slipped away from her, leaving her one of the ten thousand other lonely, faded women, forcing themselves unwelcome into men's jobs. There came to her a sense of having been robbed of what was hers by primitive eternal law. Greyson had been right. She did love powerpower to serve and shape the world. She would have earned it and used it well. She could have helped him, inspired him. They would have worked together: he the force and she the guidance. She would have supplied the things he lacked. It was to her he came for counsel, as it was. But for her he would never have taken the first step. What right had this poor brainless lump of painted flesh to share his wounds, his triumphs? What help could she give him when the time should come that he should need it?

Suddenly he broke off. "What a fool I'm making of myself," he said. "I always was a dreamer."

She forced a laugh. "Why shouldn't it come true?" she asked.

They had the little garden to themselves. The million lights of Paris shone below them.

"Because you won't be there," he answered, "and without you I can't do it. You think I'm always like I am tonight, bragging, confident. So I am when you are with me. You give me back my strength. The plans and hopes and dreams that were slipping from me come crowding round me, laughing and holding out their hands. They are like the children. They need two to care for them. I want to talk about them to someone who understands them and loves them, as I do. I want to feel they are dear to someone else, as well as to myself: that I must work for them for her sake, as well as for my own. I want someone to help me to bring them up."

There were tears in his eyes. He brushed them angrily away. "Oh, I know I ought to be ashamed of myself," he said. "It wasn't her fault. She wasn't to know that a hotblooded young chap of twenty hasn't all his wits about him, any more than I was. If I had never met you, it wouldn't have mattered. I'd have done my bit of good, and have stopped there, content. With you beside me" he looked away from her to where the silent city peeped through its veil of night "I might have left the world better than I found it."

The blood had mounted to her face. She drew back into the shadow, beyond the tiny sphere of light made by the little lamp.

"Men have accomplished great things without a woman's help," she said.

"Some men," he answered. "Artists and poets. They have the woman within them. Men like myself the mere fighter: we are incomplete in ourselves. Male and female created He them. We are lost without our mate."

He was thinking only of himself. Had he no pity for her. So was she, also, useless without her mate. Neither was she of those, here and there, who can stand alone. Her task was that of the eternal woman: to make a home: to cleanse the world of sin and sorrow, make it a kinder dwellingplace for the children that should come. This man was her true helpmeet. He would have been her weapon, her dear servant; and she could have rewarded him as none other ever could. The lamplight fell upon his ruddy face, his strong white hands resting on the flimsy table. He belonged to an older order than her own. That suggestion about him of something primitive, of something not yet altogether tamed. She felt again that slight thrill of fear that so strangely excited her. A mist seemed to be obscuring all things. He seemed to be coming towards her. Only by keeping her eyes fixed on his moveless hands, still resting on the table, could she convince herself that his arms were not closing about her, that she was not being drawn nearer and nearer to him, powerless to resist.

Suddenly, out of the mist, she heard voices. The waiter was standing beside him with the bill. She reached out her hand and took it. The usual few mistakes had occurred. She explained them, good temperedly, and the waiter, with profuse apologies, went back to have it corrected.

He turned to her as the man went. "Try and forgive me," he said in a low voice. "It all came tumbling out before I thought what I was saying."

The blood was flowing back into her veins. "Oh, it wasn't your fault," she answered. "We must make the best we can of it."

He bent forward so that he could see into her eyes.

“Tell me,” he said. There was a note of fierce exultation in his voice. “I’ll promise never to speak of it again. If I had been a free man, could I have won you?”

She had risen while he was speaking. She moved to him and laid her hands upon his shoulders.

“Will you serve me and fight for me against all my enemies?” she asked.

“So long as I live,” he answered.

She glanced round. There was no sign of the returning waiter. She bent over him and kissed him.

“Don’t come with me,” she said. “There’s a cab stand in the Avenue. I shall walk to Sèvres and take the train.”

She did not look back.

CHAPTER III

She reached home in the evening. The Phillips's old rooms had been twice let since Christmas, but were now again empty. The McKean with his silent ways and his everlasting pipe had gone to America to superintend the production of one of his plays. The house gave her the feeling of being haunted. She had her dinner brought up to her and prepared for a long evening's work; but found herself unable to think except on the one subject that she wanted to put off thinking about. To her relief the last post brought her a letter from Arthur. He had been called to Lisbon to look after a contract, and would be away for a fortnight. Her father was not as well as he had been.

It seemed to just fit in. She would run down and spend a few quiet days at Liverpool. In her old familiar room where the moon peeped in over the tops of the tall pines she would be able to reason things out. Perhaps her father would be able to help her. She had lost her childish conception of him as of someone prim and proper, with cut and dried formulas for all occasions. That glimpse he had shown her of himself had established a fellowship between them. He, too, had wrestled with life's riddles, not sure of his own answers. She found him suffering from his old heart trouble, but more cheerful than she had known him for years. Arthur seemed to be doing wonders with the men. They were coming to trust him.

"The difficulty I have always been up against," explained her father, "has been their suspicion. 'What's the cunning old rascal up to now? What's his little game?' That is always what I have felt they were thinking to themselves whenever I have wanted to do anything for them. It isn't anything he says to them. It seems to be just he, himself."

He sketched out their plans to her. It seemed to be all going in at one ear and out at the other. What was the matter with her? Perhaps she was tired without knowing it. She would get him to tell her all about it tomorrow. Also, tomorrow, she would tell him about Phillips, and ask his advice. It was really quite late. If he talked any more now, it would give her a headache. She felt it coming on.

She made her "goodnight" extra affectionate, hoping to disguise her impatience. She wanted to get up to her own room.

But even that did not help her. It seemed in some mysterious way to be no longer her room, but the room of someone she had known and half forgotten: who would never come back. It gave her the same feeling she had experienced on returning to the house in London: that the place was haunted. The high cheval glass from her mother's dressingroom had been brought there for her use. The picture of an absurdly small child the child to whom this room had once belonged standing before it naked, rose

before her eyes. She had wanted to see herself. She had thought that only her clothes stood in the way. If we could but see ourselves, as in some magic mirror? All the garments usage and education has dressed us up in laid aside. What was she underneath her artificial niceties, her prim moralities, her laboriously acquired restraints, her unconscious pretences and hypocrisies? She changed her clothes for a loose robe, and putting out the light drew back the curtains. The moon peeped in over the top of the tall pines, but it only stared at her, indifferent. It seemed to be looking for somebody else.

Suddenly, and intensely to her own surprise, she fell into a passionate fit of weeping. There was no reason for it, and it was altogether so unlike her. But for quite a while she was unable to control it. Gradually, and of their own accord, her sobs lessened, and she was able to wipe her eyes and take stock of herself in the long glass. She wondered for the moment whether it was really her own reflection that she saw there or that of some ghostly image of her mother. She had so often seen the same look in her mother's eyes. Evidently the likeness between them was more extensive than she had imagined. For the first time she became conscious of an emotional, hysterical side to her nature of which she had been unaware. Perhaps it was just as well that she had discovered it. She would have to keep a stricter watch upon herself. This question of her future relationship with Phillips: it would have to be thought out coldly, dispassionately. Nothing unexpected must be allowed to enter into it.

It was some time before she fell asleep. The high glass faced her as she lay in bed. She could not get away from the idea that it was her mother's face that every now and then she saw reflected there.

She woke late the next morning. Her father had already left for the works. She was rather glad to have no need of talking. She would take a long walk into the country, and face the thing squarely with the help of the cheerful sun and the free west wind that was blowing from the sea. She took the train up north and struck across the hills. Her spirits rose as she walked.

It was only the intellectual part of him she wanted the spirit, not the man. She would be taking nothing away from the woman, nothing that had ever belonged to her. All the rest of him: his home life, the benefits that would come to her from his improved means, from his social position: all that the woman had ever known or cared for in him would still be hers. He would still remain to her the kind husband and father. What more was the woman capable of understanding? What more had she any right to demand?

It was not of herself she was thinking. It was for his work's sake that she wanted to be near to him always: that she might counsel him, encourage him. For this she was

prepared to sacrifice herself, give up her woman's claim on life. They would be friends, comrades nothing more. That little lurking curiosity of hers, concerning what it would be like to feel his strong arms round her, pressing her closer and closer to him: it was only a foolish fancy. She could easily laugh that out of herself. Only bad women had need to be afraid of themselves. She would keep guard for both of them. Their purity of motive, their high purpose, would save them from the danger of anything vulgar or ridiculous.

Of course they would have to be careful. There must be no breath of gossip, no food for evil tongues. About that she was determined even more for his sake than her own. It would be fatal to his career. She was quite in agreement with the popular demand, supposed to be peculiarly English, that a public man's life should be above reproach. Of what use these prophets without selfcontrol; these social reformers who could not shake the ape out of themselves? Only the brave could give courage to others. Only through the pure could God's light shine upon men.

It was vexing his having moved round the corner, into North Street. Why couldn't the silly woman have been content where she was. Living under one roof, they could have seen one another as often as was needful without attracting attention. Now, she supposed, she would have to be more than ever the bosom friend of Mrs. Phillipspend hours amid that hideous furniture, surrounded by those bilious wallpapers. Of course he could not come to her. She hoped he would appreciate the sacrifice she would be making for him. Fortunately Mrs. Phillips would give no trouble. She would not even understand.

What about Hilda? No hope of hiding their secret from those sharp eyes. But Hilda would approve. They could trust Hilda. The child might prove helpful.

It cast a passing shadow upon her spirits, this necessary descent into details. It brought with it the suggestion of intrigue, of deceit: robbing the thing, to a certain extent, of its fineness. Still, what was to be done? If women were coming into public life these sort of relationships with men would have to be faced and worked out. Sex must no longer be allowed to interfere with the working together of men and women for common ends. It was that had kept the world back. They would be the pioneers of the new order. Casting aside their earthly passions, humbly with pure hearts they would kneel before God's altar. He should bless their union.

A lark was singing. She stood listening. Higher and higher he rose, pouring out his song of worship; till the tiny, fragile body disappeared as if fallen from him, leaving his sweet soul still singing. The happy tears came to her eyes, and she passed on. She did not

hear that little last faint sob with which he sank exhausted back to earth beside a hidden nest among the furrows.

She had forgotten the time. It was already late afternoon. Her long walk and the keen air had made her hungry. She had a couple of eggs with her tea at a village inn, and was fortunate enough to catch a train that brought her back in time for dinner. A little ashamed of her unresponsiveness the night before, she laid herself out to be sympathetic to her father's talk. She insisted on hearing again all that he and Arthur were doing, opposing him here and there with criticism just sufficient to stimulate him; careful in the end to let him convince her.

These small hypocrisies were new to her. She hoped she was not damaging her character. But it was good, watching him slyly from under drawdown lids, to see the flash of triumph that would come into his tired eyes in answer to her halfprotesting: "Yes, I see your point, I hadn't thought of that," her half reluctant admission that "perhaps" he was right, there; that "perhaps" she was wrong. It was delightful to see him young again, eager, boyishly pleased with himself. It seemed there was a joy she had not dreamed of in yielding victory as well as in gaining it. A new tenderness was growing up in her. How considerate, how patient, how selfforgetful he had always been. She wanted to mother him. To take him in her arms and croon over him, hushing away remembrance of the old sad days.

Folk's words came back to her: "And poor Jack Allway. Tell him I thank him for all those years of love and gentleness." She gave him the message.

Folk had been right. He was not offended. "Dear old chap," he said. "That was kind of him. He was always generous."

He was silent for a while, with a quiet look on his face.

"Give him our love," he said. "Tell him we came together, at the end."

It was on her tongue to ask him, as so often she had meant to do of late, what had been the cause of her mother's illness if illness it was: what it was that had happened to change both their lives. But always something had stopped hersomething ever present, ever watchful, that seemed to shape itself out of the air, bending towards her with its finger on its lips.

She stayed over the weekend; and on the Saturday, at her suggestion, they took a long excursion into the country. It was the first time she had ever asked him to take her out. He came down to breakfast in a new suit, and was quite excited. In the car his hand had

sought hers shyly, and, feeling her responsive pressure, he had continued to hold it; and they had sat for a long time in silence. She decided not to tell him about Phillips, just yet. He knew of him only from the Tory newspapers and would form a wrong idea. She would bring them together and leave Phillips to make his own way. He would like Phillips when he knew him, she felt sure. He, too, was a people's man. The torch passed down to him from his old Ironside ancestors, it still glowed. More than once she had seen it leap to flame. In congenial atmosphere, it would burn clear and steadfast. It occurred to her what a delightful solution of her problem, if later on her father could be persuaded to leave Arthur in charge of the works, and come to live with her in London. There was a fine block of flats near Chelsea Church with long views up and down the river. How happy they could be there; the drawingroom in the Adams style with winecoloured curtains! He was a father any young woman could be proud to take about. Unconsciously she gave his hand an impulsive squeeze. They lunched at an old inn upon the moors; and the landlady, judging from his shy, attentive ways, had begun by addressing her as Madame.

“You grow wonderfully like your mother,” he told her that evening at dinner. “There used to be something missing. But I don't feel that, now.”

She wrote to Phillips to meet her, if possible, at Euston. There were things she wanted to talk to him about. There was the question whether she should go on writing for Carleton, or break with him at once. Also one or two points that were worrying her in connection with tariff reform. He was waiting for her on the platform. It appeared he, too, had much to say. He wanted her advice concerning his next speech. He had not dined and suggested supper. They could not walk about the streets. Likely enough, it was only her imagination, but it seemed to her that people in the restaurant had recognized him, and were whispering to one another: he was bound to be well known. Likewise her own appearance, she felt, was against them as regarded their desire to avoid observation. She would have to take to those mousey colours that did not suit her, and wear a veil. She hated the idea of a veil. It came from the East and belonged there. Besides, what would be the use? Unless he wore one too. “Who is the veiled woman that Phillips goes about with?” That is what they would ask. It was going to be very awkward, the whole thing. Viewed from the distance, it had looked quite fine. “Dedicating herself to the service of Humanity” was how it had presented itself to her in the garden at Meudon, the twinkling labyrinth of Paris at her feet, its sordid byways hidden beneath its myriad lights. She had not bargained for the dedication involving the loss of her selfrespect.

They did not talk as much as they had thought they would. He was not very helpful on the Carleton question. There was so much to be said both for and against. It might be

better to wait and see how circumstances shaped themselves. She thought his speech excellent. It was difficult to discover any argument against it.

He seemed to be more interested in looking at her when he thought she was not noticing. That little faint vague fear came back to her and stayed with her, but brought no quickening of her pulse. It was a fear of something ugly. She had the feeling they were both acting, that everything depended upon their not forgetting their parts. In handing things to one another, they were both of them so careful that their hands should not meet and touch.

They walked together back to Westminster and wished each other a short goodnight upon what once had been their common doorstep. With her latchkey in her hand, she turned and watched his retreating figure, and suddenly a wave of longing seized her to run after him and call him back to see his eyes light up and feel the pressure of his hands. It was only by clinging to the railings and counting till she was sure he had entered his own house round the corner and closed the door behind him, that she restrained herself.

It was a frightened face that looked at her out of the glass, as she stood before it taking off her hat.

She decided that their future meetings should be at his own house. Mrs. Phillips's only complaint was that she knocked at the door too seldom.

"I don't know what I should do without you, I really don't," confessed the grateful lady. "If ever I become a Prime Minister's wife, it's you I shall have to thank. You've got so much courage yourself, you can put the heart into him. I never had any pluck to spare myself."

She concluded by giving Joan a hug, accompanied by a sloppy but heartfelt kiss.

She would stand behind Phillips's chair with her fat arms round his neck, nodding her approval and encouragement; while Joan, seated opposite, would strain every nerve to keep her brain fixed upon the argument, never daring to look at poor Phillips's wretched face, with its pleading, apologetic eyes, lest she should burst into hysterical laughter. She hoped she was being helpful and inspiring! Mrs. Phillips would assure her afterwards that she had been wonderful. As for herself, there were periods when she hadn't the faintest idea about what she was talking.

Sometimes Mrs. Phillips, called away by domestic duty, would leave them; returning full of excuses just as they had succeeded in forgetting her. It was evident she was under the

impression that her presence was useful to them, making it easier for them to open up their minds to one another.

“Don’t you be put off by his seeming a bit unresponsive,” Mrs. Phillips would explain. “He’s shy with women. What I’m trying to do is to make him feel you are one of the family.”

“And don’t you take any notice of me,” further explained the good woman, “when I seem to be in opposition, like. I chip in now and then on purpose, just to keep the ball rolling. It stirs him up, a bit of contradictoriness. You have to live with a man before you understand him.”

One morning Joan received a letter from Phillips, marked immediate. He informed her that his brain was becoming addled. He intended that afternoon to give it a draught of fresh air. He would be at the Robin Hood gate in Richmond Park at three o’clock. Perhaps the gods would be good to him. He would wait there for half an hour to give them a chance, anyway.

She slipped the letter unconsciously into the bosom of her dress, and sat looking out of the window. It promised to be a glorious day, and London was stifling and gritty. Surely no one but an unwholesomeminded prude could jibe at a walk across a park. Mrs. Phillips would be delighted to hear that she had gone. For the matter of that, she would tell her when next they met.

Phillips must have seen her getting off the bus, for he came forward at once from the other side of the gate, his face radiant with boyish delight. A young man and woman, entering the park at the same time, looked at them and smiled sympathetically.

Joan had no idea the park contained such pleasant byways. But for an occasional perambulator they might have been in the heart of the country. The fallow deer stole near to them with noiseless feet, regarding them out of their large gentle eyes with looks of comradeship. They paused and listened while a missal thrush from a branch close to them poured out his song of hope and courage. From quite a long way off they could still hear his clear voice singing, telling to the young and brave his gallant message. It seemed too beautiful a day for politics. After all, politics one has them always with one; but the spring passes.

He saw her on to a bus at Kingston, and himself went back by train. They agreed they would not mention it to Mrs. Phillips. Not that she would have minded. The danger was that she would want to come, too; honestly thinking thereby to complete their happiness. It seemed to be tacitly understood there would be other such excursions.

The summer was propitious. Phillips knew his London well, and how to get away from it. There were winding lanes in Hertfordshire, Surrey hills and commons, deep, cool, birdhaunted woods in Buckingham. Each week there was something to look forward to, something to plan for and manoeuvre. The sense of adventure, a spice of danger, added zest. She still knocked frequently, as before, at the door of the hideouslyfurnished little house in North Street; but Mrs. Phillips no longer oppressed her as some old man of the sea she could never hope to shake off from her shoulders. The flabby, foolish face, robbed of its terrors, became merely pitiful. She found herself able to be quite gentle and patient with Mrs. Phillips. Even the sloppy kisses she came to bear without a shudder down her spine.

“I know you are only doing it because you sympathize with his aims and want him to win,” acknowledged the good lady. “But I can’t help feeling grateful to you. I don’t feel how useless I am while I’ve got you to run to.”

They still discussed their various plans for the amelioration and improvement of humanity; but there seemed less need for haste than they had thought. The world, Joan discovered, was not so sad a place as she had judged it. There were chubby, rogueeyed children; whistling lads and smiling maidens; kindly men with ruddy faces; happy mothers crooning over gurgling babies. There was no call to be fretful and vehement. They would work together in patience and in confidence. God’s sun was everywhere. It needed only that dark places should be opened up and it would enter.

Sometimes, seated on a lichened log, or on the short grass of some sloping hillside, looking down upon some quiet valley, they would find they had been holding hands while talking. It was but as two happy, thoughtless children might have done. They would look at one another with frank, clear eyes and smile.

Once, when their pathway led through a littered farmyard, he had taken her up in his arms and carried her and she had felt a glad pride in him that he had borne her lightly as if she had been a child, looking up at her and laughing.

An old bent man paused from his work and watched them. “Lean more over him, missie,” he advised her. “That’s the way. Many a mile I’ve carried my lass like that, in flood time; and never felt her weight.”

Often on returning home, not knowing why, she would look into the glass. It seemed to her that the girlhood she had somehow missed was awakening in her, taking possession of her, changing her. The lips she had always seen pressed close and firm were growing curved, leaving a little parting, as though they were not quite so satisfied with one

another. The level brows were becoming slightly raised. It gave her a questioning look that was new to her. The eyes beneath were less confident. They seemed to be seeking something.

One evening, on her way home from a theatre, she met Flossie. "Can't stop now," said Flossie, who was hurrying. "But I want to see you: most particular. Was going to look you up. Will you be at home tomorrow afternoon at teatime?"

There was a distinct challenge in Flossie's eye as she asked the question. Joan felt herself flush, and thought a moment.

"Yes," she answered. "Will you be coming alone?"

"That's the idea," answered Flossie; "a heart to heart talk between you and me, and nobody else. Halfpast four. Don't forget."

Joan walked on slowly. She had the worried feeling with which, once or twice, when a schoolgirl, she had crawled up the stairs to bed after the head mistress had informed her that she would see her in her private room at eleven o'clock the next morning, leaving her to guess what about. It occurred to her, in Trafalgar Square, that she had promised to take tea with the Greysons the next afternoon, to meet some big pot from America. She would have to get out of that. She felt it wouldn't do to put off Flossie.

She went to bed wakeful. It was marvellously like being at school again. What could Flossie want to see her about that was so important? She tried to pretend to herself that she didn't know. After all, perhaps it wasn't that.

But she knew that it was the instant Flossie put up her hands in order to take off her hat. Flossie always took off her hat when she meant to be unpleasant. It was her way of pulling up her sleeves. They had their tea first. They seemed both agreed that that would be best. And then Flossie pushed back her chair and sat up.

She had just the head mistress expression. Joan wasn't quite sure she oughtn't to stand. But, controlling the instinct, leant back in her chair, and tried to look defiant without feeling it.

"How far are you going?" demanded Flossie.

Joan was not in a comprehending mood.

“If you’re going the whole hog, that’s something I can understand,” continued Flossie. “If not, you’d better pull up.”

“What do you mean by the whole hog?” requested Joan, assuming dignity.

“Oh, don’t come the kid,” advised Flossie. “If you don’t mind being talked about yourself, you might think of him. If Carleton gets hold of it, he’s done for.”

“A little bird whispers to me that Robert Phillips was seen walking across Richmond Park the other afternoon in company with Miss Joan Allway, formerly one of our contributors.’ Is that going to end his political career?” retorted Joan with fine sarcasm.

Flossie fixed a relentless eye upon her. “He’ll wait till the bird has got a bit more than that to whisper to him,” she suggested.

“There’ll be nothing more,” explained Joan. “So long as my friendship is of any assistance to Robert Phillips in his work, he’s going to have it. What use are we going to be in politics what’s all the fuss about, if men and women mustn’t work together for their common aims and help one another?”

“Why can’t you help him in his own house, instead of wandering all about the country?” Flossie wanted to know.

“So I do,” Joan defended herself. “I’m in and out there till I’m sick of the hideous place. You haven’t seen the inside. And his wife knows all about it, and is only too glad.”

“Does she know about Richmond Park and the other places?” asked Flossie.

“She wouldn’t mind if she did,” explained Joan. “And you know what she’s like! How can one think what one’s saying with that silly, goggleeyed face in front of one always.”

Flossie, since she had become engaged, had acquired quite a matronly train of thought. She spoke kindly, with a little grave shake of her head. “My dear,” she said, “the wife is always in the way. You’d feel just the same whatever her face was like.”

Joan grew angry. “If you choose to suspect evil, of course you can,” she answered with hauteur. “But you might have known me better. I admire the man and sympathize with him. All the things I dream of are the things he is working for. I can do more good by helping and inspiring him” she wished she had not let slip that word “inspire.” She knew that Flossie would fasten upon it “than I can ever accomplish by myself. And I mean to do it.” She really did feel defiant, now.

“I know, dear,” agreed Flossie, “you’ve both of you made up your minds it shall always remain a beautiful union of twin spirits. Unfortunately you’ve both got bodies rather attractive bodies.”

“We’ll keep it off that plane, if you don’t mind,” answered Joan with a touch of severity.

“I’m willing enough,” answered Flossie. “But what about Old Mother Nature? She’s going to be in this, you know.”

“Take off your glasses, and look at it straight,” she went on, without giving Joan time to reply. “What is it in us that ‘inspires’ men? If it’s only advice and sympathy he’s after, what’s wrong with dear old Mrs. Denton? She’s a good walker, except now and then, when she’s got the lumbago. Why doesn’t he get her to ‘inspire’ him?”

“It isn’t only that,” explained Joan. “I give him courage. I always did have more of that than is any use to a woman. He wants to be worthy of my belief in him. What is the harm if he does admire me if a smile from me or a touch of the hand can urge him to fresh effort? Suppose he does love me”

Flossie interrupted. “How about being quite frank?” she suggested. “Suppose we do love one another. How about putting it that way?”

“And suppose we do?” agreed Joan, her courage rising. “Why should we shun one another, as if we were both of us incapable of decency or selfcontrol? Why must love be always assumed to make us weak and contemptible, as if it were some subtle poison? Why shouldn’t it strengthen and ennoble us?”

“Why did the apple fall?” answered Flossie. “Why, when it escapes from its bonds, doesn’t it soar upward? If it wasn’t for the irritating law of gravity, we could skip about on the brink of precipices without danger. Things being what they are, sensible people keep as far away from the edge as possible.”

“I’m sorry,” she continued; “awfully sorry, old girl. It’s a bit of rotten bad luck for both of you. You were just made for one another. And Fate, knowing what was coming, bustles round and gets hold of poor, silly Mrs. Phillips so as to be able to say ‘Yah.’”

“Unless it all comes right in the end,” she added musingly; “and the poor old soul pegs out. I wouldn’t give much for her liver.”

“That’s not bringing me up well,” suggested Joan: “putting those ideas into my head.”

“Oh, well, one can’t help one’s thoughts,” explained Flossie. “It would be a blessing all round.”

They had risen. Joan folded her hands. “Thank you for your scolding, ma’am,” she said. “Shall I write out a hundred lines of Greek? Or do you think it will be sufficient if I promise never to do it again?”

“You mean it?” said Flossie. “Of course you will go on seeing him visiting them, and all that. But you won’t go gadding about, so that people can talk?”

“Only through the bars, in future,” she promised. “With the gaoler between us.” She put her arms round Flossie and bent her head, so that her face was hidden.

Flossie still seemed troubled. She held on to Joan.

“You are sure of yourself?” she asked. “We’re only the female of the species. We get hungry and thirsty, too. You know that, kiddy, don’t you?”

Joan laughed without raising her face. “Yes, ma’am, I know that,” she answered. “I’ll be good.”

She sat in the dusk after Flossie had gone; and the laboured breathing of the tired city came to her through the open window. She had rather fancied that martyr’s crown. It had not looked so very heavy, the thorns not so very alarming as seen through the window. She would wear it bravely. It would rather become her.

Facing the mirror of the days to come, she tried it on. It was going to hurt. There was no doubt of that. She saw the fatuous, approving face of the eternal Mrs. Phillips, thrust ever between them, against the background of that hideous furniture, of those bilious wall paper, the loneliness that would ever walk with her, sit down beside her in the crowded restaurant, steal up the staircase with her, creep step by step with her from room to room, the ever unsatisfied yearning for a tender word, a kindly touch. Yes, it was going to hurt.

Poor Robert! It would be hard on him, too. She could not help feeling consolation in the thought that he also would be wearing that invisible crown.

She must write to him. The sooner it was done, the better. Half a dozen contradictory moods passed over her during the composing of that letter; but to her they seemed but the unfolding of a single thought. On one page it might have been his mother writing to

him; an experienced, sagacious lady; quite aware, in spite of her affection for him, of his faults and weaknesses; solicitous that he should avoid the dangers of an embarrassing entanglement; his happiness being the only consideration of importance. On others it might have been a queen laying her immutable commands upon some loyal subject, sworn to her service. Part of it might have been written by a laughing philosopher who had learnt the folly of taking life too seriously, knowing that all things pass: that the tears of today will be remembered with a smile. And a part of it was the unconsidered language of a loving woman. And those were the pages that he kissed.

His letter in answer was much shorter. Of course he would obey her wishes. He had been selfish, thinking only of himself. As for his political career, he did not see how that was going to suffer by his being occasionally seen in company with one of the most brilliantly intellectual women in London, known to share his views. And he didn't care if it did. But inasmuch as she valued it, all things should be sacrificed to it. It was hers to do what she would with. It was the only thing he had to offer her.

Their meetings became confined, as before, to the little house in North Street. But it really seemed as if the gods, appeased by their submission, had decided to be kind. Hilda was home for the holidays; and her piercing eyes took in the situation at a flash. She appeared to have returned with a newborn and exacting affection for her mother, that astonished almost as much as it delighted the poor lady. Feeling sudden desire for a walk or a bus ride, or to be taken to an entertainment, no one was of any use to Hilda but her mother. Daddy had his silly politics to think and talk about. He must worry them out alone; or with the assistance of Miss Allway. That was what she was there for. Mrs. Phillips, torn between her sense of duty and fear of losing this new happiness, would yield to the child's coaxing. Often they would be left alone to discuss the nation's needs uninterrupted. Conscientiously they would apply themselves to the task. Always to find that, sooner or later, they were looking at one another, in silence.

One day Phillips burst into a curious laugh. They had been discussing the problem of the smallholder. Joan had put a question to him, and with a slight start he had asked her to repeat it. But it seemed she had forgotten it.

"I had to see our solicitor one morning," he explained, "when I was secretary to a miners' union up north. A point had arisen concerning the legality of certain payments. It was a matter of vast importance to us; but he didn't seem to be taking any interest, and suddenly he jumped up. 'I'm sorry, Phillips,' he said, 'but I've got a big trouble of my own on at home I guess you know what and I don't seem to care a damn about yours. You'd better see Delauny, if you're in a hurry.' And I did."

He turned and leant over his desk. "I guess they'll have to find another leader if they're in a hurry," he added. "I don't seem able to think about turnips and cows."

"Don't make me feel I've interfered with your work only to spoil it," said Joan.

"I guess I'm spoiling yours, too," he answered. "I'm not worth it. I might have done something to win you and keep you. I'm not going to do much without you."

"You mean my friendship is going to be of no use to you?" asked Joan.

He raised his eyes and fixed them on her with a pleading, doglike look.

"For God's sake don't take even that away from me," he said. "Unless you want me to go to pieces altogether. A crust does just keep one alive. One can't help thinking what a fine, strong chap one might be if one wasn't always hungry."

She felt so sorry for him. He looked such a boy, with the angry tears in his clear blue eyes, and that little childish quivering of the kind, strong, sulky mouth.

She rose and took his head between her hands and turned his face towards her. She had meant to scold him, but changed her mind and laid his head against her breast and held it there.

He clung to her, as a troubled child might, with his arms clasped round her, and his head against her breast. And a mist rose up before her, and strange, commanding voices seemed calling to her.

He could not see her face. She watched it herself with dim half consciousness as it changed before her in the tawdry mirror above the mantelpiece, half longing that he might look up and see it, half terrified lest he should.

With an effort that seemed to turn her into stone, she regained command over herself.

"I must go now," she said in a harsh voice, and he released her.

"I'm afraid I'm an awful nuisance to you," he said. "I get these moods at times. You're not angry with me?"

"No," she answered with a smile. "But it will hurt me if you fail. Remember that."

She turned down the Embankment after leaving the house. She always found the river strong and restful. So it was not only bad women that needed to be afraid of themselves even to the most highclass young woman, with letters after her name, and altruistic interests: even to her, also, the longing for the lover's clasp. Flossie had been right. Mother Nature was not to be flouted of her children not even of her new daughters; to them, likewise, the family trait.

She would have run away if she could, leaving him to guess at her real reason if he were smart enough. But that would have meant excuses and explanations all round. She was writing a daily column of notes for Greyson now, in addition to the weekly letter from Clorinda; and Mrs. Denton, having compromised with her first dreams, was delegating to Joan more and more of her work. She wrote to Mrs. Phillips that she was feeling unwell and would be unable to lunch with them on the Sunday, as had been arranged. Mrs. Phillips, much disappointed, suggested Wednesday; but it seemed on Wednesday she was no better. And so it drifted on for about a fortnight, without her finding the courage to come to any decision; and then one morning, turning the corner into Abingdon Street, she felt a slight pull at her sleeve; and Hilda was beside her. The child had shown an uncanny intuition in not knocking at the door. Joan had been fearing that, and would have sent down word that she was out. But it had to be faced.

"Are you never coming again?" asked the child.

"Of course," answered Joan, "when I'm better. I'm not very well just now. It's the weather, I suppose."

The child turned her head as they walked and looked at her. Joan felt herself smarting under that look, but persisted.

"I'm very much run down," she said. "I may have to go away."

"You promised to help him," said the child.

"I can't if I'm ill," retorted Joan. "Besides, I am helping him. There are other ways of helping people than by wasting their time talking to them."

"He wants you," said the child. "It's your being there that helps him."

Joan stopped and turned. "Did he send you?" she asked.

"No," the child answered. "Mama had a headache this morning, and I slipped out. You're not keeping your promise."

Palace Yard, save for a statuesque policeman, was empty.

“How do you know that my being with him helps him?” asked Joan.

“You know things when you love anybody,” explained the child. “You feel them. You will come again, soon?”

Joan did not answer.

“You’re frightened,” the child continued in a passionate, low voice. “You think that people will talk about you and look down upon you. You oughtn’t to think about yourself. You ought to think only about him and his work. Nothing else matters.”

“I am thinking about him and his work,” Joan answered. Her hand sought Hilda’s and held it. “There are things you don’t understand. Men and women can’t help each other in the way you think. They may try to, and mean no harm in the beginning, but the harm comes, and then not only the woman but the man also suffers, and his work is spoilt and his life ruined.”

The small, hot hand clasped Joan’s convulsively.

“But he won’t be able to do his work if you keep away and never come back to him,” she persisted. “Oh, I know it. It all depends upon you. He wants you.”

“And I want him, if that’s any consolation to you,” Joan answered with a short laugh. It wasn’t much of a confession. The child was cute enough to have found that out for herself. “Only you see I can’t have him. And there’s an end of it.”

They had reached the Abbey. Joan turned and they retraced their steps slowly.

“I shall be going away soon, for a little while,” she said. The talk had helped her to decision. “When I come back I will come and see you all. And you must all come and see me, now and then. I expect I shall have a flat of my own. My father may be coming to live with me. Goodbye. Do all you can to help him.”

She stooped and kissed the child, straining her to her almost fiercely. But the child’s lips were cold. She did not look back.

Miss Greyson was sympathetic towards her desire for a longish holiday and wonderfully helpful; and Mrs. Denton also approved, and, to Joan’s surprise, kissed her; Mrs.

Denton was not given to kissing. She wired to her father, and got his reply the same evening. He would be at her rooms on the day she had fixed with his travelling bag, and at her Ladyship's orders. "With love and many thanks," he had added. She waited till the day before starting to run round and say goodbye to the Phillipses. She felt it would be unwise to try and get out of doing that. Both Phillips and Hilda, she was thankful, were out; and she and Mrs. Phillips had tea alone together. The talk was difficult, so far as Joan was concerned. If the woman had been possessed of ordinary intuition, she might have arrived at the truth. Joan almost wished she would. It would make her own future task the easier. But Mrs. Phillips, it was clear, was going to be no help to her.

For her father's sake, she made pretence of eagerness, but as the sea widened between her and the harbour lights it seemed as if a part of herself were being torn away from her.

They travelled leisurely through Holland and the Rhine land, and that helped a little: the new scenes and interests; and in Switzerland they discovered a delightful little village in an upland valley with just one small hotel, and decided to stay there for a while, so as to give themselves time to get their letters. They took long walks and climbs, returning tired and hungry, looking forward to their dinner and the evening talk with the few other guests on the veranda. The days passed restfully in that hidden valley. The great white mountains closed her in. They seemed so strong and clean.

It was on the morning they were leaving that a telegram was put into her hands. Mrs. Phillips was ill at lodgings in Folkestone. She hoped that Joan, on her way back, would come to see her.

She showed the telegram to her father. "Do you mind, Dad, if we go straight back?" she asked.

"No, dear," he answered, "if you wish it."

"I would like to go back," she said.

CHAPTER IV

Mrs. Phillips was sitting up in an easy chair near the heavilycurtained windows when Joan arrived. It was a pleasant little house in the old part of the town, and looked out upon the harbour. She was startlingly thin by comparison with what she had been; but her face was still painted. Phillips would run down by the afternoon train whenever he could get away. She never knew when he was coming, so she explained; and she could not bear the idea of his finding her "old and ugly." She had fought against his wish that she should go into a nursing home; and Joan, who in the course of her work upon the Nursing Times had acquired some knowledge of them as a whole, was inclined to agree with her. She was quite comfortable where she was. The landlady, according to her account, was a dear. She had sent the nurse out for a walk on getting Joan's wire, so that they could have a cosy chat. She didn't really want much attendance. It was her heart. It got feeble now and then, and she had to keep very still; that was all. Joan told how her father had suffered for years from much the same complaint. So long as you were careful there was no danger. She must take things easily and not excite herself.

Mrs. Phillips acquiesced. "It's turning me into a lazybones," she said with a smile. "I can sit here by the hour, just watching the bustle. I was always one for a bit of life."

The landlady entered with Joan's tea. Joan took an instinctive dislike to her. She was a large, flashy woman, wearing a quantity of cheap jewellery. Her familiarity had about it something almost threatening. Joan waited till she heard the woman's heavy tread descending the stairs, before she expressed her opinion.

"I think she only means to be cheerful," explained Mrs. Phillips. "She's quite a good sort, when you know her." The subject seemed in some way to trouble her, and Joan dropped it.

They watched the loading of a steamer while Joan drank her tea.

"He will come this afternoon, I fancy," said Mrs. Phillips. "I seem to feel it. He will be able to see you home."

Joan started. She had been thinking about Phillips, wondering what she should say to him when they met.

"What does he think," she asked, "about your illness?"

“Oh, it worries him, of course, poor dear,” Mrs. Phillips answered. “You see, I’ve always been such a goahead, as a rule. But I think he’s getting more hopeful. As I tell him, I’ll be all right by the autumn. It was that spell of hot weather that knocked me over.”

Joan was still looking out of the window. She didn’t quite know what to say. The woman’s altered appearance had shocked her. Suddenly she felt a touch upon her hand.

“You’ll look after him if anything does happen, won’t you?” The woman’s eyes were pleading with her. They seemed to have grown larger. “You know what I mean, dear, don’t you?” she continued. “It will be such a comfort to me to know that it’s all right.”

In answer the tears sprang to Joan’s eyes. She knelt down and put her arms about the woman.

“Don’t be so silly,” she cried. “There’s nothing going to happen. You’re going to get fat and well again; and live to see him Prime Minister.”

“I am getting thin, ain’t I?” she said. “I always wanted to be thin.” They both laughed.

“But I shan’t see him that, even if I do live,” she went on. “He’ll never be that, without you. And I’d be so proud to think that he would. I shouldn’t mind going then,” she added.

Joan did not answer. There seemed no words that would come.

“You will promise, won’t you?” she persisted, in a whisper. “It’s only ‘in case’ just that I needn’t worry myself.”

Joan looked up. There was something in the eyes looking down upon her that seemed to be compelling her.

“If you’ll promise to try and get better,” she answered.

Mrs. Phillips stooped and kissed her. “Of course, dear,” she said. “Perhaps I shall, now that my mind is easier.”

Phillips came, as Mrs. Phillips had predicted. He was surprised at seeing Joan. He had not thought she could get back so soon. He brought an evening paper with him. It contained a paragraph to the effect that Mrs. Phillips, wife of the Rt. Hon. Robert Phillips, M.P., was progressing favourably and hoped soon to be sufficiently recovered to return to her London residence. It was the first time she had had a paragraph all to

herself, headed with her name. She flushed with pleasure; and Joan noticed that, after reading it again, she folded the paper up small and slipped it into her pocket. The nurse came in from her walk a little later and took Joan downstairs with her.

“She ought not to talk to more than one person at a time,” the nurse explained, with a shake of the head. She was a quiet, businesslike woman. She would not express a definite opinion.

“It’s her mental state that is the trouble,” was all that she would say. “She ought to be getting better. But she doesn’t.”

“You’re not a Christian Scientist, by any chance?” she asked Joan suddenly.

“No,” answered Joan. “Surely you’re not one?”

“I don’t know,” answered the woman. “I believe that would do her more good than anything else. If she would listen to it. She seems to have lost all willpower.”

The nurse left her; and the landlady came in to lay the table. She understood that Joan would be dining with Mr. Phillips. There was no train till the eightforty. She kept looking at Joan as she moved about the room. Joan was afraid she would begin to talk, but she must have felt Joan’s antagonism for she remained silent. Once their eyes met, and the woman leered at her.

Phillips came down looking more cheerful. He had detected improvement in Mrs. Phillips. She was more hopeful in herself. They talked in low tones during the meal, as people do whose thoughts are elsewhere. It happened quite suddenly, Phillips explained. They had come down a few days after the rising of Parliament. There had been a spell of hot weather; but nothing remarkable. The first attack had occurred about three weeks ago. It was just after Hilda had gone back to school. He wasn’t sure whether he ought to send for Hilda, or not. Her mother didn’t want him tonot just yet. Of course, if she got worse, he would have to. What did Joan think?did she think there was any real danger?

Joan could not say. So much depended upon the general state of health. There was the case of her own father. Of course she would always be subject to attacks. But this one would have warned her to be careful.

Phillips thought that living out of town might be better for her, in the futuresomewhere in Surrey, where he could easily get up and down. He could sleep himself at the club on nights when he had to be late.

They talked without looking at one another. They did not speak about themselves.

Mrs. Phillips was in bed when Joan went up to say goodbye. "You'll come again soon?" she asked, and Joan promised. "You've made me so happy," she whispered. The nurse was in the room.

They discussed politics in the train. Phillips had found more support for his crusade against Carleton than he had expected. He was going to open the attack at once, thus forestalling Carleton's opposition to his land scheme.

"It isn't going to be the Daily This and the Daily That and the Weekly the Other all combined to down me. I'm going to tell the people that it's Carleton and only Carleton here, Carleton there, Carleton everywhere, against them. I'm going to drag him out into the open and make him put up his own fists."

Joan undertook to sound Greyson. She was sure Greyson would support him, in his balanced, gentlemanly way, that could nevertheless be quite deadly.

They grew less and less afraid of looking at one another as they felt that darkened room further and further behind them.

They parted at Charing Cross. Joan would write. They agreed it would be better to choose separate days for their visits to Folkestone.

She ran against Madge in the morning, and invited herself to tea. Her father had returned to Liverpool, and her own rooms, for some reason, depressed her. Flossie was there with young Halliday. They were both off the next morning to his people's place in Devonshire, from where they were going to get married, and had come to say goodbye. Flossie put Sam in the passage and drew to the door.

"Have you seen her?" she asked. "How is she?"

"Oh, she's changed a good deal," answered Joan. "But I think she'll get over it all right, if she's careful."

"I shall hope for the best," answered Flossie. "Poor old soul, she's had a good time. Don't send me a present; and then I needn't send you one when your time comes. It's a silly custom. Besides, I've nowhere to put it. Shall be in a ship for the next six months. Will let you know when we're back."

She gave Joan a hug and a kiss, and was gone. Joan joined Madge in the kitchen, where she was toasting buns.

“I suppose she’s satisfied herself that he’s brainy,” she laughed.

“Oh, brains aren’t everything,” answered Madge. “Some of the worst rotters the world has ever been cursed with have been brainy enoughmen and women. We make too much fuss about brains; just as once upon a time we did about mere brute strength, thinking that was all that was needed to make a man great. Brain is only muscle translated into civilization. That’s not going to save us.”

“You’ve been thinking,” Joan accused her. “What’s put all that into your head?”

Madge laughed. “Mixing with so many brainy people, perhaps,” she suggested; “and wondering what’s become of their souls.”

“Be good, sweet child. And let who can be clever,” Joan quoted. “Would that be your text?”

Madge finished buttering her buns. “Kant, wasn’t it,” she answered, “who marvelled chiefly at two things: the starry firmament above him and the moral law within him. And they’re one and the same, if he’d only thought it out. It’s rather big to be good.”

They carried their tea into the sittingroom.

“Do you really think she’ll get over it?” asked Madge. “Or is it one of those things one has to say?”

“I think she could,” answered Joan, “if she would pull herself together. It’s her lack of willpower that’s the trouble.”

Madge did not reply immediately. She was watching the rooks settling down for the night in the elm trees just beyond the window. There seemed to be much need of coming and going, of much cawing.

“I met her pretty often during those months that Helen Lavery was running her round,” she said at length. “It always seemed to me to have a touch of the heroic, that absurd effort she was making to ‘qualify’ herself, so that she might be of use to him. I can see her doing something quite big, if she thought it would help him.”

The cawing of the rooks grew fainter. One by one they folded their wings.

Neither spoke for a while. Later on, they talked about the coming election. If the Party got back, Phillips would go to the Board of Trade. It would afford him a better platform for the introduction of his land scheme.

“What do you gather is the general opinion?” Joan asked. “That he will succeed?”

“The general opinion seems to be that his star is in the ascendant,” Madge answered with a smile; “that all things are working together for his good. It’s rather a useful atmosphere to have about one, that. It breeds friendship and support!”

Joan looked at her watch. She had an article to finish. Madge stood on tiptoe and kissed her.

“Don’t think me unsympathetic,” she said. “No one will rejoice more than I shall if God sees fit to call you to good work. But I can’t help letting fall my little tear of fellowship with the weeping.”

“And mind your p’s and q’s,” she added. “You’re in a difficult position. And not all the eyes watching you are friendly.”

Joan bore the germ of worry in her breast as she crossed the Gray’s Inn Garden. It was a hard law, that of the world: knowing only winners and losers. Of course, the woman was to be pitied. No one could feel more sorry for her than Joan herself. But what had Madge exactly meant by those words: that she could “see her doing something really big,” if she thought it would help him? There was no doubt about her affection for him. It was almost doglike. And the child, also! There must be something quite exceptional about him to have won the devotion of two such opposite beings. Especially Hilda. It would be hard to imagine any lengths to which Hilda’s blind idolatry would not lead her.

She ran down twice to Folkestone during the following week. Her visits made her mind easier. Mrs. Phillips seemed so placid, so contented. There was no suggestion of suffering, either mental or physical.

She dined with the Greysons the Sunday after, and mooted the question of the coming fight with Carleton. Greyson thought Phillips would find plenty of journalistic backing. The concentration of the Press into the hands of a few conscienceless schemers was threatening to reduce the journalist to a mere hireling, and the betterclass men were becoming seriously alarmed. He found in his desk the report of a speech made by a wellknown leader writer at a recent dinner of the Press Club. The man had risen to

respond to the toast of his own health and had taken the opportunity to unpack his heart.

“I am paid a thousand a year,” so Greyson read to them, “for keeping my own opinions out of my paper. Some of you, perhaps, earn more, and others less; but you’re getting it for writing what you’re told. If I were to be so foolish as to express my honest opinion, I’d be on the street, the next morning, looking for another job.”

“The business of the journalist,” the man had continued, “is to destroy the truth, to lie, to pervert, to vilify, to fawn at the feet of Mammon, to sell his soul for his daily bread. We are the tools and vassals of rich men behind the scenes. We are the jumpingjacks. They pull the strings and we dance. Our talents, our possibilities, our lives are the property of other men.”

“We tried to pretend it was only one of Jack’s little jokes,” explained Greyson as he folded up the cutting; “but it wouldn’t work. It was too near the truth.”

“I don’t see what you are going to do,” commented Mary. “So long as men are not afraid to sell their souls, there will always be a Devil’s market for them.”

Greyson did not so much mind there being a Devil’s market, provided he could be assured of an honest market alongside, so that a man could take his choice. What he feared was the Devil’s steady encroachment, that could only end by the closing of the independent market altogether. His remedy was the introduction of the American trust law, forbidding any one man being interested in more than a limited number of journals.

“But what’s the difference,” demanded Joan, “between a man owning one paper with a circulation of, say, six millions; or owning six with a circulation of a million apiece? By concentrating all his energies on one, a man with Carleton’s organizing genius might easily establish a single journal that would cover the whole field.”

“Just all the difference,” answered Greyson, “between Pooh Bah as Chancellor of the Exchequer, or Lord High Admiral, or Chief Executioner, whichever he preferred to be, and Pooh Bah as all the Officers of State rolled into one. Pooh Bah may be a very able statesman, entitled to exert his legitimate influence. But, after all, his opinion is only the opinion of one old gentleman, with possible prejudices and preconceived convictions. The Mikado or the people, according to locality would like to hear the views of others of his ministers. He finds that the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice and the Groom of the Bedchamber and the Attorney General the whole entire Cabinet, in short, are unanimously of the same opinion as Pooh Bah. He doesn’t know it’s only

Pooh Bah speaking from different corners of the stage. The consensus of opinion convinces him. One statesman, however eminent, might err in judgment. But half a score of statesmen, all of one mind! One must accept their verdict.”

Mary smiled. “But why shouldn’t the good newspaper proprietor hurry up and become a multiproprietor?” she suggested. “Why don’t you persuade Lord Sutcliffe to buy up three or four papers, before they’re all gone?”

“Because I don’t want the Devil to get hold of him,” answered Greyson.

“You’ve got to face this unalterable law,” he continued. “That power derived from worldly sources can only be employed for worldly purposes. The power conferred by popularity, by wealth, by that ability to make use of other men that we term organization sooner or later the man who wields that power becomes the Devil’s servant. So long as Kingship was merely a force struggling against anarchy, it was a holy weapon. As it grew in power so it degenerated into an instrument of tyranny. The Church, so long as it remained a scattered body of meek, lowly men, did the Lord’s work. Enthroned at Rome, it thundered its edicts against human thought. The Press is in danger of following precisely the same history. When it wrote in fear of the pillory and of the jail, it fought for Liberty. Now it has become the Fourth Estate, it fawns as Jack Swinton said of it at the feet of Mammon. My Proprietor, good fellow, allows me to cultivate my plot amid the wilderness for other purposes than those of quick returns. If he were to become a competitor with the Carletons and the Bloomfields, he would have to look upon it as a business proposition. The Devil would take him up on to the high mountain, and point out to him the kingdom of huge circulations and vast profits, whispering to him: ‘All this will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.’ I don’t want the dear good fellow to be tempted.”

“Is it impossible, then, to combine duty and success?” questioned Joan.

“The combination sometimes happens, by chance,” admitted Greyson. “But it’s dangerous to seek it. It is so easy to persuade ourselves that it’s our duty to succeed.”

“But we must succeed to be of use,” urged Mary. “Must God’s servants always remain powerless?”

“Powerless to rule. Powerful only to serve,” he answered. “Powerful as Christ was powerful; not as Caesar was powerful powerful as those who have suffered and have failed, leaders of forlorn hopes powerful as those who have struggled on, despised and vilified; not as those of whom all men speak well powerful as those who have fought lone

battles and have died, not knowing their own victory. It is those that serve, not those that rule, shall conquer.”

Joan had never known him quite so serious. Generally there was a touch of irony in his talk, a suggestion of aloofness that had often irritated her.

“I wish you would always be yourself, as you are now,” she said, “and never pose.”

“Do I pose?” he asked, raising his eyebrows.

“That shows how far it has gone,” she told him, “that you don’t even know it. You pretend to be a philosopher. But you’re really a man.”

He laughed. “It isn’t always a pose,” he explained. “It’s some men’s way of saying: Thy will be done.”

“Ask Phillips to come and see me,” he said. “I can be of more help, if I know exactly his views.”

He walked with her to the bus. They passed a corner house that he had more than once pointed out to her. It had belonged, years ago, to a wellknown artist, who had worked out a wonderful scheme of decoration in the drawingroom. A board was up, announcing that the house was for sale. A gas lamp, exactly opposite, threw a flood of light upon the huge white lettering.

Joan stopped. “Why, it’s the house you are always talking about,” she said. “Are you thinking of taking it?”

“I did go over it,” he answered. “But it would be rather absurd for just Mary and me.”

She looked up Phillips at the House, and gave him Greyson’s message. He had just returned from Folkestone, and was worried.

“She was so much better last week,” he explained. “But it never lasts.”

“Poor old girl!” he added. “I believe she’d have been happier if I’d always remained plain Bob Phillips.”

Joan had promised to go down on the Friday; but finding, on the Thursday morning, that it would be difficult, decided to run down that afternoon instead. She thought at first of sending a wire. But in Mrs. Phillips’s state of health, telegrams were perhaps to

be avoided. It could make no difference. The front door of the little house was standing half open. She called down the kitchen stairs to the landlady, but received no answer. The woman had probably run out on some short errand. She went up the stairs softly. The bedroom door, she knew, would be open. Mrs. Phillips had a feeling against being "shut off," as she called it. She meant to tap lightly and walk straight in, as usual. But what she saw through the opening caused her to pause. Mrs. Phillips was sitting up in bed with her box of cosmetics in front of her. She was sensitive of anyone seeing her makeup; and Joan, knowing this, drew back a step. But for some reason, she couldn't help watching. Mrs. Phillips dipped a brush into one of the compartments and then remained with it in her hand, as if hesitating. Suddenly she stuck out her tongue and passed the brush over it. At least, so it seemed to Joan. It was only a side view of Mrs. Phillips's face that she was obtaining, and she may have been mistaken. It might have been the lips. The woman gave a little gasp and sat still for a moment. Then, putting away the brush, she closed the box and slipped it under the pillow.

Joan felt her knees trembling. A cold, creeping fear was taking possession of her. Why, she could not understand. She must have been mistaken. People don't make up their tongues. It must have been the lips. And even if not the woman had licked the brush! It was a silly trick people do. Perhaps she liked the taste. She pulled herself together and tapped at the door.

Mrs. Phillips gave a little start at seeing her; but was glad that she had come. Phillips had not been down for two days and she had been feeling lonesome. She persisted in talking more than Joan felt was good for her. She was feeling so much better, she explained. Joan was relieved when the nurse came back from her walk and insisted on her lying down. She dropped to sleep while Joan and the nurse were having their tea.

Joan went back by the early train. She met some people at the station that she knew and travelled up with them. That picture of Mrs. Phillips's tongue just showing beyond the line of Mrs. Phillips's cheek remained at the back of her mind; but it was not until she was alone in her own rooms that she dared let her thoughts return to it.

The suggestion that was forcing itself into her brain was monstrous and unthinkable. That, never possessed of any surplus vitality, and suffering from the added lassitude of illness, the woman should have become indifferent, willing to let a life that to her was full of fears and difficulties slip peacefully away from her, that was possible. But that she should exercise thought and ingenuity that she should have reasoned the thing out and deliberately laid her plans, calculating at every point on their success; it was inconceivable.

Besides, what could have put the idea into her head? It was laughable, the presumption that she was a finished actress, capable of deceiving everyone about her. If she had had an inkling of the truth, Joan, with every nerve on the alert, almost hoping for it, would have detected it. She had talked with her alone the day before she had left England, and the woman had been full of hopes and projects for the future.

That picture of Mrs. Phillips, propped up against the pillows, with her makeup box upon her knees was still before her when she went to bed. All night long it haunted her: whether thinking or dreaming of it, she could not tell.

Suddenly, she sat up with a stifled cry. It seemed as if a flash of light had been turned upon her, almost blinding her.

Hilda! Why had she never thought of it? The whole thing was so obvious. "You ought not to think about yourself. You ought to think only of him and of his work. Nothing else matters." If she could say that to Joan, what might she not have said to her mother who, so clearly, she divined to be the incubus the drag upon her father's career? She could hear the child's dry, passionate tones could see Mrs. Phillips's flabby cheeks grow white the frightened, staring eyes. Where her father was concerned the child had neither conscience nor compassion. She had waited her time. It was a few days after Hilda's return to school that Mrs. Phillips had been first taken ill.

She flung herself from the bed and drew the blind. A chill, grey light penetrated the room. It was a little before five. She would go round to Phillips, wake him up. He must be told.

With her hat in her hands, she paused. No. That would not do. Phillips must never know. They must keep the secret to themselves. She would go down and see the woman; reason with her, insist. She went into the other room. It was lighter there. The "A.B.C." was standing in its usual place upon her desk. There was a train to Folkestone at six fifteen. She had plenty of time. It would be wise to have a cup of tea and something to eat. There would be no sense in arriving there with a headache. She would want her brain clear.

It was half past five when she sat down with her tea in front of her. It was only ten minutes' walk to Charing Cross say a quarter of an hour. She might pick up a cab. She grew calmer as she ate and drank. Her reason seemed to be returning to her. There was no such violent hurry. Hadn't she better think things over, in the clear daylight? The woman had been ill now for nearly six weeks: a few hours a day or two could make no difference. It might alarm the poor creature, her unexpected appearance at such an unusual hour cause a relapse. Suppose she had been mistaken? Hadn't she better make

a few inquiries first feel her way? One did harm more often than good, acting on impulse. After all, had she the right to interfere? Oughtn't the thing to be thought over as a whole? Mightn't there be arguments, worth considering, against her interference? Her brain was too much in a whirl. Hadn't she better wait till she could collect and arrange her thoughts?

The silver clock upon her desk struck six. It had been a gift from her father when she was at Girton. It never obtruded. Its voice was a faint musical chime that she need not hear unless she cared to listen. She turned and looked at it. It seemed to be a little face looking back at her out of its two round, blinkless eyes. For the first time during all the years that it had watched beside her, she heard its quick, impatient tick.

She sat motionless, staring at it. The problem, in some way, had simplified itself into a contest between herself, demanding time to think, and the little insistent clock, shouting to her to act upon blind impulse. If she could remain motionless for another five minutes, she would have won.

The ticking of the little clock was filling the room. The thing seemed to have become alive to be threatening to burst its heart. But the thin, delicate indicator moved on.

Suddenly its ticking ceased. It had become again a piece of lifeless mechanism. The hands pointed to six minutes past. Joan took off her hat and laid it aside.

She must think the whole thing over quietly.

CHAPTER V

She could help him. Without her, he would fail. The woman herself saw that, and wished it. Why should she hesitate? It was not as if she had only herself to consider. The fate of the happiness of millions was at stake. He looked to her for aid for guidance. It must have been intended. All roads had led to it. Her going to the house. She remembered now, it was the first door at which she had knocked. Her footsteps had surely been directed. Her meeting with Mrs. Phillips in Madge's rooms; and that invitation to dinner, coinciding with that crisis in his life. It was she who had persuaded him to accept. But for her he would have doubted, wavered, let his opportunities slip by. He had confessed it to her.

And she had promised him. He needed her. The words she had spoken to Madge, not dreaming then of their swift application. They came back to her. "God has called me. He girded His sword upon me." What right had she to leave it rusting in its scabbard, turning aside from the pathway pointed out to her because of one weak, useless life, crouching in her way. It was not as if she were being asked to do evil herself that good might come. The decision had been taken out of her hands. All she had to do was to remain quiescent, not interfering, awaiting her orders. Her business was with her own part, not with another's. To be willing to sacrifice oneself: that was at the root of all service. Sometimes it was one's own duty, sometimes that of another. Must one never go forward because another steps out of one's way, voluntarily? Besides, she might have been mistaken. That picture, ever before her, of the woman pausing with the brush above her tongue that little stilled gasp! It may have been but a phantasm, born of her own fevered imagination. She clung to that, desperately.

It was the task that had been entrusted to her. How could he hope to succeed without her. With her, he would be all powerful accomplish the end for which he had been sent into the world. Society counts for so much in England. What public man had ever won through without its assistance. As Greyson had said: it is the dinner table that rules. She could win it over to his side. That mission to Paris that she had undertaken for Mrs. Denton, that had brought her into contact with diplomatists, politicians, the leaders and the rulers, the bearers of names known and honoured in history. They had accepted her as one of themselves. She had influenced them, swayed them. That afternoon at Folk's studio, where all eyes had followed her, where famous men and women had waited to attract her notice, had hung upon her words. Even at school, at college, she had always commanded willing homage. As Greyson had once told her, it was herself her personality that was her greatest asset. Was it to be utterly wasted? There were hundreds of impersonal, sexless women, equipped for nothing else, with pens as keen if not keener than hers. That was not the talent with which she had been entrusted for which she would have to account. It was her beauty, her power to charm, to draw after

hitherto compel by the mere exercise of her will. Hitherto Beauty had been content to barter itself for mere coin of the realm for ease and luxury and pleasure. She only asked to be allowed to spend it in service. As his wife, she could use it to fine ends. By herself she was helpless. One must take the world as one finds it. It gives the unmarried woman no opportunity to employ the special gifts with which God has endowed her except for evil. As the wife of a rising statesman, she could be a force for progress. She could become another Madame Roland; gather round her all that was best of English social life; give back to it its lost position in the vanguard of thought.

She could strengthen him, give him courage. Without her, he would always remain the mere fighter, doubtful of himself. The confidence, the inspiration, necessary for leadership, she alone could bring to him. Each by themselves was incomplete. Together, they would be the whole. They would build the city of their dreams.

She seemed to have become a wandering spirit rather than a living being. She had no sense of time or place. Once she had started, hearing herself laugh. She was seated at a table, and was talking. And then she had passed back into forgetfulness. Now, from somewhere, she was gazing downward. Roofs, domes and towers lay stretched before her, emerging from a sea of shadows. She held out her arms towards them and the tears came to her eyes. The poor tired people were calling to her to join with them to help them. Should she fail them, turn deaf ears to the myriad because of pity for one useless, feeble life?

She had been fashioned to be his helpmate, as surely as if she had been made of the same bone. Nature was at one with God. Spirit and body both yearned for him. It was not position or power for herself that she craved. The marriage market that had been her desire: it had always been open to her. She had the gold that buys these things. Wealth, ambition: they had been offered to her spread out temptingly before her eyes. They were always within her means, if ever she chose to purchase them. It was this man alone to whom she had ever felt drawn: this man of the people, with that suggestion about him of something primitive, untamed, causing her always in his presence that faint, compelling thrill of fear, who stirred her blood as none of the polished men of her own class had ever done. His kind, strong, ugly face: it moved beside her: its fearless, tender eyes now pleading, now commanding.

He needed her. She heard his passionate, low voice, as she had heard it in the little garden above Meudon: "Because you won't be there; and without you I can do nothing." What right had this poor, worn-out shadow to stand between them, to the end? Had love and life no claims, but only weakness? She had taken all, had given nothing. It was but reparation she was making. Why stop her?

She was alone in a maze of narrow, silent streets that ended always in a high blank wall. It seemed impossible to get away from this blank wall. Whatever way she turned she was always coming back to it.

What was she to do? Drag the woman back to life against her will lead her back to him to be a chain about his feet until the end? Then leave him to fight the battle alone?

And herself? All her world had been watching and would know. She had counted her chickens before they were dead. She had set her cap at the man, reckoning him already widowed; and his wife had come to life and snatched it from her head. She could hear the laughter the half amused, half contemptuous pity for her "rotten bad luck." She would be their standing jest, till she was forgotten.

What would life leave to her? A lonely lodging and a pot of ink that she would come to hate the smell of. She could never marry. It would be but her body that she could give to any other man. Not even for the sake of her dreams could she bring herself to that. It might have been possible before, but not now. She could have won the victory over herself, but for hope, that had kindled the smouldering embers of her passion into flame. What cunning devil had flung open this door, showing her all her heart's desire, merely that she should be called upon to slam it to in her own face?

A fierce anger blazed up in her brain. Why should she listen? Why had reason been given to us if we were not to use it weigh good and evil in the balance and decide for ourselves where lay the nobler gain? Were we to be led hither and thither like blind children? What was right what wrong, but what our own Godgiven judgment told us? Was it wrong of the woman to perform this act of selfrenunciation, yielding up all things to love? No, it was greatheroic of her. It would be her cross of victory, her crown.

If the gift were noble, so also it could not be ignoble to accept it.

To reject it would be to dishonour it.

She would accept it. The wonder of it should cast out her doubts and fears. She would seek to make herself worthy of it. Consecrate it with her steadfastness, her devotion.

She thought it ended. But yet she sat there motionless.

What was plucking at her sleeve still holding her?

Unknowing, she had entered a small garden. It formed a passage between two streets, and was left open day and night. It was but a narrow strip of rank grass and withered

shrubs with an asphalt pathway widening to a circle in the centre, where stood a gas lamp and two seats, facing one another.

And suddenly it came to her that this was her Garden of Gethsemane; and a dull laugh broke from her that she could not help. It was such a ridiculous apology for Gethsemane. There was not a corner in which one could possibly pray. Only these two iron seats, one each side of the gaunt gas lamp that glared down upon them. Even the withered shrubs were fenced off behind a railing. A ragged figure sprawled upon the bench opposite to her. It snored gently, and its breath came laden with the odour of cheap whisky.

But it was her Gethsemane: the best that Fate had been able to do for her. It was here that her choice would be made. She felt that.

And there rose before her the vision of that other Garden of Gethsemane with, below it, the soft lights of the city shining through the trees; and above, clear against the starlit sky, the cold, dark cross.

It was only a little cross, hers, by comparison. She could see that. They seemed to be standing side by side. But then she was only a woman little more than a girl. And her courage was so small. She thought He ought to know that. For her, it was quite a big cross. She wondered if He had been listening to all her arguments. There was really a good deal of sense in some of them. Perhaps He would understand. Not all His prayer had come down to us. He, too, had put up a fight for life. He, too, was young. For Him, also, life must have seemed but just beginning. Perhaps He, too, had felt that His duty still lay among the people teaching, guiding, healing them. To Him, too, life must have been sweet with its noble work, its loving comradeship. Even from Him the words had to be wrung: "Thy will, not Mine, be done."

She whispered them at last. Not bravely, at all. Feebly, haltingly, with a little sob: her forehead pressed against the cold iron seat, as if that could help her.

She thought that even then God might reconsider it see her point of view. Perhaps He would send her a sign.

The ragged figure on the bench opposite opened its eyes, stared at her; then went to sleep again. A prowling cat paused to rub itself against her foot, but meeting no response, passed on. Through an open window, somewhere near, filtered the sound of a child's low whimpering.

It was daylight when she awoke. She was cold and her limbs ached. Slowly her senses came back to her. The seat opposite was vacant. The gas lamp showed but a faint blue point of flame. Her dress was torn, her boots soiled and muddy. Strands of her hair had escaped from underneath her hat.

She looked at her watch. Fortunately it was still early. She would be able to let herself in before anyone was up. It was but a little way. She wondered, while rearranging her hair, what day it was. She would find out, when she got home, from the newspaper.

In the street she paused a moment and looked back through the railings. It seemed even still more sordid in the daylight: the sooty grass and the withered shrubs and the asphalt pathway strewn with dirty paper. And again a laugh she could not help broke from her. Her Garden of Gethsemane!

She sent a brief letter round to Phillips, and a telegram to the nurse, preparing them for what she meant to do. She had just time to pack a small trunk and catch the morning train. At Folkestone, she drove first to a house where she herself had once lodged and fixed things to her satisfaction. The nurse was waiting for her in the downstairs room, and opened the door to her. She was opposed to Joan's interference. But Joan had come prepared for that. "Let me have a talk with her," she said. "I think I've found out what it is that is causing all the trouble."

The nurse shot her a swift glance. "I'm glad of that," she said dryly. She let Joan go upstairs.

Mrs. Phillips was asleep. Joan seated herself beside the bed and waited. She had not yet made herself up for the day and the dyed hair was hidden beneath a white, closefitting cap. The pale, thin face with its closed eyes looked strangely young. Suddenly the thin hands clasped, and her lips moved, as if she were praying in her sleep. Perhaps she also was dreaming of Gethsemane. It must be quite a crowded garden, if only we could see it.

After a while, her eyes opened. Joan drew her chair nearer and slipped her arm in under her, and their eyes met.

"You're not playing the game," whispered Joan, shaking her head. "I only promised on condition that you would try to get well."

The woman made no attempt to deny. Something told her that Joan had learned her secret. She glanced towards the door. Joan had closed it.

“Don’t drag me back,” she whispered. “It’s all finished.” She raised herself up and put her arms about Joan’s neck. “It was hard at first, and I hated you. And then it came to me that this was what I had been wanting to do, all my lifesome thing to help him, that nobody else could do. Don’t take it from me.”

“I know,” whispered Joan. “I’ve been there, too. I knew you were doing it, though I didn’t quite know how till the other day. I wouldn’t think. I wanted to pretend that I didn’t. I know all you can say. I’ve been listening to it. It was right of you to want to give it all up to me for his sake. But it would be wrong of me to take it. I don’t quite see why. I can’t explain it. But I mustn’t. So you see it would be no good.”

“But I’m so useless,” pleaded the woman.

“I said that,” answered Joan. “I wanted to do it and I talked and talked, so hard. I said everything I could think of. But that was the only answer: I mustn’t do it.”

They remained for a while with their arms round one another. It struck Joan as curious, even at the time, that all feeling of superiority had gone out of her. They might have been two puzzled children that had met one another on a path that neither knew. But Joan was the stronger character.

“I want you to give me up that box,” she said, “and to come away with me where I can be with you and take care of you until you are well.”

Mrs. Phillips made yet another effort. “Have you thought about him?” she asked.

Joan answered with a faint smile. “Oh, yes,” she said. “I didn’t forget that argument in case it hadn’t occurred to the Lord.”

“Perhaps,” she added, “the helpmate theory was intended to apply only to our bodies. There was nothing said about our souls. Perhaps God doesn’t have to work in pairs. Perhaps we were meant to stand alone.”

Mrs. Phillips’s thin hands were playing nervously with the bed clothes. There still seemed something that she had to say. As if Joan hadn’t thought of everything. Her eyes were fixed upon the narrow strip of light between the window curtains.

“You don’t think you could, dear,” she whispered, “if I didn’t do anything wicked any more. But just let things take their course.”

“You see, dear,” she went on, her face still turned away, “I thought it all finished. It will be hard for me to go back to him, knowing as I do now that he doesn’t want me. I shall always feel that I am in his way. And Hilda,” she added after a pause, “she will hate me.”

Joan looked at the white patient face and was silent. What would be the use of senseless contradiction. The woman knew. It would only seem an added stab of mockery. She knelt beside the bed, and took the thin hands in hers.

“I think God must want you very badly,” she said, “or He wouldn’t have laid so heavy a cross upon you. You will come?”

The woman did not answer in words. The big tears were rolling down her cheeks. There was no paint to mingle with and mar them. She drew the little metal box from under the pillow and gave it into Joan’s hands.

Joan crept out softly from the room.

The nurse was standing by the window. She turned sharply on Joan’s entrance. Joan slipped the box into her hands.

The nurse raised the lid. “What a fool I’ve been,” she said. “I never thought of that.”

She held out a large strong hand and gave Joan a longish grip. “You’re right,” she said, “we must get her out of this house at once. Forgive me.”

Phillips had been called up north and wired that he would not be able to get down till the Wednesday evening. Joan met him at the station.

“She won’t be expecting you, just yet,” she explained. “We might have a little walk.”

She waited till they had reached a quiet road leading to the hills.

“You will find her changed,” she said. “Mentally, I mean. Though she will try not to show it. She was dying for your sake to set you free. Hilda seems to have had a talk with her and to have spared her no part of the truth. Her great love for you made the sacrifice possible and even welcome. It was the one gift she had in her hands. She was giving it gladly, proudly. So far as she was concerned, it would have been kinder to let her make an end of it. But during the last few days I have come to the conclusion there is a law within us that we may not argue with. She is coming back to life, knowing you no longer want her, that she is only in the way. Perhaps you may be able to think of something to say or do that will lessen her martyrdom. I can’t.”

They had paused where a group of trees threw a blot of shadow across the moonlit road.

“You mean she was killing herself?” he asked.

“Quite cleverly. So as to avoid all danger of after discovery: that might have hurt us,” she answered.

They walked in silence, and coming to a road that led back into the town, he turned down it. She had the feeling she was following him without his knowing it. A cab was standing outside the gate of a house, having just discharged its fare. He seemed to have suddenly recollected her.

“Do you mind?” he said. “We shall get there so much quicker.”

“You go,” she said. “I’ll stroll on quietly.”

“You’re sure?” he said.

“I would rather,” she answered.

It struck her that he was relieved. He gave the man the address, speaking hurriedly, and jumped in.

She had gone on. She heard the closing of the door behind her, and the next moment the cab passed her.

She did not see him again that night. They met in the morning at breakfast. A curious strangeness to each other seemed to have grown up between them, as if they had known one another long ago, and had half forgotten. When they had finished she rose to leave; but he asked her to stop, and, after the table had been cleared, he walked up and down the room, while she sat sideways on the window seat from where she could watch the little ships moving to and fro across the horizon, like painted figures in a show.

“I had a long talk with Nan last night,” he said. “And, trying to explain it to her, I came a little nearer to understanding it myself. My love for you would have been strong enough to ruin both of us. I see that now. It would have dominated every other thought in me. It would have swallowed up my dreams. It would have been blind, unscrupulous. Married to you, I should have aimed only at success. It would not have been your fault. You would not have known. About mere birth I should never have troubled myself. I’ve met daughters of a hundred earlsmore or less: clever, jolly little women I could have

chucked under the chin and have been chummy with. Nature creates her own ranks, and puts her ban upon misalliances. Every time I took you in my arms I should have felt that you had stepped down from your proper order to mate yourself with me and that it was up to me to make the sacrifice good to you by giving you powerposition. Already within the last few weeks, when it looked as if this thing was going to be possible, I have been thinking against my will of a compromise with Carleton that would give me his support. This coming election was beginning to have terrors for me that I have never before felt. The thought of defeathering to go back to comparative poverty, to comparative obscurity, with you as my wife, was growing into a nightmare. I should have wanted wealth, fame, victory, for your sake to see you honoured, courted, envied, finely dressed and finely housed grateful to me for having won for you these things. It wasn't honest, healthy love the love that unites, that makes a man willing to take as well as to give, that I felt for you; it was worship that separates a man from a woman, that puts fear between them. It isn't good that man should worship a woman. He can't serve God and woman. Their interests are liable to clash. Nan's my helpmate just a loving woman that the Lord brought to me and gave me when I was alone that I still love. I didn't know it till last night. She will never stand in my way. I haven't to put her against my duty. She will leave me free to obey the voice that calls to me. And no man can hear that voice but himself."

He had been speaking in a clear, selfconfident tone, as if at last he saw his road before him to the end; and felt that nothing else mattered but that he should go forward hopefully, unflinching. Now he paused, and his eyes wandered. But the lines about his strong mouth deepened.

"Perhaps, I am not of the stuff that conquerors are made," he went on. "Perhaps, if I were, I should be thinking differently. It comes to me sometimes that I may be one of those intended only to prepare the way that for me there may be only the endless struggle. I may have to face unpopularity, abuse, failure. She won't mind."

"Nor would you," he added, turning to her suddenly for the first time, "I know that. But I should be afraid for you."

She had listened to him without interrupting, and even now she did not speak for a while.

It was hard not to. She wanted to tell him that he was all wrong at least, so far as she was concerned. It was not the conqueror she loved in him; it was the fighter. Not in the hour of triumph but in the hour of despair she would have yearned to put her arms about him. "Unpopularity, abuse, failure," it was against the fear of such that she would have guarded him. Yes, she had dreamed of leadership, influence, command. But it was

the leadership of the valiant few against the hosts of the oppressors that she claimed. Wealth, honours! Would she have given up a life of ease, shut herself off from society, if these had been her standards? “Mésalliance!” Had the male animal no instinct, telling it when it was loved with all a woman’s being, so that any other union would be her degradation.

It was better for him he should think as he did. She rose and held out her hand.

“I will stay with her for a little while,” she said. “Till I feel there is no more need. Then I must get back to work.”

He looked into her eyes, holding her hand, and she felt his body trembling. She knew he was about to speak, and held up a warning hand.

“That’s all, my lad,” she said with a smile. “My love to you, and God speed you.”

Mrs. Phillips progressed slowly but steadily. Life was returning to her, but it was not the same. Out of those days there had come to her a gentle dignity, a strengthening and refining. The face, now pale and drawn, had lost its foolishness. Under the thin, white hair, and in spite of its deep lines, it had grown younger. A great patience, a childlike thoughtfulness had come into the quiet eyes.

She was sitting by the window, her hands folded. Joan had been reading to her, and the chapter finished, she had closed the book and her thoughts had been wandering. Mrs. Phillips’s voice recalled them.

“Do you remember that day, my dear,” she said, “when we went furnishing together. And I would have all the wrong things. And you let me.”

“Yes,” answered Joan with a laugh. “They were pretty awful, some of them.”

“I was just wondering,” she went on. “It was a pity, wasn’t it? I was silly and began to cry.”

“I expect that was it,” Joan confessed. “It interferes with our reason at times.”

“It was only a little thing, of course, that,” she answered. “But I’ve been thinking it must be that that’s at the bottom of it all; and that is why God lets there be weak things children and little animals and men and women in pain, that we feel sorry for, so that people like you and Robert and so many others are willing to give up all your lives to helping them. And that is what He wants.”

“Perhaps God cannot help there being weak things,” answered Joan. “Perhaps He, too, is sorry for them.”

“It comes to the same thing, doesn’t it, dear?” she answered. “They are there, anyhow. And that is how He knows those who are willing to serve Him: by their being pitiful.”

They fell into a silence. Joan found herself dreaming.

Yes, it was true. It must have been the beginning of all things. Man, pitiless, deaf, blind, groping in the darkness, knowing not even himself. And to her vision, far off, out of the mist, he shaped himself before her: that dim, first standardbearer of the Lord, the man who first felt pity. Savage, brutish, dumbly there amid the desolation, staring down at some hurt creature, man or beast it mattered not, his dull eyes troubled with a strange new pain he understood not.

And suddenly, as he stooped, there must have come a great light into his eyes.

Man had heard God’s voice across the deep, and had made answer.

CHAPTER VI

The years that followed till, like some shipwrecked swimmer to whom returning light reveals the land, she felt new life and hopes come back to her always remained in her memory vague, confused; a jumble of events, thoughts, feelings, without sequence or connection.

She had gone down to Liverpool, intending to persuade her father to leave the control of the works to Arthur, and to come and live with her in London; but had left without broaching the subject. There were nights when she would trapse the streets till she would almost fall exhausted, rather than face the solitude awaiting her in her own rooms. But so also there were moods when, like some stricken animal, her instinct was to shun all living things. At such times his presence, for all his loving patience, would have been as a knife in her wound. Besides, he would always be there, when escape from herself for a while became an absolute necessity. More and more she had come to regard him as her comforter. Not from anything he ever said or did. Rather, it seemed to her, because that with him she felt no need of words.

The works, since Arthur had shared the management, had gradually been regaining their position; and he had urged her to let him increase her allowance.

“It will give you greater freedom,” he had suggested with fine assumption of propounding a mere business proposition; “enabling you to choose your work entirely for its own sake. I have always wanted to take a hand in helping things on. It will come to just the same, your doing it for me.”

She had suppressed a smile, and had accepted. “Thanks, Dad,” she had answered. “It will be nice, having you as my backer.”

Her admiration of the independent woman had undergone some modification since she had come in contact with her. Woman was intended to be dependent upon man. It was the part appointed to him in the social scheme. Woman had hers, no less important. Earning her own living did not improve her. It was one of the drawbacks of civilization that so many had to do it of necessity. It developed her on the wrong lines against her nature. This cry of the unsexed: that woman must always be the paid servant instead of the helper of man paid for being mother, paid for being wife! Why not carry it to its logical conclusion, and insist that she should be paid for her embraces? That she should share in man's labour, in his hopes, that was the true comradeship. What mattered it, who held the purse strings!

Her room was always kept ready for her. Often she would lie there, watching the moonlight creep across the floor; and a curious feeling would come to her of being something wandering, incomplete. She would see as through a mist the passionate, restless child with the rebellious eyes to whom the room had once belonged; and later the strangely selfpossessed girl with that impalpable veil of mystery around her who would stand with folded hands, there by the window, seeming always to be listening. And she, too, had passed away. The tears would come into her eyes, and she would stretch out yearning arms towards their shadowy forms. But they would only turn upon her eyes that saw not, and would fade away.

In the daytime, when Arthur and her father were at the works, she would move through the high, square, stifflyfurnished rooms, or about the great formal garden, with its ordered walks and level lawns. And as with knowledge we come to love some old, stern face our childish eyes had thought forbidding, and would not have it changed, there came to her with the years a growing fondness for the old, plain brickbuilt house. Generations of Allways had lived and died there: men and women somewhat narrow, unsympathetic, a little hard of understanding; but at least earnest, sincere, seeking to do their duty in their solid, unimaginative way. Perhaps there were other ways besides those of speech and pen. Perhaps one did better, keeping to one's own people; the very qualities that separated us from them being intended for their need. What mattered the colours, so that one followed the flag? Somewhere, all roads would meet.

Arthur had to be in London generally once or twice a month, and it came to be accepted that he should always call upon her and "take her out." She had lost the selfsufficiency that had made roaming about London by herself a pleasurable adventure; and a newlyborn fear of what people were saying and thinking about her made her shy even of the few friends she still clung to, so that his visits grew to be of the nature of childish treats to which she found herself looking forwardcounting the days. Also, she came to be dependent upon him for the keeping alight within her of that little kindly fire of selfconceit at which we warm our hands in wintry days. It is not good that a young woman should remain for long a stranger to her mirrorabove her frocks, indifferent to the angle of her hat. She had met the women superior to feminine vanities. Handsome enough, some of them must once have been; now sunk in slovenliness, uncleanliness, in disrespect to womanhood. It would not be fair to him. The worshipper has his rights. The goddess must remember always that she is a goddessmust pull herself together and behave as such, appearing upon her pedestal becomingly attired; seeing to it that in all things she is at her best; not allowing private grief to render her neglectful of this duty.

She had not told him of the Phillips episode. But she felt instinctively that he knew. It was always a little mysterious to her, his perception in matters pertaining to herself.

“I want your love,” she said to him one day. “It helps me. I used to think it was selfish of me to take it, knowing I could never return it not that love. But I no longer feel that now. Your love seems to me a fountain from which I can drink without hurting you.”

“I should love to be with you always,” he answered, “if you wished it. You won’t forget your promise?”

She remembered it then. “No,” she answered with a smile. “I shall keep watch. Perhaps I shall be worthy of it by that time.”

She had lost her faith in journalism as a drum for the rousing of the people against wrong. Its beat had led too often to the trickster’s booth, to the cheapjack’s rostrum. It had lost its rallying power. The popular Press had made the newspaper a byword for falsehood. Even its supporters, while reading it because it pandered to their passions, tickled their vices, and flattered their ignorance, despised and disbelieved it. Here and there, an honest journal advocated a reform, pleaded for the sweeping away of an injustice. The public shrugged its shoulders. Another newspaper stunt! A bid for popularity, for notoriety: with its consequent financial kudos.

She still continued to write for Greyson, but felt she was labouring for the doomed. Lord Sutcliffe had died suddenly and his holding in the Evening Gazette had passed to his nephew, a gentleman more interested in big game shooting than in politics. Greyson’s support of Phillips had brought him within the net of Carleton’s operations, and negotiations for purchase had already been commenced. She knew that, sooner or later, Greyson would be offered the alternative of either changing his opinions or of going. And she knew that he would go. Her work for Mrs. Denton was less likely to be interfered with. It appealed only to the few, and aimed at informing and explaining rather than directly converting. Useful enough work in its way, no doubt; but to put heart into it seemed to require longer views than is given to the eyes of youth.

Besides, her pen was no longer able to absorb her attention, to keep her mind from wandering. The solitude of her desk gave her the feeling of a prison. Her body made perpetual claims upon her, as though it were some restless, fretful child, dragging her out into the streets without knowing where it wanted to go, discontented with everything it did: then hurrying her back to fling itself upon a chair, weary, but still dissatisfied.

If only she could do something. She was sick of thinking.

These physical activities into which women were throwing themselves! Where one used one’s body as well as one’s brain hastened to appointments; gathered round noisy tables;

met fellow human beings, argued with them, walked with them, laughing and talking; forced one's way through crowds; cheered, shouted; stood up on platforms before a sea of faces; roused applause, filling and emptying one's lungs; met interruptions with swift flash of wit or anger, faced opposition, danger felt one's blood surging through one's veins, felt one's nerves quivering with excitement; felt the delirious thrill of passion; felt the mad joy of the loosened animal.

She threw herself into the suffrage movement. It satisfied her for a while. She had the rare gift of public speaking, and enjoyed her triumphs. She was temperate, reasonable; persuasive rather than aggressive; feeling her audience as she went, never losing touch with them. She had the magnetism that comes of sympathy. Medical students who came intending to tell her to go home and mind the baby, remained to wonder if man really was the undoubted sovereign of the world, born to look upon woman as his willing subject; to wonder whether under some unwritten whispered law it might not be the other way about. Perhaps she had the right with or without the baby to move about the kingdom, express her wishes for its care and management. Possibly his doubts may not have been brought about solely by the force and logic of her arguments. Possibly the voice of Nature is not altogether out of place in discussions upon Humanity's affairs.

She wanted votes for women. But she wanted them clean won without dishonour. These "monkey tricks" this apish fury and impatience! Suppose it did hasten by a few months, more or less, the coming of the inevitable. Suppose, by unlawful methods, one could succeed in dragging a reform a little prematurely from the womb of time, did not one endanger the child's health? Of what value was woman's influence on public affairs going to be, if she was to boast that she had won the right to exercise it by unscrupulousness and brutality?

They were to be found at every corner: the reformers who could not reform themselves. The believers in universal brotherhood who hated half the people. The denouncers of tyranny demanding lampposts for their opponents. The bloodthirsty preachers of peace. The moralists who had persuaded themselves that every wrong was justified provided one were fighting for the right. The deaf shouters for justice. The excellent intentioned men and women labouring for reforms that could only be hoped for when greed and prejudice had yielded place to reason, and who sought to bring about their ends by appeals to passion and self-interest.

And the insincere, the selfseekers, the selfadvertisers! Those who were in the business for even coarser profit! The limelight lovers who would always say and do the clever, the unexpected thing rather than the useful and the helpful thing: to whom paradox was more than principle.

Ought there not to be a school for reformers, a training college where could be inculcated selfexamination, patience, temperance, subordination to duty; with lectures on the fundamental laws, within which all progress must be accomplished, outside which lay confusion and explosions; with lectures on history, showing how improvements had been brought about and how failure had been invited, thus avoiding much waste of reforming zeal; with lectures on the properties and tendencies of human nature, forbidding the attempt to treat it as a sum in rule of three?

There were the others. The men and women not in the limelight. The lone, scattered men and women who saw no flag but Pity's ragged skirt; who heard no drum but the world's low cry of pain; who fought with feeble hands against the wrong around them; who with aching heart and troubled eyes laboured to make kinder the little space about them. The great army of the nameless reformers uncheered, unparaphrased, unhonoured. The unknown sowers of the seed. Would the reapers of the harvest remember them?

Beyond giving up her visits to the house, she had made no attempt to avoid meeting Phillips; and at public functions and at mutual friends they sometimes found themselves near to one another. It surprised her that she could see him, talk to him, and even be alone with him without its troubling her. He seemed to belong to a part of her that lay dead and buried something belonging to her that she had thrust away with her own hands: that she knew would never come back to her.

She was still interested in his work and keen to help him. It was going to be a stiff fight. He himself, in spite of Carleton's opposition, had been returned with an increased majority; but the Party as a whole had suffered loss, especially in the counties. The struggle centred round the agricultural labourer. If he could be won over the Government would go ahead with Phillips's scheme. Otherwise there was danger of its being shelved. The difficulty was the old problem of how to get at the men of the scattered villages, the lonely cottages. The only papers that they ever saw were those, chiefly of the Carleton group, that the farmers and the gentry took care should come within their reach; that were handed to them at the end of their day's work as a kindly gift; given to the school children to take home with them; supplied in ample numbers to all the little inns and publichouses. In all these, Phillips was held up as their arch enemy, his proposal explained as a device to lower their wages, decrease their chances of employment, and rob them of the produce of their gardens and allotments. No arguments were used. A daily stream of abuse, misrepresentation and deliberate lies, set forth under flaming headlines, served their simple purpose. The one weekly paper that had got itself established among them, that their fathers had always taken, that dimly they had come to look upon as their one friend, Carleton had at last succeeded in purchasing. When that, too, pictured Phillips's plan as a diabolical intent to take from

them even the little that they had, and give it to the loafing socialist and the bloated foreigner, no room for doubt was left to them.

He had organized volunteer cycle companies of speakers from the towns, young workingmen and women and students, to go out on summer evenings and hold meetings on the village greens. They were winning their way. But it was slow work. And Carleton was countering their efforts by a hired opposition that followed them from place to place, and whose interruptions were made use of to represent the whole campaign as a fiasco.

“He’s clever,” laughed Phillips. “I’d enjoy the fight, if I’d only myself to think of, and life wasn’t so short.”

The laugh died away and a shadow fell upon his face.

“If I could get a few of the big landlords to come in on my side,” he continued, “it would make all the difference in the world. They’re sensible men, some of them; and the whole thing could be carried out without injury to any legitimate interest. I could make them see that, if I could only get them quietly into a corner.”

“But they’re frightened of me,” he added, with a shrug of his broad shoulders, “and I don’t seem to know how to tackle them.”

Those drawingrooms? Might not something of the sort be possible? Not, perhaps, the sumptuous salon of her imagination, thronged with the fair and famous, suitably attired. Something, perhaps, more homely, more immediately attainable. Some of the women dressed, perhaps, a little dowdily; not all of them young and beautiful. The men wise, perhaps, rather than persistently witty; a few of them prosy, maybe a trifle ponderous; but solid and influential. Mrs. Denton’s great empty house in Gower Street? A central situation and near to the tube. Lords and ladies had once ruffled there; trod a measure on its spacious floors; filled its echoing stone hall with their greetings and their partings. The gaping sconces, where their linkboys had extinguished their torches, still capped its grim iron railings.

Seated in the great, sombre library, Joan hazarded the suggestion. Mrs. Denton might almost have been waiting for it. It would be quite easy. A little opening of long fastened windows; a lighting of chill grates; a little mending of motheaten curtains, a sweeping away of longgathered dust and cobwebs.

Mrs. Denton knew just the right people. They might be induced to bring their sons and daughters; it might be their grandchildren, youth being there to welcome them. For Joan, of course, would play her part.

The lonely woman touched her lightly on the hand. There shot a pleading look from the old stern eyes.

“You will have to imagine yourself my daughter,” she said. “You are taller, but the colouring was the same. You won’t mind, will you?”

The right people did come: Mrs. Denton being a personage that a landed gentry, rendered jumpy by the perpetual explosion of new ideas under their very feet, and casting about eagerly for friends, could not afford to snub. A kindly, simple folk, quite intelligent, some of them, as Phillips had surmised. Mrs. Denton made no mystery of why she had invited them. Why should all questions be left to the politicians and the journalists? Why should not the people interested take a hand; meet and talk over these little matters with quiet voices and attentive ears, amid surroundings where the unwritten law would restrain ladies and gentlemen from addressing other ladies and gentlemen as bloodsuckers or anarchists, as grinders of the faces of the poor or as oilytongued rogues; arguments not really conducive to mutual understanding and the bridging over of differences. The latest Russian dancer, the last new musical revue, the marvellous things that can happen at golf, the curious hands that one picks up at bridge, the eternal fox, the sacred bird! Excellent material for ninety-ninths of our conversation. But the remaining tenth? Would it be such excruciatingly bad form for us to be intelligent, occasionally; say, on one or two Fridays during the season? Mrs. Denton wrapped it up tactfully; but that was her daring suggestion.

It took them aback at first. There were people who did this sort of thing. People of no class, who called themselves names and took up things. But for people of social standing to talk about serious subjectsexcept, perhaps, in bed to one’s wife! It sounded so unEnglish.

With the elders it was sense of duty that prevailed. That, at all events, was English. The country must be saved. To their sons and daughters it was the originality, the novelty that gradually appealed. Mrs. Denton’s Fridays became a new sensation. It came to be the chic and proper thing to appear at them in shades of mauve or purple. A pushing little woman in Hanover Street designed the “Denton” bodice, with hanging sleeves and squarecut neck. The younger men inclined towards a coat shaped to the waist with a roll collar.

Joan sighed. It looked as if the word had been passed round to treat the whole thing as a joke. Mrs. Denton took a different view.

“Nothing better could have happened,” she was of opinion. “It means that their hearts are in it.”

The stone hall was still vibrating to the voices of the last departed guests. Joan was seated on a footstool before the fire in front of Mrs. Denton’s chair.

“It’s the thing that gives me greatest hope,” she continued. “The childishness of men and women. It means that the world is still young, still teachable.”

“But they’re so slow at their lessons,” grumbled Joan. “One repeats it and repeats it; and then, when one feels that surely now at least one has drummed it into their heads, one finds they have forgotten all that one has ever said.”

“Not always forgotten,” answered Mrs. Denton; “misaid, it may be, for the moment. An Indian student, the son of an old Rajah, called on me a little while ago. He was going back to organize a system of education among his people. ‘My father heard you speak when you were over in India,’ he told me. ‘He has always been thinking about it.’ Thirty years ago it must have been, that I undertook that mission to India. I had always looked back upon it as one of my many failures.”

“But why leave it to his son,” argued Joan. “Why couldn’t the old man have set about it himself, instead of wasting thirty precious years?”

“I should have preferred it, myself,” agreed Mrs. Denton. “I remember when I was a very little girl my mother longing for a tree upon the lawn underneath which she could sit. I found an acorn and planted it just in the right spot. I thought I would surprise her. I happened to be in the neighbourhood last summer, and I walked over. There was such a nice old lady sitting under it, knitting stockings. So you see it wasn’t wasted.”

“I wouldn’t mind the waiting,” answered Joan, “if it were not for the sorrow and the suffering that I see all round me. I want to get rid of it right away, now. I could be patient for myself, but not for others.”

The little old lady straightened herself. There came a hardening of the thin, firm mouth.

“And those that have gone before?” she demanded. “Those that have won the ground from where we are fighting. Had they no need of patience? Was the cry never wrung from their lips: ‘How long, oh Lord, how long?’ Is it for us to lay aside the sword that

they bequeath us because we cannot hope any more than they to see the faroff victory? Fifty years I have fought, and what, a few years hence, will my closing eyes still see but the banners of the foe still waving, fresh armies pouring to his standard?"

She flung back her head and the grim mouth broke into a smile.

"But I've won," she said. "I'm dying further forward. I've helped advance the line."

She put out her hands and drew Joan to her.

"Let me think of you," she said, "as taking my place, pushing the outposts a little further on."

Joan did not meet Hilda again till the child had grown into a woman practically speaking. She had always been years older than her age. It was at a reception given in the Foreign Office. Joan's dress had been trodden on and torn. She had struggled out of the crowd into an empty room, and was examining the damage somewhat ruefully, when she heard a voice behind her, proffering help. It was a hard, cold voice, that yet sounded familiar, and she turned.

There was no forgetting those deep, burning eyes, though the face had changed. The thin red lips still remained its one touch of colour; but the unhealthy whiteness of the skin had given place to a delicate pallor; and the features that had been indistinct had shaped themselves in fine, firm lines. It was a beautiful, arresting face, marred only by the sullen callousness of the dark, clouded eyes.

Joan was glad of the assistance. Hilda produced pins.

"I always come prepared to these scimmages," she explained. "I've got some Hazeline in my bag. They haven't kicked you, have they?"

"No," laughed Joan. "At least, I don't think so."

"They do sometimes," answered Hilda, "if you happen to be in the way, near the feeding troughs. If they'd only put all the refreshments into one room, one could avoid it. But they will scatter them about so that one never knows for certain whether one is in the danger zone or not. I hate a mob."

"Why do you come?" asked Joan.

“Oh, I!” answered the girl. “I go everywhere where there’s a chance of picking up a swell husband. They’ve got to come to these shows, they can’t help themselves. One never knows what incident may give one one’s opportunity.”

Joan shot a glance. The girl was evidently serious.

“You think it would prove a useful alliance?” she suggested.

“It would help, undoubtedly,” the girl answered. “I don’t see any other way of getting hold of them.”

Joan seated herself on one of the chairs ranged round the walls, and drew the girl down beside her. Through the closed door, the mingled voices of the Foreign Secretary’s guests sounded curiously like the buzzing of flies.

“It’s quite easy,” said Joan, “with your beauty. Especially if you’re not going to be particular. But isn’t there danger of your devotion to your father leading you too far? A marriage founded on a lie no matter for what purpose! mustn’t it degrade a woman’s soul for all time? We have a right to give up the things that belong to ourselves, but not the things that belong to God: our truth, our sincerity, our cleanliness of mind and body; the things that He may one day want of us. It led you into evil once before. Don’t think I’m judging you. I was no better than you. I argued just as you must have done. Something stopped me just in time. That was the only difference between us.”

The girl turned her dark eyes full upon Joan. “What did stop you?” she demanded.

“Does it matter what we call it?” answered Joan. “It was a voice.”

“It told me to do it,” answered the girl.

“Did no other voice speak to you?” asked Joan.

“Yes,” answered the girl. “The voice of weakness.”

There came a fierce anger into the dark eyes. “Why did you listen to it?” she demanded. “All would have been easy if you hadn’t.”

“You mean,” answered Joan quietly, “that if I had let your mother die and had married your father, that he and I would have loved each other to the end; that I should have

helped him and encouraged him in all things, so that his success would have been certain. Is that the argument?"

"Didn't you love him?" asked the girl, staring. "Wouldn't you have helped him?"

"I can't tell," answered Joan. "I should have meant to. Many men and women have loved, and have meant to help each other all their lives; and with the years have drifted asunder; coming even to be against one another. We change and our thoughts change; slight differences of temperament grow into barriers between us; unguessed antagonisms widen into gulfs. Accidents come into our lives. A friend was telling me the other day of a woman who practically proposed to and married a musical genius, purely and solely to be of use to him. She earned quite a big income, drawing fashions; and her idea was to relieve him of the necessity of doing potboilers for a living, so that he might devote his whole time to his real work. And a few weeks after they were married she ran the point of a lead pencil through her eye and it set up inflammation of her brain. And now all the poor fellow has to think of is how to make enough to pay for her keep at a private lunatic asylum. I don't mean to be flippant. It's the very absurdity of it all that makes the mystery of life that renders it so hopeless for us to attempt to find our way through it by our own judgment. It is like the ants making all their clever, laborious plans, knowing nothing of chickens and the gardener's spade. That is why we have to cling to the life we can order for ourselves the life within us. Truth, Justice, Pity. They are the strong things, the eternal things, the things we've got to sacrifice ourselves for serve with our bodies and our souls.

"Don't think me a prig," she pleaded. "I'm talking as if I knew all about it. I don't really. I grope in the dark; and now and then at least so it seems to me I catch a glint of light. We are powerless in ourselves. It is only God working through us that enables us to be of any use. All we can do is to keep ourselves kind and clean and free from self, waiting for Him to come to us."

The girl rose. "I must be getting back," she said. "Dad will be wondering where I've got to."

She paused with the door in her hand, and a faint smile played round the thin red lips.

"Tell me," she said. "What is God?"

"A Labourer, together with man, according to Saint Paul," Joan answered.

The girl turned and went. Joan watched her as she descended the great staircase. She moved with a curious, gliding motion, pausing at times for the people to make way for her.

CHAPTER VII

It was a summer's evening; Joan had dropped in at the Greysons and had found Mary alone, Francis not having yet returned from a bachelor dinner at his uncle's, who was some big pot in the Navy. They sat in the twilight, facing the open French windows, through which one caught a glimpse of the park. A great stillness seemed to be around them.

The sale and purchase of the Evening Gazette had been completed a few days before. Greyson had been offered the alternative of gradually and gracefully changing his opinions, or getting out; and had, of course, chosen dismissal. He was taking a holiday, as Mary explained with a short laugh.

"He had some shares in it himself, hadn't he?" Joan asked.

"Oh, just enough to be of no use," Mary answered. "Carleton was rather decent, so far as that part of it was concerned, and insisted on paying him a fair price. The market value would have been much less; and he wanted to be out of it."

Joan remained silent. It made her mad, that a man could be suddenly robbed of fifteen years' labour: the weapon that his heart and brain had made keen wrested from his hand by a legal process, and turned against the very principles for which all his life he had been fighting.

"I'm almost more sorry for myself than for him," said Mary, making a whimsical grimace. "He will start something else, so soon as he's got over his first soreness; but I'm too old to dream of another child."

He came in a little later and, seating himself between them, filled and lighted his pipe. Looking back, Joan remembered that curiously none of them had spoken. Mary had turned at the sound of his key in the door. She seemed to be watching him intently; but it was too dark to notice her expression. He pulled at his pipe till it was well alight and then removed it.

"It's war," he said.

The words made no immediate impression upon Joan. There had been rumours, threatenings and alarms, newspaper talk. But so there had been before. It would come one day: the world war that one felt was gathering in the air; that would burst like a second deluge on the nations. But it would not be in our time: it was too big. A way out would be found.

“Is there no hope?” asked Mary.

“Yes,” he answered. “The hope that a miracle may happen. The Navy’s got its orders.”

And suddenly as years before in a Paris music hall there leapt to life within Joan’s brain a little impish creature that took possession of her. She hoped the miracle would not happen. The little impish creature within her brain was marching up and down beating a drum. She wished he would stop a minute. Someone was trying to talk to her, telling her she ought to be tremendously shocked and grieved. He or she, or whatever it was that was trying to talk to her, appeared concerned about Reason and Pity and Universal Brotherhood and Civilization’s clockthings like that. But the little impish drummer was making such a din, she couldn’t properly hear. Later on, perhaps, he would get tired; and then she would be able to listen to this humane and sensible person, whoever it might be.

Mary argued that England could and should keep out of it; but Greyson was convinced it would be impossible, not to say dishonourable: a sentiment that won the enthusiastic approval of the little drummer in Joan’s brain. He played “Rule Britannia” and “God Save the King,” the “Marseillaise” and the Russian National hymn, all at the same time. He would have included “Deutschland über Alles,” if Joan hadn’t made a supreme effort and stopped him. Evidently a sporting little devil. He took himself off into a corner after a time, where he played quietly to himself; and Joan was able to join in the conversation.

Greyson spoke with an enthusiasm that was unusual to him. So many of our wars had been mean wars for the wrong; sordid wars for territory, for gold mines; wars against the weak at the bidding of our traders, our financiers. “Shouldering the white man’s burden,” we called it. Wars for the right of selling opium; wars to perpetuate the vile rule of the Turk because it happened to serve our commercial interests. This time, we were out to play the knight; to save the smaller peoples; to rescue our once “sweet enemy,” fair France. Russia was the disturbing thought. It somewhat discounted the knighterrant idea, riding stirrup to stirrup beside that barbarian horseman. But there were possibilities about Russia. Idealism lay hid within that sleeping brain. It would be a holy war for the Kingdom of the Peoples. With Germany freed from the monster of blood and iron that was crushing out her soul, with Russia awakened to life, we would build the United States of Europe. Even his voice was changed. Joan could almost fancy it was some excited schoolboy that was talking.

Mary had been clasping and unclasping her hands, a habit of hers when troubled. Could good ever come out of evil? That was her doubt. Did war ever do anything but sow the

seeds of future violence; substitute one injustice for another; change wrong for wrong. Did it ever do anything but add to the world's sum of evil, making God's task the heavier?

Suddenly, while speaking, she fell into a passionate fit of weeping. She went on through her tears:

"It will be terrible," she said. "It will last longer than you say. Every nation will be drawn into it. There will be no voice left to speak for reason. Every day we shall grow more brutalized, more pitiless. It will degrade us, crush the soul out of us. Blood and iron! It will become our God too: the God of all the world. You say we are going into it with clean hands, this time. How long will they keep clean? The people who only live for making money: how long do you think they will remain silent? What has been all the talk of the last ten years but of capturing German trade. We shall be told that we owe it to our dead to make a profit out of them; that otherwise they will have died in vain. Who will care for the people but to use them for killing one another to hound them on like dogs. In every country nothing but greed and hatred will be preached. Horrible men and women will write to the papers crying out for more blood, more cruelty. Everything that can make for anger and revenge will be screamed from every newspaper. Every plea for humanity will be jeered at as 'sickly sentimentality.' Every man and woman who remembers the ideals with which we started will be shrieked at as a traitor. The people who are doing well out of it, they will get hold of the Press, appeal to the passions of the mob. Nobody else will be allowed to speak. It always has been so in war. It always will be. This will be no exception merely because it's bigger. Every country will be given over to savagery. There will be no appeal against it. The whole world will sink back into the beast."

She ended by rising abruptly and wishing them goodnight. Her outburst had silenced Joan's impish drummer, for the time. He appeared to be nervous and depressed, but bucked up again on the way to the bus. Greyson walked with her as usual. They took the long way round by the outer circle.

"Poor Mary!" he said. "I should not have talked before her if I had thought. Her horror of war is almost physical. She will not even read about them. It has the same effect upon her as stories of cruelty."

"But there's truth in a good deal that she says," he added. "War can bring out all that is best in a people; but also it brings out the worst. We shall have to take care that the ideals are not lost sight of."

“I wish this wretched business of the paper hadn’t come just at this time,” said Joan: “just when your voice is most needed.

“Couldn’t you get enough money together to start something quickly,” she continued, the idea suddenly coming to her. “I think I could help you. It wouldn’t matter its being something small to begin with. So long as it was entirely your own, and couldn’t be taken away from you. You’d soon work it up.”

“Thanks,” he answered. “I may ask you to later on. But just now” He paused.

Of course. For war you wanted men, to fight. She had been thinking of them in the lump: hurrying masses such as one sees on cinema screens, blurred but picturesque. Of course, when you came to think of it, they would have to be made up of individuals gallant-hearted, boyish sort of men who would pass through doors, one at a time, into little rooms; give their name and address to a soldier man seated at a big deal table. Later on, one would say goodbye to them on crowded platforms, wave a handkerchief. Not all of them would come back. “You can’t make omelettes without breaking eggs,” she told herself.

It annoyed her, that silly saying having come into her mind. She could see them lying there, with their white faces to the night. Surely she might have thought of some remark less idiotic to make to herself, at such a time.

He was explaining to her things about the air service. It seemed he had had experience in flying some relation of his with whom he had spent a holiday last summer.

It would mean his getting out quickly. He seemed quite eager to be gone.

“Isn’t it rather dangerous work?” she asked. She felt it was a footling question even as she asked it. Her brain had become stodgy.

“Nothing like as dangerous as being in the Infantry,” he answered. “And that would be my only other alternative. Besides I get out of the drilling.” He laughed. “I should hate being shouted at and ordered about by a husky old sergeant.”

They neither spoke again till they came to the bridge, from the other side of which the busses started.

“I may not see you again before I go,” he said. “Look after Mary. I shall try to persuade her to go down to her aunt in Hampshire. It’s rather a bit of luck, as it turns out, the paper being finished with. I shouldn’t have quite known what to do.”

He had stopped at the corner. They were still beneath the shadow of the trees. Quite unconsciously she put her face up; and as if it had always been the custom at their partings, he drew her to him and kissed her; though it really was for the first time.

She walked home instead of taking the bus. She wanted to think. A day or two would decide the question. She determined that if the miracle did not happen, she would go down to Liverpool. Her father was on the committee of one of the great hospitals; and she knew one or two of the matrons. She would want to be doing something to get out to the front, if possible. Maybe, her desire to serve was not altogether free from curiosity from the craving for adventure. There's a spice of the man even in the best of women.

Her conscience plagued her when she thought of Mrs. Denton. For some time now, they had been very close together; and the old lady had come to depend upon her. She waited till all doubt was ended before calling to say goodbye. Mrs. Denton was seated before an old bureau that had long stood locked in a corner of the library. The drawers were open and books and papers were scattered about.

Joan told her plans. "You'll be able to get along without me for a little while?" she asked doubtfully.

Mrs. Denton laughed. "I haven't much more to do," she answered. "Just tidying up, as you see; and two or three half-finished things I shall try to complete. After that, I'll perhaps take a rest."

She took from among the litter a faded photograph and handed it to Joan. "Odd," she said. "I've just turned it out."

It represented a long, thin line of eminently respectable ladies and gentlemen in early Victorian costume. The men in peg-top trousers and silk stocks, the women in crinolines and poke bonnets. Among them, holding the hand of a benevolent-looking, stoutish gentleman, was a mere girl. The terminating frills of a white unmentionable garment showed beneath her skirts. She wore a porkpie hat with a feather in it.

"My first public appearance," explained Mrs. Denton. "I teased my father into taking me with him. We represented Great Britain and Ireland. I suppose I'm the only one left."

"I shouldn't have recognized you," laughed Joan. "What was the occasion?"

“The great International Peace Congress at Paris,” explained Mrs. Denton; “just after the Crimean war. It made quite a stir at the time. The Emperor opened our proceedings in person, and the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury both sent us their blessing. We had a copy of the speeches presented to us on leaving, in every known language in Europe, bound in vellum. I’m hoping to find it. And the Press was enthusiastic. There were to be Acts of Parliament, Courts of Arbitration, International Laws, Diplomatic Treaties. A SubCommittee was appointed to prepare a special set of prayers and a Palace of Peace was to be erected. There was only one thing we forgot, and that was the foundation.”

“I may not be here,” she continued, “when the new plans are submitted. Tell them not to forget the foundation this time. Tell them to teach the children.”

Joan dined at a popular restaurant that evening. She fancied it might cheer her up. But the noisy patriotism of the overfed crowd only irritated her. These elderly, flabby men, these fleshy women, who would form the spectators, who would loll on their cushioned seats protected from the sun, munching contentedly from their wellprovided baskets while listening to the dying groans rising upwards from the drenched arena. She glanced from one podgy thumb to another and a feeling of nausea crept over her.

Suddenly the band struck up “God Save the King.” Three commonplace enough young men, seated at a table near to her, laid down their napkins and stood up. Yes, there was something to be said for war, she felt, as she looked at their boyish faces, transfigured. Not for them Business as usual, the Capture of German Trade. Other visions those young eyes were seeing. The little imp within her brain had seized his drum again. “Follow me” so he seemed to beat “I teach men courage, duty, the laying down of self. I open the gates of honour. I make heroes out of dust. Isn’t it worth my price?”

A figure was loitering the other side of the street when she reached home. She thought she somehow recognized it, and crossed over. It was McKean, smoking his everlasting pipe. Success having demanded some such change, he had migrated to “The Albany,” and she had not seen him for some time. He had come to have a last look at the house in case it might happen to be the last. He was off to Scotland the next morning, where he intended to “join up.”

“But are you sure it’s your particular duty?” suggested Joan. “I’m told you’ve become a household word both in Germany and France. If we really are out to end war and establish the brotherhood of nations, the work you are doing is of more importance than even the killing of Germans. It isn’t as if there wouldn’t be enough without you.”

“To tell the truth,” he answered, “that’s exactly what I’ve been saying to myself. I shan’t be any good. I don’t see myself sticking a bayonet into even a German. Unless he happened to be abnormally clumsy. I tried to shoot a rabbit once. I might have done it if the little beggar, instead of running away, hadn’t turned and looked at me.”

“I should keep out of it if I were you,” laughed Joan.

“I can’t,” he answered. “I’m too great a coward.”

“An odd reason for enlisting,” thought Joan.

“I couldn’t face it,” he went on; “the way people would be looking at me in trains and omnibuses; the things people would say of me, the things I should imagine they were saying; what my valet would be thinking of me. Oh, I’m ashamed enough of myself. It’s the artistic temperament, I suppose. We must always be admired, praised. We’re not the stuff that martyrs are made of. We must for ever be kowtowing to the cackling geese around us. We’re so terrified lest they should hiss us.”

The street was empty. They were pacing it slowly, up and down.

“I’ve always been a coward,” he continued. “I fell in love with you the first day I met you on the stairs. But I dared not tell you.”

“You didn’t give me that impression,” answered Joan.

She had always found it difficult to know when to take him seriously and when not.

“I was so afraid you would find it out,” he explained.

“You thought I would take advantage of it,” she suggested.

“One can never be sure of a woman,” he answered. “And it would have been so difficult. There was a girl down in Scotland, one of the village girls. It wasn’t anything really. We had just been children together. But they all thought I had gone away to make my fortune so as to come back and marry hereven my mother. It would have looked so mean if after getting on I had married a fine London lady. I could never have gone home again.”

“But you haven’t married heror have you?” asked Joan.

“No,” he answered. “She wrote me a beautiful letter that I shall always keep, begging me to forgive her, and hoping I might be happy. She had married a young farmer, and was going out to Canada. My mother will never allow her name to be mentioned in our house.”

They had reached the end of the street again. Joan held out her hand with a laugh.

“Thanks for the compliment,” she said. “Though I notice you wait till you’re going away before telling me.”

“But quite seriously,” she added, “give it a little more thoughtthe enlisting, I mean. The world isn’t too rich in kind influences. It needs men like you. Come, pull yourself together and show a little pluck.” She laughed.

“I’ll try,” he promised, “but it won’t be any use; I shall drift about the streets, seeking to put heart into myself, but all the while my footsteps will be bearing me nearer and nearer to the recruiting office; and outside the door some girl in the crowd will smile approval or some old fool will pat me on the shoulder and I shall sneak in and it will close behind me. It must be fine to have courage.”

He wrote her two days later from Ayr, giving her the name of his regiment, and again some six months later from Flanders. But there would have been no sense in her replying to that last.

She lingered in the street by herself, a little time, after he had turned the corner. It had been a house of sorrow and disappointment to her; but so also she had dreamed her dreams there, seen her visions. She had never made much headway with her landlord and her landlady: a worthy couple, who had proved most excellent servants, but who prided themselves, to use their own expression, on knowing their place and keeping themselves to themselves. Joan had given them notice that morning, and had been surprised at the woman’s bursting into tears.

“I felt it just the same when young Mr. McKean left us,” she explained with apologies. “He had been with us five years. He was like you, miss, so unpracticable. I’d got used to looking after him.”

Mary Greyson called on her in the morning, while she was still at breakfast. She had come from seeing Francis off by an early train from Euston. He had sent Joan a ring.

“He is so afraid you may not be able to wear itthat it will not fit you,” said Mary, “but I told him I was sure it would.”

Joan held out her hand for the letter. "I was afraid he had forgotten it," she answered, with a smile.

She placed the ring on her finger and held out her hand. "I might have been measured for it," she said. "I wonder how he knew."

"You left a glove behind you, the first day you ever came to our house," Mary explained. "And I kept it."

She was following his wishes and going down into the country. They did not meet again until after the war.

Madge dropped in on her during the week and brought Flossie with her. Flossie's husband, Sam, had departed for the Navy; and Niel Singleton, who had offered and been rejected for the Army, had joined a Red Cross unit. Madge herself was taking up canteen work. Joan rather expected Flossie to be in favour of the war, and Madge against it. Instead of which, it turned out the other way round. It seemed difficult to forecast opinion in this matter.

Madge thought that England, in particular, had been too much given up to luxury and pleasure. There had been too much idleness and empty laughter: Hitchicoo dances and women undressing themselves upon the stage. Even the working classes seemed to think of nothing else but cinemas and beer. She dreamed of a United Kingdom purified by suffering, cleansed by tears; its people drawn together by memory of common sacrifice; class antagonism buried in the grave where Duke's son and cook's son would lie side by side: of a newborn Europe rising from the ashes of the old. With Germany beaten, her lust of war burnt out, her hideous doctrine of Force proved to be false, the world would breathe a freer air. Passion and hatred would fall from man's eyes. The people would see one another and join hands.

Flossie was sceptical. "Why hasn't it done it before?" she wanted to know. "Good Lord! There's been enough of it."

"Why didn't we all kiss and be friends after the Napoleonic wars?" she demanded, "instead of getting up Peterloo massacres, and antiCorn Law riots, and breaking the Duke of Wellington's windows?"

"All this talk of downing Militarism," she continued. "It's like trying to do away with the other sort of disorderly house. You don't stamp out a vice by chivying it round the corner. When men and women have become decent there will be no more disorderly

houses. But it won't come before. Suppose we do knock Militarism out of Germany, like we did out of France, not so very long ago? It will only slip round the corner into Russia or Japan. Come and settle over here, as likely as not, especially if we have a few victories and get to fancy ourselves."

Madge was of opinion that the world would have had enough of war. Not armies but whole peoples would be involved this time. The lesson would be driven home.

"Oh, yes, we shall have had enough of it," agreed Flossie, "by the time we've paid up. There's no doubt of that. What about our children? I've just left young Frank strutting all over the house and flourishing a paper knife. And the servants have had to bar the kitchen door to prevent his bursting in every five minutes and attacking them. What's he going to say when I tell him, later on, that his father and myself have had all the war we want, and have decided there shall be no more? The old folks have had their fun. Why shouldn't I have mine? That will be his argument."

"You can't do it," she concluded, "unless you are prepared to keep half the world's literature away from the children, scrap half your music, edit your museums and your picture galleries; bowdlerize your Old Testament and rewrite your histories. And then you'll have to be careful for twentyfour hours a day that they never see a dogfight."

Madge still held to her hope. God would make a wind of reason to pass over the earth. He would not smite again his people.

"I wish poor dear Sam could have been kept out of it," said Flossie. She wiped her eyes and finished her tea.

Joan had arranged to leave on the Monday. She ran down to see Mary Stopperton on the Saturday afternoon. Mr. Stopperton had died the year before, and Mary had been a little hurt, divining insincerity in the condolences offered to her by most of her friends.

"You didn't know him, dear," she had said to Joan. "All his faults were on the outside."

She did not want to talk about the war.

"Perhaps it's wrong of me," she said. "But it makes me so sad. And I can do nothing."

She had been busy at her machine when Joan had entered; and a pile of delicate white work lay folded on a chair beside her.

"What are you making?" asked Joan.

The little withered face lighted up. "Guess," she said, as she unfolded and displayed a tiny garment.

"I so love making them," she said. "I say to myself, 'It will all come right. God will send more and more of His Christ babies; till at last there will be thousands and thousands of them everywhere; and their love will change the world!'"

Her bright eyes had caught sight of the ring upon Joan's hand. She touched it with her little fragile fingers.

"You will let me make one for you, dearie, won't you?" she said. "I feel sure it will be a little Christ baby."

Arthur was still away when she arrived home. He had gone to Norway on business. Her father was afraid he would find it difficult to get back. Telegraphic communication had been stopped, and they had had no news of him. Her father was worried. A big Government contract had come in, while many of his best men had left to enlist.

"I've fixed you up all right at the hospital," he said. "It was good of you to think of coming home. Don't go away, for a bit." It was the first time he had asked anything of her.

Another fortnight passed before they heard from Arthur, and then he wrote them both from Hull. He would be somewhere in the North Sea, mine sweeping, when they read his letters. He had hoped to get a day or two to run across and say goodbye; but the need for men was pressing and he had not liked to plead excuses. The boat by which he had managed to leave Bergen had gone down. He and a few others had been picked up, but the sights that he had seen were haunting him. He felt sure his uncle would agree that he ought to be helping, and this was work for England he could do with all his heart. He hoped he was not leaving his uncle in the lurch; but he did not think the war would last long, and he would soon be back.

"Dear lad," said her father, "he would take the most dangerous work that he could find. But I wish he hadn't been quite so impulsive. He could have been of more use helping me with this War Office contract. I suppose he never got my letter, telling him about it."

In his letter to Joan he went further. He had received his uncle's letter, so he confided to her. Perhaps she would think him a crank, but he couldn't help it. He hated this killing business, this making of machinery for slaughtering men in bulk, like they killed

pigs in Chicago. Out on the free, sweet sea, helping to keep it clean from man's abominations, he would be away from it all.

She saw the vision of him that night, as, leaning from her window, she looked out beyond the pines: the little lonely ship amid the waste of waters; his beautiful, almost womanish, face, and the gentle dreamy eyes with their haunting suggestion of a shadow.

Her little drummer played less and less frequently to her as the months passed by. It didn't seem to be the war he had looked forward to. The illustrated papers continued to picture it as a sort of glorified picnic where smiling young men lolled luxuriously in cosy dugouts, reading their favourite paper. By curious coincidence, it generally happened to be the journal publishing the photograph. Occasionally, it appeared, they came across the enemy, who then put up both hands and shouted "Kamerad." But the weary, wounded men she talked to told another story.

She grew impatient of the fighters with their mouths; the savage old baldheads heroically prepared to sacrifice the last young man; the sleek, purring women who talked childish nonsense about killing every man, woman and child in Germany, but quite meant it; the shrieking journalists who had decided that their place was the home front; the pressspurred mobs, the spy hunters, chasing terrified old men and sobbing children through the streets. It was a relief to enter the quiet ward and close the door behind her. The campfollowers: the traders and pedlars, the balladmongers, and the mountebanks, the ghoulish sightseers! War brought out all that was worst in them. But the givers of their blood, the lads who suffered, who had made the sacrifice: war had taught them chivalry, manhood. She heard no revilings of hatred and revenge from those drawn lips. Patience, humour, forgiveness, they had learnt from war. They told her kindly stories even of Hans and Fritz.

The little drummer in her brain would creep out of his corner, play to her softly while she moved about among them.

One day she received a letter from Folk. He had come to London at the request of the French Government to consult with English artists on a matter he must not mention. He would not have the time, he told her, to run down to Liverpool. Could she get a couple of days' leave and dine with him in London.

She found him in the uniform of a French Colonel. He had quite a military bearing and seemed pleased with himself. He kissed her hand, and then held her out at arms' length.

"It's wonderful how like you are to your mother," he said, "I wish I were as young as I feel."

She had written him at the beginning of the war, telling him of her wish to get out to the front, and he thought that now he might be able to help her.

“But perhaps you’ve changed your mind,” he said. “It isn’t quite as pretty as it’s painted.”

“I want to,” she answered. “It isn’t all curiosity. I think it’s time for women to insist on seeing war with their own eyes, not trust any longer to the pictures you men paint.” She smiled.

“But I’ve got to give it up,” she added. “I can’t leave Dad.”

They were sitting in the hall of the hotel. It was the dressing hour and the place was almost empty. He shot a swift glance at her.

“Arthur is still away,” she explained, “and I feel that he wants me. I should be worrying myself, thinking of him all alone with no one to look after him. It’s the mother instinct I suppose. It always has hampered woman.” She laughed.

“Dear old boy,” he said. He was watching her with a little smile. “I’m glad he’s got some luck at last.”

They dined in the great restaurant belonging to the hotel. He was still vastly pleased with himself as he marched up the crowded room with Joan upon his arm. He held himself upright and talked and laughed perhaps louder than an elderly gentleman should. “Swaggering old beggar,” he must have overheard a young sub. mutter as they passed. But he did not seem to mind it.

They lingered over the meal. Folk was a brilliant talker. Most of the men whose names were filling the newspapers had sat to him at one time or another. He made them seem quite human. Joan was surprised at the time.

“Come up to my rooms, will you?” he asked. “There’s something I want to say to you. And then I’ll walk back with you.” She was staying at a small hotel off Jermyn Street.

He sat her down by the fire and went into the next room. He had a letter in his hand when he returned. Joan noticed that the envelope was written upon across the corner, but she was not near enough to distinguish the handwriting. He placed it on the mantelpiece and sat down opposite her.

“So you have come to love the dear old chap,” he said.

“I have always loved him,” Joan answered. “It was he didn’t love me, for a time, as I thought. But I know now that he does.”

He was silent for a few moments, and then he leant across and took her hands in his.

“I am going,” he said, “where there is just the possibility of an accident: one never knows. I wanted to be sure that all was well with you.”

He was looking at the ring upon her hand.

“A soldier boy?” he asked.

“Yes,” she answered. “If he comes back.” There was a little catch in her voice.

“I know he’ll come back,” he said. “I won’t tell you why I am so sure. Perhaps you wouldn’t believe.” He was still holding her hands, looking into her eyes.

“Tell me,” he said, “did you see your mother before she died. Did she speak to you?”

“No,” Joan answered. “I was too late. She had died the night before. I hardly recognized her when I saw her. She looked so sweet and young.”

“She loved you very dearly,” he said. “Better than herself. All those years of sorrow: they came to her because of that. I thought it foolish of her at the time, but now I know she was wise. I want you always to love and honour her. I wouldn’t ask you if it wasn’t right.”

She looked at him and smiled. “It’s quite easy,” she answered. “I always see her as she lay there with all the sorrow gone from her. She looked so beautiful and kind.”

He rose and took the letter from where he had placed it on the mantelpiece. He stooped and held it out above the fire and a little flame leaped up and seemed to take it from his hand.

They neither spoke during the short walk between the two hotels. But at the door she turned and held out her hands to him.

“Thank you,” she said, “for being so kind and wise. I shall always love and honour her.”

He kissed her, promising to take care of himself.

She ran against Phillips, the next day, at one of the big stores where she was shopping. He had obtained a commission early in the war and was now a captain. He had just come back from the front on leave. The alternative had not appealed to him, of being one of those responsible for sending other men to death while remaining himself in security and comfort.

“It’s a matter of temperament,” he said. “Somebody’s got to stop behind and do the patriotic speechifying. I’m glad I didn’t. Especially after what I’ve seen.”

He had lost interest in politics.

“There’s something bigger coming,” he said. “Here everything seems to be going on much the same, but over there you feel it. Something growing silently out of all this blood and mud. I find myself wondering what the men are staring at, but when I look there’s nothing as far as my fieldglasses will reach but waste and desolation. And it isn’t only on the faces of our own men. It’s in the eyes of the prisoners too. As if they saw something. A funny ending to the war, if the people began to think.”

Mrs. Phillips was running a Convalescent Home in Folkestone, he told her; and had even made a speech. Hilda was doing relief work among the ruined villages of France.

“It’s a new world we shall be called upon to build,” he said. “We must pay more heed to the foundation this time.”

She seldom discussed the war with her father. At the beginning, he had dreamed with Greyson of a short and glorious campaign that should weld all classes together, and after which we should forgive our enemies and shape with them a better world. But as the months went by, he appeared to grow indifferent; and Joan, who got about twelve hours a day of it outside, welcomed other subjects.

It surprised her when one evening after dinner he introduced it himself.

“What are you going to do when it’s over?” he asked her. “You won’t give up the fight, will you, whatever happens?” She had not known till then that he had been taking any interest in her work.

“No,” she answered with a laugh, “no matter what happens, I shall always want to be in it.”

“Good lad,” he said, patting her on the shoulder. “It will be an ugly world that will come out of all this hate and anger. The Lord will want all the help that He can get.”

“And you don’t forget our compact, do you?” he continued, “that I am to be your backer. I want to be in it too.”

She shot a glance at him. He was looking at the portrait of that old Ironside Allway who had fought and died to make a nobler England, as he had dreamed. A grim, unprepossessing gentleman, unless the artist had done him much injustice, with high, narrow forehead, and puzzled, staring eyes.

She took the cigarette from her lips and her voice trembled a little.

“I want you to be something more to me than that, sir,” she said. “I want to feel that I’m an Allway, fighting for the things we’ve always had at heart. I’ll try and be worthy of the name.”

Her hand stole out to him across the table, but she kept her face away from him. Until she felt his grasp grow tight, and then she turned and their eyes met.

“You’ll be the last of the name,” he said. “Something tells me that. I’m glad you’re a fighter. I always prayed my child might be a fighter.”

Arthur had not been home since the beginning of the war. Twice he had written them to expect him, but the little fleet of mine sweepers had been hard pressed, and on both occasions his leave had been stopped at the last moment. One afternoon he turned up unexpectedly at the hospital. It was a few weeks after the Conscription Act had been passed.

Joan took him into her room at the end of the ward, from where, through the open door, she could still keep watch. They spoke in low tones.

“It’s done you good,” said Joan. “You look every inch the jolly Jack Tar.” He was hard and tanned, and his eyes were marvellously bright.

“Yes,” he said, “I love the sea. It’s clean and strong.”

A fear was creeping over her. “Why have you come back?” she asked.

He hesitated, keeping his eyes upon the ground.

“I don’t suppose you will agree with me,” he said. “Somehow I felt I had to.”

A Conscientious Objector. She might have guessed it. A “Conchy,” as they would call him in the Press: all the spiteful screamers who had never risked a scratch, themselves, denouncing him as a coward. The local Dogberrys of the tribunals would fire off their little stock of gibes and platitudes upon him, propound with owlish solemnity the new Christianity, abuse him and condemn him, without listening to him. Jeering mobs would follow him through the streets. More than once, of late, she had encountered such crowds made up of shrieking girls and foulmouthed men, surging round some whitefaced youngster while the well-dressed passersby looked on and grinned.

She came to him and stood over him with her hands upon his shoulders.

“Must you, dear?” she said. “Can’t you reconcile it to yourself to go on with your work of mercy, of saving poor folks’ lives?”

He raised his eyes to hers. The shadow that, to her fancy, had always rested there seemed to have departed. A light had come to them.

“There are more important things than saving men’s bodies. You think that, don’t you?” he asked.

“Yes,” she answered. “I won’t try to hold you back, dear, if you think you can do that.”

He caught her hands and held them.

“I wanted to be a coward,” he said, “to keep out of the fight. I thought of the shame, of the petty persecution that even you might despise me. But I couldn’t. I was always seeing His face before me with His beautiful tender eyes, and the blood drops on His brow. It is He alone can save the world. It is perishing for want of love; and by a little suffering I might be able to help Him. And then one night I suppose it was a piece of driftwood there rose up out of the sea a little cross that seemed to call to me to stretch out my hand and grasp it, and gird it to my side.”

He had risen. “Don’t you see,” he said. “It is only by suffering that one can help Him. It is the sword that He has chosen by which one day He will conquer the world. And this is such a splendid opportunity to fight for Him. It would be like deserting Him on the eve of a great battle.”

She looked into his eager, hopeful eyes. Yes, it had always been so it always would be, to the end. Not priests and prophets, but ever that little scattered band of glad sufferers for His sake would be His army. His weapon still the cross, till the victory should be won.

She glanced through the open door to where the poor, broken fellows she always thought of as "her boys" lay so patient, and then held out her hand to him with a smile, though the tears were in her eyes.

"So you're like all the rest of them, lad," she said. "It's for King and country. Good luck to you."

After the war was over and the men, released from their long terms of solitary confinement, came back to life injured in mind and body, she was almost glad he had escaped. But at the time it filled her soul with darkness.

It was one noonday. He had been down to the tribunal and his case had been again adjourned. She was returning from a lecture, and, crossing a street in the neighbourhood of the docks, found herself suddenly faced by an oncoming crowd. It was yelping and snarling, curiously suggestive of a pack of hungry wolves. A couple of young soldiers were standing back against a wall.

"Better not go on, nurse," said one of them. "It's some poor devil of a Conchy, I expect. Must have a damned sight more pluck than I should."

It was the fear that had been haunting her. She did not know how white she had turned.

"I think it is someone I know," she said. "Won't you help me?"

The crowd gave way to them, and they had all but reached him. He was hatless and bespattered, but his tender eyes had neither fear nor anger in them. She reached out her arms and called to him. Another step and she would have been beside him, but at the moment a slim, laughing girl darted in front of him and slipped her foot between his legs and he went down.

She heard the joyous yell and the shrill laughter as she struggled wildly to force her way to him. And then for a moment there was a space and a man with bent body and clenched hands was rushing forward as if upon a football field, and there came a little sickening thud and then the crowd closed in again.

Her strength was gone and she could only wait. More soldiers had come up and were using their fists freely, and gradually the crowd retired, still snarling; and they lifted him up and brought him to her.

“There’s a chemist’s shop in the next street. We’d better take him there,” suggested the one who had first spoken to her. And she thanked them and followed them.

They made a bed for him with their coats upon the floor, and some of them kept guard outside the shop, while one, putting aside the frightened, useless little chemist, waited upon her, bringing things needful, while she cleansed the foulness from his smooth young face, and washed the matted blood from his fair hair, and closed the lids upon his tender eyes, and, stooping, kissed the cold, quiet lips.

There had been whispered talk among the men, and when she rose the one who had first spoken to her came forward. He was nervous and stood stiffly.

“Beg pardon, nurse,” he said, “but we’ve sent for a stretcher, as the police don’t seem in any hurry. Would you like us to take him. Or would it upset him, do you think, if he knew?”

“Thank you,” she answered. “He would think it kind of you, I know.”

She had the feeling that he was being borne by comrades.

CHAPTER VIII

It was from a small operating hospital in a village of the Argonne that she first saw the war with her own eyes.

Her father had wished her to go. Arthur's death had stirred in him the old Puritan blood with its record of long battle for liberty of conscience. If war claimed to be master of a man's soul, then the new warfare must be against war. He remembered the saying of a Frenchwoman who had been through the FrancoPrussian war. Joan, on her return from Paris some years before, had told him of her, repeating her words: "But, of course, it would not do to tell the truth," the old lady had said, "or we should have our children growing up to hate war."

"I'll be lonely and anxious till you come back," he said. "But that will have to be my part of the fight."

She had written to Folk. No female nurses were supposed to be allowed within the battle zone; but under pressure of shortage the French staff were relaxing the rule, and Folk had pledged himself to her discretion. "I am not doing you any kindness," he had written. "You will have to share the common hardships and privations, and the danger is real. If I didn't feel instinctively that underneath your mask of sweet reasonableness you are one of the most obstinate young women God ever made, and that without me you would probably get yourself into a still worse hole, I'd have refused." And then followed a list of the things she was to be sure to take with her, including a pound or two of Keating's insect powder, and a hint that it might save her trouble, if she had her hair cut short.

There was but one other woman at the hospital. It had been a farmhouse. The man and both sons had been killed during the first year of the war, and the woman had asked to be allowed to stay on. Her name was Madame Lelanne. She was useful by reason of her great physical strength. She could take up a man as he lay and carry him on her outstretched arms. It was an expressionless face, with dull, slowmoving eyes that never changed. She and Joan shared a small grenier in one of the barns. Joan had brought with her a camp bedstead; but the woman, wrapping a blanket round her, would creep into a hole she had made for herself among the hay. She never took off her clothes, except the great woodsoled boots, so far as Joan could discover.

The medical staff consisted of a Dr. Poujoulet and two assistants. The authorities were always promising to send him more help, but it never arrived. One of the assistants, a Monsieur Dubos, a little man with a remarkably big beard, was a chemist, who, at the outbreak of the war, had been on the verge, as he made sure, of an important discovery

in connection with colour photography. Almost the first question he asked Joan was could she speak German. Finding that she could, he had hurried her across the yard into a small hut where patients who had borne their operation successfully awaited their turn to be moved down to one of the convalescent hospitals at the base. Among them was a German prisoner, an elderly man, belonging to the Landwehr; in private life a photographer. He also had been making experiments in the direction of colour photography. Chance had revealed to the two men their common interest, and they had been exchanging notes. The German talked a little French, but not sufficient; and on the day of Joan's arrival they had reached an impasse that was maddening to both of them. Joan found herself up against technical terms that rendered her task difficult, but fortunately had brought a dictionary with her, and was able to make them understand one another. But she had to be firm with both of them, allowing them only ten minutes together at a time. The little Frenchman would kneel by the bedside, holding the German at an angle where he could talk with least danger to his wound. It seemed that each was the very man the other had been waiting all his life to meet. They shed tears on one another's neck when they parted, making all arrangements to write to one another.

"And you will come and stay with me," persisted the little Frenchman, "when this affair is finished" he made an impatient gesture with his hands. "My wife takes much interest. She will be delighted."

And the big German, again embracing the little Frenchman, had promised, and had sent his compliments to Madame.

The other was a young priest. He wore the regulation Red Cross uniform, but kept his cassock hanging on a peg behind his bed. He had pretty frequent occasion to take it down. These small emergency hospitals, within range of the guns, were reserved for only dangerous cases: men whose wounds would not permit of their being carried further; and there never was much more than a sporting chance of saving them. They were always glad to find there was a priest among the staff. Often it was the first question they would ask on being lifted out of the ambulance. Even those who professed to no religion seemed comforted by the idea. He went by the title of "Monsieur le Prêtre:" Joan never learned his name. It was he who had laid out the little cemetery on the opposite side of the village street. It had once been an orchard, and some of the trees were still standing. In the centre, rising out of a pile of rockwork, he had placed a crucifix that had been found upon the roadside and had surrounded it with flowers. It formed the one bright spot of colour in the village; and at night time, when all other sounds were hushed, the iron wreaths upon its little crosses, swaying against one another in the wind, would make a low, clear, tinkling music. Joan would sometimes lie

awake listening to it. In some way she could not explain it always brought the thought of children to her mind.

The doctor himself was a broadshouldered, bulletheaded man, clean shaven, with closecropped, bristly hair. He had curiously square hands, with short, squat fingers. He had been head surgeon in one of the Paris hospitals, and had been assigned his present post because of his marvellous quickness with the knife. The hospital was the nearest to a hill of great strategical importance, and the fighting in the neighbourhood was almost continuous. Often a single ambulance would bring in three or four cases, each one demanding instant attention. Dr. Poujoulet, with his hairy arms bare to the shoulder, would polish them off one after another, with hardly a moment's rest between, not allowing time even for the washing of the table. Joan would have to summon all her nerve to keep herself from collapsing. At times the need for haste was such that it was impossible to wait for the anaesthetic to take effect. The one redeeming feature was the extraordinary heroism of the men, though occasionally there was nothing for it but to call in the orderlies to hold some poor fellow down, and to deafen one's ears.

One day, after a successful operation, she was tending a young sergeant. He was a wellbuilt, handsome man, with skin as white as a woman's. He watched her with curious indifference in his eyes as she busied herself, trying to make him comfortable, and did nothing to help her.

"Has Mam'selle ever seen a bull fight?" he asked her.

"No," she answered. "I've seen all the horror and cruelty I want to for the rest of my life."

"Ah," he said, "you would understand if you had. When one of the horses goes down gored, his entrails lying out upon the sand, you know what they do, don't you? They put a rope round him, and drag him, groaning, into the shambles behind. And once there, kind people like you and Monsieur le Médecin tend him and wash him, and put his entrails back, and sew him up again. He thinks it so kind of them the first time. But the second! He understands. He will be sent back into the arena to be ripped up again, and again after that. This is the third time I have been wounded, and as soon as you've all patched me up and I've got my breath again, they'll send me back into it. Mam'selle will forgive my not feeling grateful to her." He gave a short laugh that brought the blood into his mouth.

The village consisted of one long straggling street, following the course of a small stream between two lines of hills. It was on one of the great lines of communication: and troops and war material passed through it, going and coming, in almost endless procession. It

served also as a camp of rest. Companies from the trenches would arrive there, generally towards the evening, weary, listless, dulled, many of them staggering like overdriven cattle beneath their mass of burdens. They would fling their accoutrements from them and stand in silent groups till the sergeants and corporals returned to lead them to the barns and outhouses that had been assigned to them, the houses still habitable being mostly reserved for the officers. Like those of most French villages, they were drab, plastercovered buildings without gardens; but some of them were covered with vines, hiding their ugliness; and the village as a whole, with its groups, here and there, of fine sycamore trees and its great stone fountain in the centre, was picturesque enough. It had twice changed hands, and a part of it was in ruins. From one or two of the more solidly built houses merely the front had fallen, leaving the rooms just as they had always been: the furniture in its accustomed place, the pictures on the walls. They suggested doll's houses standing open. One wondered when the giant child would come along and close them up. The iron spire of the little church had been hit twice. It stood above the village, twisted into the form of a note of interrogation. In the churchyard many of the graves had been ripped open. Bones and skulls lay scattered about among the shattered tombstones. But, save for a couple of holes in the roof, the body was still intact, and every afternoon a faint, timidsounding bell called a few villagers and a sprinkling of soldiers to Mass. Most of the inhabitants had fled, but the farmers and shopkeepers had remained. At intervals, the German batteries, searching round with apparent aimlessness, would drop a score or so of shells about the neighbourhood; but the peasant, with an indifference that was almost animal, would still follow his oxdrawn plough; the old, bent crone, muttering curses, still ply the hoe. The proprietors of the tiny *épiceries* must have been rapidly making their fortunes, considering the prices that they charged the unfortunate *poilu*, dreaming of some small luxury out of his five sous a day. But as one of them, a stout, smiling lady, explained to Joan, with a gesture: "It is not often that one has a war."

Joan had gone out in September, and for a while the weather was pleasant. The men, wrapped up in their greatcoats, would sleep for preference under the great sycamore trees. Through open doorways she would catch glimpses of picturesque groups of eager cardplayers, crowded round a flickering candle. From the darkness there would steal the sound of flute or zither, of voices singing. Occasionally it would be some strident ditty of the Paris *musichalls*, but more often it was sad and plaintive. But early in October the rains commenced and the stream became a roaring torrent, and a clammy mist lay like a white river between the wooded hills.

Mud! that seemed to be the one word with which to describe modern war. Mud everywhere! Mud ankledeep upon the roads; mud into which you sank up to your knees the moment you stepped off it; tents and huts to which you waded through the mud, avoiding the slimy gangways on which you slipped and fell; mudbespattered men,

mudbespattered horses, little donkeys, looking as if they had been sculptured out of mud, struggling up and down the light railways that every now and then would disappear and be lost beneath the mud; guns and wagons groaning through the mud; lorries and ambulances, that in the darkness had swerved from the straight course, overturned and lying abandoned in the mud, motorcyclists ploughing swift furrows through the mud, rolling it back in liquid streams each side of them; staff cars rushing screaming through the mud, followed by a rushing fountain of mud; serried ranks of muddy men stamping through the mud with steady rhythm, moving through a rain of mud, rising upward from the ground; long lines of motorbuses filled with a mass of muddy humanity packed shoulder to shoulder, rumbling ever through the endless mud.

Men sitting by the roadside in the mud, gnawing at unsavoury food; men squatting by the ditches, examining their sores, washing their bleeding feet in the muddy water, replacing the muddy rags about their wounds.

A world without colour. No other colour to be seen beneath the sky but mud. The very buttons on the men's coats painted to make them look like mud.

Mud and dirt! Dirty faces, dirty hands, dirty clothes, dirty food, dirty beds; dirty interiors, from which there was never time to wash the mud; dirty linen hanging up to dry, beneath which dirty children played, while dirty women scolded. Filth and desolation all around. Shattered farmsteads half buried in the mud; shattered gardens trampled into mud. A weary land of foulness, breeding foulness; tangled wire the only harvest of the fields; mile after mile of gaping holes, filled with muddy water; stinking carcasses of dead horses; birds of prey clinging to broken fences, flapping their great wings.

A land where man died, and vermin increased and multiplied. Vermin on your body, vermin in your head, vermin in your food, vermin waiting for you in your bed; vermin the only thing that throve, the only thing that looked at you with bright eyes; vermin the only thing to which the joy of life had still been left.

Joan had found a liking gradually growing up in her for the quickmoving, curt-tongued doctor. She had dismissed him at first as a mere butcher: his brutal haste, his indifference apparently to the suffering he was causing, his great, strong, hairy hands, with their squat fingers, his cold grey eyes. But she learnt as time went by, that his callousness was a thing that he put on at the same time that he tied his white apron round his waist, and rolled up his sleeves.

She was resting, after a morning of grim work, on a bench outside the hospital, struggling with clenched, quivering hands against a craving to fling herself upon the ground and sob. And he had found her there; and had sat down beside her.

“So you wanted to see it with your own eyes,” he said. He laid his hand upon her shoulder, and she had some difficulty in not catching hold of him and clinging to him. She was feeling absurdly womanish just at that moment.

“Yes,” she answered. “And I’m glad that I did it,” she added, defiantly.

“So am I,” he said. “Tell your children what you have seen. Tell other women.”

“It’s you women that make war,” he continued. “Oh, I don’t mean that you do it on purpose, but it’s in your blood. It comes from the days when to live it was needful to kill. When a man who was swift and strong to kill was the only thing that could save a woman and her brood. Every other man that crept towards them through the grass was an enemy, and her only hope was that her man might kill him, while she watched and waited. And later came the tribe; and instead of the one man creeping through the grass, the everlasting warfare was against all other tribes. So you loved only the men ever ready and willing to fight, lest you and your children should be carried into slavery: then it was the only way. You brought up your boys to be fighters. You told them stories of their gallant sires. You sang to them the songs of battle: the glory of killing and of conquering. You have never unlearned the lesson. Man has learnt comradeship would have travelled further but for you. But woman is still primitive. She would still have her man the hater and the killer. To the woman the world has never changed.”

“Tell the other women,” he said. “Open their eyes. Tell them of their sons that you have seen dead and dying in the foolish quarrel for which there was no need. Tell them of the foulness, of the cruelty, of the senselessness of it all. Set the women against War. That is the only way to end it.”

It was a morning or two later that, knocking at the door of her loft, he asked her if she would care to come with him to the trenches. He had brought an outfit for her which he handed to her with a grin. She had followed Folk’s advice and had cut her hair; and when she appeared before him for inspection in trousers and overcoat, the collar turned up about her neck, and reaching to her helmet, he had laughingly pronounced the experiment safe.

A motor carried them to where the road ended, and from there, a little onehorse ambulance took them on to almost the last trees of the forest. There was no life to be seen anywhere. During the last mile, they had passed through a continuous double line

of graves; here and there a group of tiny crosses keeping one another company; others standing singly, looking strangely lonesome amid the tornup earth and shattered trees. But even these had ceased. Death itself seemed to have been frightened away from this terrorhaunted desert.

Looking down, she could see thin wreaths of smoke, rising from the ground. From underneath her feet there came a low, faint, ceaseless murmur.

“Quick,” said the doctor. He pushed her in front of him, and she almost fell down a flight of mudcovered steps that led into the earth. She found herself in a long, low gallery, lighted by a dim oil lamp, suspended from the blackened roof. A shelf ran along one side of it, covered with straw. Three men lay there. The straw was soaked with their blood. They had been brought in the night before by the stretcherbearers. A young surgeon was rearranging their splints and bandages, and redressing their wounds. They would lie there for another hour or so, and then start for their twenty kilometre drive over shellridden roads to one or another of the great hospitals at the base. While she was there, two more cases were brought in. The doctor gave but a glance at the first one and then made a sign; and the bearers passed on with him to the further end of the gallery. He seemed to understand, for he gave a low, despairing cry and the tears sprang to his eyes. He was but a boy. The other had a foot torn off. One of the orderlies gave him two round pieces of wood to hold in his hands while the young surgeon cut away the hanging flesh and bound up the stump.

The doctor had been whispering to one of the bearers. He had the face of an old man, but his shoulders were broad and he looked sturdy. He nodded, and beckoned Joan to follow him up the slippery steps.

“It is breakfast time,” he explained, as they emerged into the air. “We leave each other alone for half an hour even the snipers. But we must be careful.” She followed in his footsteps, stooping so low that her hands could have touched the ground. They had to be sure that they did not step off the narrow track marked with white stones, lest they should be drowned in the mud. They passed the head of a dead horse. It looked as if it had been cut off and laid there; the body was below it in the mud.

They spoke in whispers, and Joan at first had made an effort to disguise her voice. But her conductor had smiled. “They shall be called the brothers and the sisters of the Lord,” he had said. “Mademoiselle is brave for her Brothers’ sake.” He was a priest. There were many priests among the stretcherbearers.

Crouching close to the ground, behind the spreading roots of a giant oak, she raised her eyes. Before her lay a sea of smooth, soft mud nearly a mile wide. From the centre rose

a solitary tree, from which all had been shot away but two bare branches like outstretched arms above the silence. Beyond, the hills rose again. There was something unearthly in the silence that seemed to brood above that sea of mud. The old priest told her of the living men, French and German, who had stood there day and night sunk in it up to their waists, screaming hour after hour, and waving their arms, sinking into it lower and lower, none able to help them: until at last only their screaming heads were left, and after a time these, too, would disappear: and the silence come again.

She saw the ditches, like long graves dug for the living, where the weary, listless men stood kneedeep in mud, hoping for wounds that would relieve them from the ghastly monotony of their existence; the holes of muddy water where the dead things lay, to which they crept out in the night to wash a little of the filth from their clammy bodies and their stinking clothes; the holes dug out of the mud in which they ate and slept and lived year after year: till brain and heart and soul seemed to have died out of them, and they remembered with an effort that they once were men.

After a time, the care of the convalescents passed almost entirely into Joan's hands, Madame Lelanne being told off to assist her. By dint of much persistence she had succeeded in getting the leaky roof repaired, and in place of the smoky stove that had long been her despair she had one night procured a fine calorifère by the simple process of stealing it. Madame Lelanne had heard about it from the gossips. It had been brought to a lonely house at the end of the village by a major of engineers. He had returned to the trenches the day before, and the place for the time being was empty. The thieves were never discovered. The sentry was positive that no one had passed him but two women, one of them carrying a baby. Madame Lelanne had dressed it up in a child's cloak and hood, and had carried it in her arms. As it must have weighed nearly a couple of hundredweight suspicion had not attached to them.

Space did not allow of any separation; broken Frenchmen and broken Germans would often lie side by side. Joan would wonder, with a grim smile to herself, what the patriotic Press of the different countries would have thought had they been there to have overheard the conversations. Neither France nor Germany appeared to be the enemy, but a thing called "They," a mysterious power that worked its will upon them both from a place they always spoke of as "Back there." One day the talk fell on courage. A young French soldier was holding forth when Joan entered the hut.

"It makes me laugh," he was saying, "all this newspaper talk. Every nation, properly led, fights bravely. It is the male instinct. Women go into hysterics about it, because it has not been given them. I have the Croix de Guerre with all three leaves, and I haven't half the courage of my dog, who weighs twelve kilos, and would face a regiment by himself. Why, a game cock has got more than the best of us. It's the man who doesn't think, who

can't think, who has the most courage who imagines nothing, but just goes forward with his head down, like a bull. There is, of course, a real courage. When you are by yourself, and have to do something in cold blood. But the courage required for rushing forward, shouting and yelling with a lot of other fellows why, it would take a hundred times more pluck to turn back."

"They know that," chimed in the man lying next to him; "or they would not drug us. Why, when we stormed La Haye I knew nothing until an ugly looking German spat a pint of blood into my face and woke me up."

A middle-aged sergeant, who had a wound in the stomach and was sitting up in his bed, looked across. "There was a line of Germans came upon us," he said, "at Bras. I thought I must be suffering from a nightmare when I saw them. They had thrown away their rifles and had all joined hands. They came dancing towards us just like a row of ballet girls. They were shrieking and laughing, and they never attempted to do anything. We just waited until they were close up and then shot them down. It was like killing a lot of kids who had come to have a game with us. The one I potted got his arms round me before he coughed himself out, calling me his 'liebe Elsa,' and wanting to kiss me. Lord! You can guess how the Boche ink-slingers spread themselves over that business: 'Sonderbar! Colossal! Unvergessliche Helden.' Poor devils!"

"They'll give us ginger before it is over," said another. He had had both his lips torn away, and appeared to be always laughing. "Stuff it into us as if we were horses at a fair. That will make us run forward, right enough."

"Oh, come," struck in a youngster who was lying perfectly flat, face downwards on his bed: it was the position in which he could breathe easiest. He raised his head a couple of inches and twisted it round so as to get his mouth free. "It isn't as bad as all that. Why, the Thirty-third swarmed into Fort Malmaison of their own accord, though 'twas like jumping into a boiling furnace, and held it for three days against pretty nearly a division. There weren't a dozen of them left when we relieved them. They had no ammunition left. They'd just been filling up the gaps with their bodies. And they wouldn't go back even then. We had to drag them away. 'They shan't pass,' 'They shan't pass!' that's all they kept saying." His voice had sunk to a thin whisper.

A young officer was lying in a corner behind a screen. He leant forward and pushed it aside.

"Oh, give the devil his due, you fellows," he said. "War isn't a pretty game, but it does make for courage. We all know that. And things even finer than mere fighting pluck. There was a man in my company, a Jacques Decrusy. He was just a stupid peasant lad.

We were crowded into one end of the trench, about a score of us. The rest of it had fallen in, and we couldn't move. And a bomb dropped into the middle of us; and the same instant that it touched the ground Decrusy threw himself flat down upon it and took the whole of it into his body. There was nothing left of him but scraps. But the rest of us got off. Nobody had drugged him to do that. There isn't one of us who was in that trench that will not be a better man to the end of his days, remembering how Jacques Decrusy gave his life for ours."

"I'll grant you all that, sir," answered the young soldier who had first spoken. He had long, delicate hands and eager, restless eyes. "War does bring out heroism. So does pestilence and famine. Read Defoe's account of the Plague of London. How men and women left their safe homes, to serve in the pesthouses, knowing that sooner or later they were doomed. Read of the mothers in India who die of slow starvation, never allowing a morsel of food to pass their lips so that they may save up their own small daily portion to add it to their children's. Why don't we pray to God not to withhold from us His precious medicine of pestilence and famine? So is shipwreck a fine school for courage. Look at the chance it gives the captain to set a fine example. And the engineers who stick to their post with the water pouring in upon them. We don't reconcile ourselves to shipwrecks as a necessary school for sailors. We do our best to lessen them. So did persecution bring out heroism. It made saints and martyrs. Why have we done away with it? If this game of killing and being killed is the fine school for virtue it is made out to be, then all our efforts towards law and order have been a mistake. We never ought to have emerged from the jungle."

He took a notebook from under his pillow and commenced to scribble.

An oldlooking man spoke. He lay with his arms folded across his breast, addressing apparently the smoky rafters. He was a Russian, a teacher of languages in Paris at the outbreak of the war, and had joined the French Army.

"It is not only courage," he said, "that War brings out. It brings out vile things too. Oh, I'm not thinking merely of the Boches. That's the cant of every nation: that all the heroism is on one side and all the brutality on the other. Take men from anywhere and some of them will be devils. War gives them their opportunity, brings out the beast. Can you wonder at it? You teach a man to plunge a bayonet into the writhing flesh of a fellow human being, and twist it round and round and jamb it further in, while the blood is spurting from him like a fountain. What are you making of him but a beast? A man's got to be a beast before he can bring himself to do it. I have seen things done by our own men in cold blood, the horror of which will haunt my memory until I die. But of course, we hush it up when it happens to be our own people."

He ceased speaking. No one seemed inclined to break the silence.

They remained confused in her memory, these talks among the wounded men in the low, dimly lighted hut that had become her world. At times it was but two men speaking to one another in whispers, at others every creaking bed would be drawn into the argument.

One topic that never lost its interest was: Who made wars? Who hounded the people into them, and kept them there, tearing at one another's throats? They never settled it.

"God knows I didn't want it, speaking personally," said a German prisoner one day, with a laugh. "I had been working at a printing business sixteen hours a day for seven years. It was just beginning to pay me, and now my wife writes me that she has had to shut the place up and sell the machinery to keep them all from starving."

"But couldn't you have done anything to stop it?" demanded a Frenchman, lying next to him. "All your millions of Socialists, what were they up to? What went wrong with the Internationale, the Universal Brotherhood of Labour, and all that Tralala?"

The German laughed again. "Oh, they know their business," he answered. "You have your glass of beer and go to bed, and when you wake up in the morning you find that war has been declared; and you keep your mouth shut unless you want to be shot for a traitor. Not that it would have made much difference," he added. "I admit that. The ground had been too well prepared. England was envious of our trade. King Edward had been plotting our destruction. Our papers were full of translations from yours, talking about 'La Revanche!' We were told that you had been lending money to Russia to enable her to build railways, and that when they were complete France and Russia would fall upon us suddenly. 'The Fatherland in danger!' It may be lies or it may not; what is one to do? What would you have done even if you could have done anything?"

"He's right," said a dreamy-eyed looking man, laying down the book he had been reading. "We should have done just the same. 'My country, right or wrong.' After all, it is an ideal."

A dark, blackbearded man raised himself painfully upon his elbow. He was a tailor in the Rue Parnesse, and prided himself on a decided resemblance to Victor Hugo.

"It's a noble ideal," he said. "La Patrie! The great Mother. Right or wrong, who shall dare to harm her? Yes, if it was she who rose up in her majesty and called to us." He laughed. "What does it mean in reality: Germania, Italia, La France, Britannia? Half a score of pompous old muddlers with their fat wives egging them on: sons of the fools

before them; talkers who have wormed themselves into power by making frothy speeches and fine promises. My Country!” he laughed again. “Look at them. Can’t you see their swelling paunches and their flabby faces? Half a score of ambitious politicians, gouty old financiers, baldheaded old toffs, with their waxed moustaches and false teeth. That’s what we mean when we talk about ‘My Country’: a pack of selfish, soulless, muddleheaded old men. And whether they’re right or whether they’re wrong, our duty is to fight at their bidding to bleed for them, to die for them, that they may grow more sleek and prosperous.” He sank back on his pillow with another laugh.

Sometimes they agreed it was the newspapers that made war that fanned every trivial difference into a vital question of national honour that, whenever there was any fear of peace, restoked the fires of hatred with their neverfailing stories of atrocities. At other times they decided it was the capitalists, the traders, scenting profit for themselves. Some held it was the politicians, dreaming of going down to history as Richelieu or as Bismarcks. A popular theory was that cause for war was always discovered by the ruling classes whenever there seemed danger that the workers were getting out of hand. In war, you put the common people back in their place, revived in them the habits of submission and obedience. Napoleon the Little, it was argued, had started the war of 1870 with that idea. Russia had welcomed the present war as an answer to the Revolution that was threatening Czarism. Others contended it was the great munition industries, aided by the military party, the officers impatient for opportunities of advancement, the strategists eager to put their theories to the test. A few of the more philosophical shrugged their shoulders. It was the thing itself that sooner or later was bound to go off of its own accord. Half every country’s energy, half every country’s time and money was spent in piling up explosives. In every country envy and hatred of every other country was preached as a religion. They called it patriotism. Sooner or later the spark fell.

A wizened little man had been listening to it all one day. He had a curiously ratlike face, with round, red, twinkling eyes, and a long, pointed nose that twitched as he talked.

“I’ll tell you who makes all the wars,” he said. “It’s you and me, my dears: we make the wars. We love them. That’s why we open our mouths and swallow all the twaddle that the papers give us; and cheer the fine, blackcoated gentlemen when they tell us it’s our sacred duty to kill Germans, or Italians, or Russians, or anybody else. We are just crazy to kill something: it doesn’t matter what. If it’s to be Germans, we shout ‘A Berlin!’; and if it’s to be Russians we cheer for Liberty. I was in Paris at the time of the Fashoda trouble. How we hissed the English in the cafés! And how they glared back at us! They were just as eager to kill us. Who makes a dog fight? Why, the dog. Anybody can do it. Who could make us fight each other, if we didn’t want to? Not all the king’s horses and all the King’s men. No, my dears, it’s we make the wars. You and me, my dears.”

There came a day in early spring. All night long the guns had never ceased. It sounded like the tireless barking of ten thousand giant dogs. Behind the hills, the whole horizon, like a fiery circle, was ringed with flashing light. Shapeless forms, bent beneath burdens, passed in endless procession through the village. Masses of rushing men swept like shadowy phantoms through the fitfully illumined darkness. Beneath that everlasting barking, Joan would hear, now the piercing wail of a child; now a clap of thunder that for the moment would drown all other sounds, followed by a faint, low, rumbling crash, like the shooting of coals into a cellar. The wounded on their beds lay with wideopen, terrified eyes, moving feverishly from side to side.

At dawn the order came that the hospital was to be evacuated. The ambulances were already waiting in the street. Joan flew up the ladder to her loft, the other side of the yard. Madame Lelanne was already there. She had thrown a few things into a bundle, and her foot was again upon the ladder, when it seemed to her that someone struck her, hurling her back upon the floor, and the house the other side of the yard rose up into the air, and then fell quite slowly, and a cloud of dust hid it from her sight.

Madame Lelanne must have carried her down the ladder. She was standing in the yard, and the dust was choking her. Across the street, beyond the ruins of the hospital, swarms of men were running about like ants when their nest has been disturbed. Some were running this way, and some that. And then they would turn and run back again, making dancing movements round one another and jostling one another. The guns had ceased; and instead, it sounded as if all the babies in the world were playing with their rattles. Suddenly Madame Lelanne reappeared out of the dust, and seizing Joan, dragged her through a dark opening and down a flight of steps, and then left her. She was in a great vaulted cellar. A faint light crept in through a grated window at the other end. There was a long table against the wall, and in front of it a bench. She staggered to it and sat down, leaning against the damp wall. The place was very silent. Suddenly she began to laugh. She tried to stop herself, but couldn't. And then she heard footsteps descending, and her memory came back to her with a rush. They were German footsteps, she felt sure by the sound: they were so slow and heavy. They should not find her in hysterics, anyhow. She fixed her teeth into the wooden table in front of her and held on to it with clenched hands. She had recovered herself before the footsteps had finished their descent. With a relief that made it difficult for her not to begin laughing again, she found it was Madame Lelanne and Monsieur Dubos. They were carrying something between them. She hardly recognized Dubos at first. His beard was gone, and a line of flaming scars had taken its place. They laid their burden on the table. It was one of the wounded men from the hut. They told her they were bringing down two more. The hut itself had not been hit, but the roof had been torn off by the force of the explosion, and the others had been killed by the falling beams. Joan wanted to return

with them, but Madame Lelanne had assumed an air of authority, and told her she would be more useful where she was. From the top of the steps they threw down bundles of straw, on which they laid the wounded men, and Joan tended them, while Madame Lelanne and the little chemist went up and down continuously. Before evening the place, considering all things, was fairly habitable. Madame Lelanne brought down the great stove from the hut; and breaking a pane of glass in the barred window, they fixed it up with its chimney and lighted it. From time to time the turmoil above them would break out again: the rattling, and sometimes a dull rumbling as of rushing water. But only a faint murmur of it penetrated into the cellar. Towards night it became quiet again.

How long Joan remained there she was never quite sure. There was little difference between day and night. After it had been quiet for an hour or so, Madame Lelanne would go out, to return a little later with a wounded man upon her back; and when one died, she would throw him across her shoulder and disappear again up the steps. Sometimes it was a Frenchman and sometimes a German she brought in. One gathered that the fight for the village still continued. There was but little they could do for them beyond dressing their wounds and easing their pain. Joan and the little chemist took it in turns to relieve one another. If Madame Lelanne ever slept, it was when she would sit in the shadow behind the stove, her hands upon her knees. Dubos had been in the house when it had fallen. Madame Lelanne had discovered him pinned against a wall underneath a great oak beam that had withstood the falling débris. His beard had been burnt off, but otherwise he had been unharmed.

She seemed to be living in a dream. She could not shake from her the feeling that it was not bodies but souls that she was tending. The men themselves gave colour to this fancy of hers. Stripped of their poor, stained, tattered uniforms, they were neither French nor Germans. Friend or foe! it was already but a memory. Often, awakening out of a sleep, they would look across at one another and smile as to a comrade. A great peace seemed to have entered there. Faint murmurs as from some distant troubled world would steal at times into the silence. It brought a pang of pity, but it did not drive away the quiet that dwelt there.

Once, someone who must have known the place and had descended the steps softly, sat there among them and talked with them. Joan could not remember seeing him enter. Perhaps unknowing, she had fallen to sleep for a few minutes. Madame Lelanne was seated by the stove, her great coarse hands upon her knees, her patient, dull, slowmoving eyes fixed upon the speaker's face. Dubos was half standing, half resting against the table, his arms folded upon his breast. The wounded men had raised themselves upon the straw and were listening. Some leant upon their elbows, some sat

with their hands clasped round their knees, and one, with head bent down, remained with his face hidden in his hands.

The speaker sat a little way apart. The light from the oil lamp, suspended from the ceiling, fell upon his face. He wore a peasant's blouse. It seemed to her a face she knew. Possibly she had passed him in the village street and had looked at him without remembering. It was his eyes that for long years afterwards still haunted her. She did not notice at the time what language he was speaking. But there were none who did not understand him.

“You think of God as of a great King,” he said, “a Ruler who orders all things: who could change all things in the twinkling of an eye. You see the cruelty and the wrong around you. And you say to yourselves: ‘He has ordered it. If He would, He could have willed it differently.’ So that in your hearts you are angry with Him. How could it be otherwise? What father, loving his children, would see them suffer wrong, when by stretching out a hand he could protect them: turn their tears to gladness? What father would see his children doing evil to one another and not check them: would see them following ways leading to their destruction, and not pluck them back? If God has ordered all things, why has He created evil, making His creatures weak and sinful? Does a father lay snares for his children: leading them into temptation: delivering them unto evil?”

“There is no God, apart from Man.”

“God is a spirit. His dwellingplace is in man's heart. We are His fellowlabourers. It is through man that He shall one day rule the world.”

“God is knocking at your heart, but you will not open to Him. You have filled your hearts with love of self. There is no room for Him to enter in.”

“God whispers to you: ‘Be pitiful. Be merciful. Be just.’ But you answer Him: ‘If I am pitiful, I lose my time and money. If I am merciful, I forego advantage to myself. If I am just, I lessen my own profit, and another passes me in the race.’”

“And yet in your inmost thoughts you know that you are wrong: that love of self brings you no peace. Who is happier than the lover, thinking only how to serve? Who is the more joyous: he who sits alone at the table, or he who shares his meal with a friend? It is more blessed to give than to receive. How can you doubt it? For what do you toil and strive but that you may give to your children, to your loved ones, reaping the harvest of their good?”

“Who among you is the more honoured? The miser or the giver: he who heaps up riches for himself or he who labours for others?”

“Who is the true soldier? He who has put away self. His own ease and comfort, even his own needs, his own safety: they are but as a feather in the balance when weighed against his love for his comrades, for his country. The true soldier is not afraid to love. He gives his life for his friend. Do you jeer at him? Do you say he is a fool for his pains? No, it is his honour, his glory.”

“God is love. Why are you afraid to let Him in? Hate knocks also at your door and to him you open wide. Why are you afraid of love? All things are created by love. Hate can but destroy. Why choose you death instead of life? God pleads to you. He is waiting for your help.”

And one answered him.

“We are but poor men,” he said. “What can we do? Of what use are such as we?”

The young man looked at him and smiled.

“You can ask that,” he said: “you, a soldier? Does the soldier say: ‘I am of no use. I am but a poor man of no account. Who has need of such as I?’ God has need of all. There is none that shall not help to win the victory. It is with his life the soldier serves. Who were they whose teaching moved the world more than it has ever yet been moved by the teaching of the wisest? They were men of little knowledge, of but little learning, poor and lowly. It was with their lives they taught.”

“Cast out self, and God shall enter in, and you shall be One with God. For there is none so lowly that he may not become the Temple of God: there is none so great that he shall be greater than this.”

The speaker ceased. There came a faint sound at which she turned her head; and when she looked again he was gone.

The wounded men had heard it also. Dubos had moved forward. Madame Lelanne had risen. It came again, the thin, faint shrill of a distant bugle. Footsteps were descending the stairs. French soldiers, laughing, shouting, were crowding round them.

CHAPTER IX

Her father met her at Waterloo. He had business in London, and they stayed on for a few days. Reading between the lines of his later letters, she had felt that all was not well with him. His old heart trouble had come back; and she noticed that he walked to meet her very slowly. It would be all right, now that she had returned, he explained: he had been worrying himself about her.

Mrs. Denton had died. She had left Joan her library, together with her wonderful collection of note books. She had brought them all uptodate and indexed them. They would be invaluable to Francis when he started the new paper upon which they had determined. He was still in the hospital at Breganze, near to where his machine had been shot down. She had tried to get to him; but it would have meant endless delays; and she had been anxious about her father. The Italian surgeons were very proud of him, he wrote. They had had him Xrayed before and after; and beyond a slight lameness which gave him, he thought, a touch of distinction, there was no flaw that the most careful scrutiny would be likely to detect. Any day, now, he expected to be discharged. Mary had married an old sweetheart. She had grown restless in the country with nothing to do, and, at the suggestion of some friends, had gone to Bristol to help in a children's hospital; and there they had met once more.

Neil Singleton, after serving two years in a cholera hospital at Baghdad, had died of the flu in Dover twentyfour hours after landing. Madge was in Palestine. She had been appointed secretary to a committee for the establishment of native schools. She expected to be there for some years, she wrote. The work was interesting, and appealed to her.

Flossie 'phoned her from Paddington Station, the second day, and by luck she happened to be in. Flossie had just come up from Devonshire. Sam had "got through," and she was on her way to meet him at Hull. She had heard of Joan's arrival in London from one of Carleton's illustrated dailies. She brought the paper with her. They had used the old photograph that once had adorned each week the Sunday Post. Joan hardly recognized herself in the serene, selfconfident young woman who seemed to be looking down upon a world at her feet. The world was strong and cruel, she had discovered; and Joans but small and weak. One had to pretend that one was not afraid of it.

Flossie had joined every society she could hear of that was working for the League of Nations. Her hope was that it would get itself established before young Frank grew up.

"Not that I really believe it will," she confessed. "A draw might have disgusted us all with fighting. As it is, half the world is dancing at Victory balls, exhibiting captured

guns on every village green, and hanging father's helmet above the mantelpiece; while the other half is nursing its revenge. Young Frank only cares for life because he is looking forward to one day driving a tank. I've made up my mind to burn Sam's uniform; but I expect it will end in my wrapping it up in lavender and hiding it away in a drawer. And then there will be all the books and plays. No self-respecting heroine, for the next ten years will dream of marrying anyone but a soldier."

Joan laughed. "Difficult to get anything else, just at present," she said. "It's the soldiers I'm looking to for help. I don't think the men who have been there will want their sons to go. It's the women I'm afraid of."

Flossie caught sight of the clock and jumped up. "Who was it said that woman would be the last thing man would civilize?" she asked.

"It sounds like Meredith," suggested Joan. "I am not quite sure."

"Well, he's wrong, anyhow," retorted Flossie. "It's no good our waiting for man. He is too much afraid of us to be of any real help to us. We shall have to do it ourselves." She gave Joan a hug and was gone.

Phillips was still abroad with the Army of Occupation. He had tried to get out of it, but had not succeeded. He held it to be gaoler's work; and the sight of the starving populace was stirring in him a fierce anger.

He would not put up again for Parliament. He was thinking of going back to his old work upon the Union. "Parliament is played out," he had written her. "Kings and Aristocracies have served their purpose and have gone, and now the Ruling Classes, as they call themselves, must be content to hear the bell toll for them also. Parliament was never anything more than an instrument in their hands, and never can be. What happens? Once in every five years you wake the people up: tell them the time has come for them to exercise their Heavenordained privilege of putting a cross against the names of some seven hundred gentlemen who have kindly expressed their willingness to rule over them. After that, you send the people back to sleep; and for the next five years these seven hundred gentlemen, consulting no one but themselves, rule over the country as absolutely as ever a Caesar ruled over Rome. What sort of Democracy is that? Even a Labour Government supposing that in spite of the Press it did win through what would be its fate? Separated from its base, imprisoned within those traditionhaunted walls, it would lose touch with the people, would become in its turn a mere oligarchy. If the people are ever to govern they must keep their hand firmly upon the machine; not remain content with pulling a lever and then being shown the door."

She had sent a note by messenger to Mary Stopperton to say she was coming. Mary had looked very fragile the last time she had seen her, just before leaving for France; and she had felt a fear. Mary had answered in her neat, thin, quavering writing, asking her to come early in the morning. Sometimes she was a little tired and had to lie down again. She had been waiting for Joan. She had a present for her.

The morning promised to be fair, and she decided to walk by way of the Embankment. The great river with its deep, strong patience had always been a friend to her. It was Sunday and the city was still sleeping. The pale December sun rose above the mist as she reached the corner of Westminster Bridge, turning the river into silver and flooding the silent streets with a soft, white, tender light.

The tower of Chelsea Church brought back to her remembrance of the wheezy old clergyman who had preached there that Sunday evening, that now seemed so long ago, when her footsteps had first taken her that way by chance. Always she had intended making inquiries and discovering his name. Why had she never done so? It would surely have been easy. He was someone she had known as a child. She had become quite convinced of that. She could see his face close to hers as if he had lifted her up in his arms and was smiling at her. But pride and power had looked out of his eyes then.

It was earlier than the time she had fixed in her own mind and, pausing with her elbows resting on the granite parapet, she watched the ceaseless waters returning to the sea, bearing their burden of impurities.

“All roads lead to Calvary.” It was curious how the words had dwelt with her, till gradually they had become a part of her creed. She remembered how at first they had seemed to her a threat chilling her with fear. They had grown to be a promise, a hope held out to all. The road to Calvary! It was the road to life. By the giving up of self we gained God.

And suddenly a great peace came to her. One was not alone in the fight, God was with us: the great Comrade. The evil and the cruelty all round her: she was no longer afraid of it. God was coming. Beyond the menace of the passing day, black with the war's foul aftermath of evil dreams and hatreds, she saw the breaking of the distant dawn. The devil should not always triumph. God was gathering His labourers.

God was conquering. Unceasing through the ages, God's voice had crept round man, seeking entry. Through the long darkness of that dim beginning, when man knew no law but self, unceasing God had striven: until at last one here and there, emerging from the brute, had heard had listened to the voice of love and pity, and in that hour, unknowing, had built to God a temple in the wilderness.

Labourers together with God. The mighty host of those who through the ages had heard the voice of God and had made answer. The men and women in all lands who had made room in their hearts for God. Still nameless, scattered, unknown to one another: still powerless as yet against the world's foul law of hate, they should continue to increase and multiply, until one day they should speak with God's voice and should be heard. And a new world should be created.

God. The tireless Spirit of eternal creation, the Spirit of Love. What else was it that out of formlessness had shaped the spheres, had planned the orbits of the suns. The law of gravity we named it. What was it but another name for Love, the yearning of like for like, the calling to one another of the stars. What else but Love had made the worlds, had gathered together the waters, had fashioned the dry land. The cohesion of elements, so we explained it. The clinging of like to like. The brotherhood of the atoms.

God. The Eternal Creator. Out of matter, lifeless void, he had moulded His worlds, had ordered His endless firmament. It was finished. The greater task remained: the Universe of mind, of soul. Out of man it should be created. God in man and man in God: made in like image: fellow labourers together with one another: together they should build it. Out of the senseless strife and discord, above the chaos and the tumult should be heard the new command: "Let there be Love."

The striking of the old church clock recalled her to herself. But she had only a few minutes' walk before her. Mary had given up her Church work. It included the cleaning, and she had found it beyond her failing strength. But she still lived in the tiny cottage behind its long strip of garden. The door yielded to Joan's touch: it was seldom fast closed. And knowing Mary's ways, she entered without knocking and pushed it to behind her, leaving it still ajar.

And as she did so, it seemed to her that someone passing breathed upon her lips a little kiss: and for a while she did not move. Then, treading softly, she looked into the room.

It welcomed her, as always, with its smile of cosy neatness. The spotless curtains that were Mary's pride: the gay flowers in the window, to which she had given children's names: the few poor pieces of furniture, polished with much loving labour: the shining grate: the foolish china dogs and the little china house between them on the mantelpiece. The fire was burning brightly, and the kettle was singing on the hob.

Mary's work was finished. She sat upright in her straightbacked chair before the table, her eyes half closed. It seemed so odd to see those little workworn hands idle upon her lap.

Joan's present lay on the table near to her, as if she had just folded it and placed it there: the little cap and the fine robe of lawn: as if for a king's child.

Joan had never thought that Death could be so beautiful. It was as if some friend had looked in at the door, and, seeing her so tired, had taken the work gently from her hands, and had folded them upon her lap. And she had yielded with a smile.

Joan heard a faint rustle and looked up. A woman had entered. It was the girl she had met there on a Christmas Day, a Miss Ensor. Joan had met her once or twice since then. She was still in the chorus. Neither of them spoke for a few minutes.

"I have been expecting every morning to find her gone," said the girl. "I think she only waited to finish this." She gently unfolded the fine lawn robe, and they saw the delicate insertion and the wonderful, embroidery.

"I asked her once," said the girl, "why she wasted so much work on them. They were mostly only for poor people. 'One never knows, dearie,' she answered, with that childish smile of hers. 'It may be for a little Christ.'"

They would not let less loving hands come near her.

Her father had completed his business, and both were glad to leave London. She had a sense of something sinister, foreboding, casting its shadow on the sordid, unclean streets, the neglected buildings falling into disrepair. A lurking savagery, a halfveiled enmity seemed to be stealing among the people. The town's mad lust for pleasure: its fierce, unjoyous laughter: its desire ever to be in crowds as if afraid of itself: its orgies of eating and drinking: its animallike indifference to the misery and death that lay but a little way beyond its own horizon! She dared not remember history. Perhaps it would pass.

The long, slow journey tried her father's strength, and assuming an authority to which he yielded obedience tempered by grumbling, Joan sent him to bed, and would not let him come down till Christmas Day. The big, square house was on the outskirts of the town where it was quiet, and in the afternoon they walked in the garden sheltered behind its high brick wall.

He told her of what had been done at the works. Arthur's plan had succeeded. It might not be the last word, but at least it was on the road to the right end. The men had been

brought into it and shared the management. And the disasters predicted had proved groundless.

“You won’t be able to indulge in all your mad schemes,” he laughed, “but there’ll be enough to help on a few. And you will be among friends. Arthur told me he had explained it to you and that you had agreed.”

“Yes,” she answered. “It was the last time he came to see me in London. And I could not help feeling a bit jealous. He was doing things while I was writing and talking. But I was glad he was an Allway. It will be known as the Allway scheme. New ways will date from it.”

She had thought it time for him to return indoors, but he pleaded for a visit to his beloved roses. He prided himself on being always able to pick roses on Christmas Day.

“This young man of yours,” he asked, “what is he like?”

“Oh, just a Christian gentleman,” she answered. “You will love him when you know him.”

He laughed. “And this new journal of his?” he asked. “It’s got to be published in London, hasn’t it?”

She gave a slight start, for in their letters to one another they had been discussing this very point.

“No,” she answered, “it could be circulated just as well from, say, Birmingham or Manchester.”

He was choosing his roses. They held their petals wrapped tight round them, trying to keep the cold from their brave hearts. In the warmth they would open out and be gay, until the end.

“Not Liverpool?” he suggested.

“Or even Liverpool,” she laughed.

They looked at one another, and then beyond the sheltering evergreens and the wide lawns to where the great square house seemed to be listening.

“It’s an ugly old thing,” he said.

“No, it isn’t,” she contradicted. “It’s simple and big and kind. I always used to feel it disapproved of me. I believe it has come to love me, in its solemn old brick way.”

“It was built by Kent in seventeenforty for your greatgreat grandfather,” he explained. He was regarding it more affectionately. “Solid respectability was the dream, then.”

“I think that’s why I love it,” she said: “for it’s dear, oldfashioned ways. We will teach it the new dreams, too. It will be so shocked, at first.”

They dined in state in the great diningroom.

“I was going to buy you a present,” he grumbled. “But you wouldn’t let me get up.”

“I want to give you something quite expensive, Dad,” she said. “I’ve had my eye on it for years.”

She slipped her hand in his. “I want you to give me that Dream of yours; that you built for my mother, and that all went wrong. They call it Allway’s Folly; and it makes me so mad. I want to make it all come true. May I try?”

It was there that he came to her.

She stood beneath the withered trees, beside the shattered fountain. The sadfaced ghosts peeped out at her from the broken windows of the little silent houses.

She wondered later why she had not been surprised to see him. But at the time it seemed to be in the order of things that she should look up and find him there.

She went to him with outstretched arms.

“I’m so glad you’ve come,” she said. “I was just wanting you.”

They sat on the stone step of the fountain, where they were sheltered from the wind; and she buttoned his long coat about him.

“Do you think you will go on doing it?” he asked, with a laugh.

“I’m so afraid,” she answered gravely. “That I shall come to love you too much: the home, the children and you. I shall have none left over.”

“There is an old Hindoo proverb,” he said: “That when a man and woman love they dig a fountain down to God.”

“This poor, little chokedup thing,” he said, “against which we are sitting; it’s for want of men and women drawing water, of children dabbling their hands in it and making themselves all wet, that it has run dry.”

She took his hands in hers to keep them warm. The nursing habit seemed to have taken root in her.

“I see your argument,” she said. “The more I love you, the deeper will be the fountain. So that the more Love I want to come to me, the more I must love you.”

“Don’t you see it for yourself?” he demanded.

She broke into a little laugh.

“Perhaps you are right,” she admitted. “Perhaps that is why He made us male and female: to teach us to love.”

A robin broke into a song of triumph. He had seen the sadfaced ghosts steal silently away.