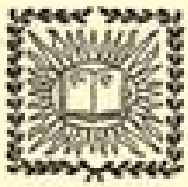
The Prodigal Father

BY

J. STORER CLOUSTON

AUTHOR "THE LUNATIC AT LARGE," "A COUNTY FAMILY," ETC.



New York
The Century Co.
1909

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Title: The Prodigal Father

Author: J. Storer Clouston

Release date: June 25, 2008 [eBook #25899]
Most recently updated: January 3, 2021

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/25899

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK
THE PRODIGAL FATHER ***

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J. STORER CLOUSTON

AUTHOR "THE LUNATIC AT LARGE,"
"A COUNTY FAMILY," ETC.



New York

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J. Storer Clouston

Published, September, 1909

J. F. TAPLEY CO.

NEW YORK

WITH GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT TO AN UNKNOWN CORRESPONDENT WHO ONCE MADE A CERTAIN SUGGESTION. IF HE READS THIS STORY HE PERHAPS WILL REMEMBER

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THE PRODIGAL FATHER

INTRODUCTORY

In one of the cable tramway cars which, at a reverential pace, perambulate the city of Edinburgh, two citizens conversed. The winds without blew gustily and filled the air with sounds like a stream in flood, the traffic clattered noisily over the causeway, the car itself thrummed and rattled; but the voices of the two were hushed. Said the one—

"It's the most extraordinary thing ever I heard of."

"It's all that," said the other; "in fact, it's pairfectly incomprehensible."

"Mr. Walkingshaw of all people!"

"Of Walkingshaw and Gilliflower—that's the thing that fair takes my breath away!" added the other; as though the firm was an even surer guarantee of respectability than the honored name of the senior partner.

They shook their heads ominously. It was clear this was no ordinary portent they were discussing.

"Do you think has he taken to—?"

The first citizen finished his question by a crooking of his upturned little finger, one of those many delicate symbols by which the north Briton indicates a failing not uncommon in his climate.

"It's a curious thing," replied his friend, "that I haven't heard that given as an explanation. Of course he's not a teetotaler—"

"Oh, none ever insinuated that," put in the other, with the air of one who desired to do justice even to

the most erring.

"On the other hand, he's ay had the name of being one of the most respectable men in the town, just an example, they've always told me."

"I knew him fine myself, in a business way, and that's just the expression I'd have used—an Example."

"Respected by all."

"An elder, and what not."

"A fine business, he has."

"His daughter married a Ramornie of Pettigrew."

They shook their heads again, if possible more gravely than before.

"He must be going off his head."

"He must be gone, I'd say."

"Yon speech he made was an outrage to common sense and decency!"

"And about his son's marriage!"

"That's Andrew Walkingshaw—his partner?"

"Aye."

"Oh, you've heard the story, then? I wonder is it true?"

"I had it on the best authority."

They pursed their lips solemnly.

"The man's mad!"

"But think of letting him loose to make a public exhibition of himself! It's an awfu' end to a respected career—in fact, it's positively discouraging."

"You're right: you're right. If as respectable a liver as him ends that way—well, well!"

In this strain and with such comments (exceedingly natural under the circumstances) did his fellow-citizens discuss the remarkable thing that befell Mr. Walkingshaw. And yet they could see only the outward symptoms or manifestations of this thing. Now that the full circumstances are made public, it will be generally conceded that few well-authenticated occurrences have ever at first sight seemed less probable. This has actually been advanced as an argument for their suppression; but since enough has already leaked out to whet the public curiosity, and indeed to lead to damaging misconceptions in a city so unused to phenomena other than meteorological, it is considered wisest that the unvarnished facts should be placed in the hands of a scrupulous editor and allowed to speak for themselves.

PART I

THE PRODIGAL FATHER

CHAPTER I

At a certain windy corner in the famous city of Edinburgh, a number of brass plates were affixed to the framework of a door. On the largest and brightest of them appeared the legend "Walkingshaw & Gilliflower, W.S."; and on no other sheet of brass in Scotland were more respectable names inscribed. For the benefit of the Sassenach and other foreigners, it may be explained that "W.S." is a condensation of "Writers to the Signet"—a species of beatified solicitor holding a position so esteemed, so enviable, and so intensely reputable that the only scandal previously whispered in connection with a member of this class proved innocently explicable upon the discovery that he was affianced to the lady's aunt. The building in which the firm had their office formed one end of an austere range of dark stone houses overlooking a street paved with cubes of granite and confronted by a precisely similar line of houses on the farther side. The whole sloped somewhat steeply down a hill, up which and down which a stimulating breeze careered and eddied during three hundred days of the year. Had you thrust your head out of the office windows and looked down the street, you could have seen, generally beneath a gray sky and through a haze of smoke, an inspiring glimpse of distant sea with yet more distant hills beyond. But Mr. Walkingshaw had no time for looking gratis out of his window to see unprofitable views. The gray street had been the background to nearly fifty years of dignified labor on behalf of the most respectable clients.

His full name was James Heriot Walkingshaw, but it had been early recognized that "James" was too brief

a designation and "Jimmie" too trivial for one of his parts and presence, and so he was universally known as Heriot Walkingshaw. His antecedents were as respectable as his clients. One of his eight great-great-grandfathers owned a landed estate in the county of Peebles, one of his maternal uncles was a theological professor in the University of Aberdeen, and his father before him had been a W.S. Young Heriot himself was brought up on porridge, the tawse, the Shorter Catechism, and an allowance of five shillings a week. His parents were both prudent and pious. Throughout such portions of the Sabbath as they did not spend with their offspring in their pew, they kept them indoors behind drawn blinds. His mother kissed young Heriot seldom and severely (with a cold smack like a hailstone), and never permitted him to remain ten minutes in the same room with a housemaid unchaperoned. His father never allowed him to sleep under more than two blankets, and locked the front door at nine o'clock in summer and six in winter.

The supreme merit of this system in insuring the survival of the fittest was seen in its results. Heriot's elder brother passed away at the age of two in the course of a severe winter. Clearly he would never have been a credit to oatmeal. His younger brother broke loose at nineteen, pained his relatives exceedingly, and retired to a distant colony where the standard was lower. His name was never mentioned till at his decease it was found that he had left £30,000 to be divided among the survivors of the ordeal. And finally, here was Heriot, a credit to his parents, his porridge, and his Catechism—in a word, an Example.

One damp February morning, Mr. Walkingshaw,

accompanied as usual by his eldest son, set forth from his decorous residence. It was one of a circle of stately houses, broken in two or three places to permit the sedatest kind of street to enter. The grave dignity of these mansions was accentuated by the straight, deep-hewn furrows at the junctions of the vast rectangular stones, and by the pediment and fluted pillars which every here and there gave one of them the appearance of a Greek temple dedicated to some chaste goddess. In the midst, a round, railed-in garden was full of lofty trees, very upright and dark, like monuments to the distinguished inhabitants.

Just as Mr. Walkingshaw and his son had got down the steps and reached the pavement, the door opened again behind them and a figure appeared which seemed to light the dull February morning with a ray of something like sunshine. Her dress was a warm golden brown; her face clear-skinned and fresh-colored, with bright eyes, a straight little nose, and, at that moment, eager, parted lips; her hair a coil of curling gold; her age nineteen.

"Father!" she cried, "you've forgotten your muffler!"

"Tut, tuts," muttered Mr. Walkingshaw.

He stopped and let her wind the muffler round his neck, while his son regarded the performance with a curiously captious eye.

"Thanks, Jean," said Mr. Walkingshaw.

He threw the girl a brief nod, and the two resumed their walk. Jean stood for a minute on the steps with a smile half formed upon her lips, as though she were prepared to wave them a farewell; but neither man looked back, and the smile died away, the door

closed behind her, and the morning became as raw as ever.

For a few minutes father and son walked together in silence. In Andrew's eye lurked the same suggestion of criticism, and in his parent's some consciousness of this and not a little consequent irritation. They were the same height—just under six feet—and there was a decided resemblance between Mr. Walkingshaw's portly gait and Andrew's dignified carriage, but otherwise they were not much alike. The father had a large and open countenance, very ruddy and fringed with the most respectable white whiskers; and something ample in his voice and eye and manner accorded with it admirably. Andrew's face also was full, but rather in places than comprehensively. The chief places were his cheeks and upper lip. This lip was perhaps his most striking characteristic. It was both full and long, meeting his cheeks at either end in a little dimple, and protruding above the lower lip. Beneath it his chin sloped sharply back and then abruptly shot forward again in the shape of a round aggressive little ball. His eye was cold and gray, his hair dark, his age six-and-thirty, and for the last few years he had been his father's partner. He was the first to break the silence.

"Why you don't see a respectable doctor, I can't imagine," said he.

"I went to Mackenzie. I went to Grant," replied Mr. Walkingshaw shortly. "A lot of good either of them did my gout!"

"Gout!" said Andrew. "And have you exchanged that for anything better? You ought to have stayed in bed to-day. I wonder you ventured out in the state that man's got you into."

The words might conceivably be taken to represent a very natural filial anxiety, but the voice was reminiscent of the consolation of Job. Mr. Walkingshaw had always been able to inspire his children with a respect so profound that it was a little difficult at times to distinguish it from awe. Even Andrew when he became his partner had not lost the attitude. But to-day his father accepted the rebuke without a murmur. In a moment the hard Scotch voice smote again—

"The idea of a man in your position going to an infernal quack like Professor Cyrus! Professor? Humph! The man's killing you."

Mr. Walkingshaw's ruddy face grew redder. The standard of common sense is high in Scotland; the humiliation in being taken in profound; the respect for the professional orthodoxies intense. And he had been the protagonist of everything sensible, orthodox, and prudent! He felt like a constable caught in the pantry.

"Cyrus is a man of remarkable—ah—ideas. He assures me I shall see the beneficial effects soon. Patience—patience; that is what he says. I—ah—have probably only caught a little chill. I believe in Cyrus, Andrew, I believe in him."

Andrew received the explanation with outward respect. His father's eye had become formidable; but in silence his own expressed his opinion of this paltry defense. Presently he inquired—

"Would you like people to know who you're going to?"

Mr. Walkingshaw started.

"I'll trouble other folks to mind their own business," he said sharply; yet he cast an uncomfortable glance at his son.

"Oh, I'm not anxious they should know my family's escapades," said Andrew reassuringly.

But his gray eye had now a triumphant gleam, and his father realized he had no case left to go before the court. If people were to know—well, he would certainly be a less shining example. Mr. Walkingshaw of Walkingshaw and Gilliflower in the hands of a quack doctor! It would sound awful bad—awful bad. Little did he dream what people would be saying of that reputable Writer to the Signet three months later.

Business happened to be slack that afternoon, and at the early hour of four o'clock Mr. Walkingshaw resumed his overcoat and muffler. As Mr. Thomieson, his confidential clerk, decorously tucked the scarf beneath the velvet collar, he offered a word or two of respectful sympathy.

"Far the wisest thing to go home, sir. But will you not take a cab? It's an awful like day to be out with a chill on ye."

Mr. Walkingshaw perceived his junior partner gazing on him in severe silence, and defiantly decided to walk. Yet as he paced homewards he could not but admit, in the unquiet recesses of his own mind, that it certainly was an odd sort of chill. He felt—well, he found it hard to tell exactly how he felt—rather as though he had swallowed some ounces of quicksilver

which kept flashing and running about inside him with every step he took. Suppose Cyrus's wonderful new system were actually to prove dangerous to the constitution, possibly even to the life, of his august, confiding patron? You could not always know your luck, however deserving you might be. The tower of Siloam fell both upon the righteous and the unrighteous. What would people say if Professor Cyrus metaphorically fell on him? Heriot Walkingshaw had more at stake than mere existence. He had a character to lose.

The sight of his house, so dignified and so permanent, soothed him a little. As he hung his coat upon the substantial rack in the dark and spacious hall, he was soothed still further. Ascending to his drawing-room, the thick carpet underfoot completed his tranquillity. Surely nothing disconcerting could happen to a man who owned such a house as this. But alas! regrettable episodes have a habit, like migrant birds, of arriving in companies.

CHAPTER II

Mrs. Walkingshaw had been dead for many years, and in her stead Heriot's maiden sister, a thin, elderly lady of exemplary views and conduct, ruled her household. As her brother ruled her, he found the arrangement worked admirably.

"Are you not coming out with me in the carriage?" said she to her niece that afternoon.

Jean excused herself. She had letters she positively

must write; and so the two tall horses pranced off, bearing in the very large and very shiny carriage only the exemplary lady. As she heard them clatter off over the resounding granite, Jean gave a little skip. Her eyes danced too and her lips smiled mysteriously. She ran upstairs like a whirlwind and had the drawing-room door shut behind her before she paused. Only then did she seem to feel safely alone and not in the carriage shopping. The room was very long, and very wide, and immensely high, with three tall windows down one side and substantial furniture purchased in the heyday of the Victorian epoch. The slim, fair-haired figure was quite lost in the space considered suitable by an early nineteenth-century architect for the accommodation of a Scottish lady; and the fire made much more of a display, glowing in the gloom of that raw February afternoon.

Jean sat by a little writing-table and took up a pen. Then she waited, evidently for ideas to come. Ten minutes later they arrived. The door was softly opened, a voice respectably subdued announced the name of "Mr. Vernon," and the duties of the pen were over.

The gentleman who entered made a remarkable contrast to the sedate upholstery. He had a mop of brown hair upon a large and well-shaped head, a broad face with rugged, striking features, very bright blue eyes, a dashing cavalier mustache, and a most engaging smile. His clothes were light of hue and very loose, his figure was of medium height and strongly built, his collar wide open at the neck, and his tie a large silk butterfly of an artistic shade of brown. Altogether he was a most improbable person to find calling upon a daughter of Mr. Heriot

Walkingshaw.

He gave Jean's hand the grasp of a friend, but his eyes looked on her with a more than friendly light in them. When he spoke, his voice was as pleasant as his smile, and his accents were those of that portion of Britain not yet entirely occupied by the victors of Bannockburn.

"It's very good of you to stay in," he said.

"Oh, I wasn't going out in any case," said Jean demurely.

She seated herself in one corner of the sofa, and the young man, after hesitating for an instant between a seat by her side and a chair close by, and failing to catch her eye to guide him, chose the chair, and for the moment looked unhappy.

"I've come to say good-by," he began.

She looked up quickly.

"Are you going away?"

He nodded his brown mop.

"Yes, I'm off to London again."

"For good?"

"I hope so; anyhow, it can't be for much worse than I've done here."

"Haven't your pictures been—been appreciated here?" she asked.

"They haven't been sold," he said, with a short laugh.

"What a shame! Oh, Mr. Vernon, I do think people

might have had better taste."

"So do I," he smiled, "but they haven't had. I've made nothing here but friends."

He had a musical voice, rather deep, and very readily expressive of what he strongly felt. His last sentence rang in Jean's ears like a declaration of love. Her eyes fell and her color rose.

"We have all been very glad to see you."

He shook his head; his eyes fastened on her all the time.

"No, you haven't."

She looked up, but meeting that devouring gaze, looked down again.

"Not all of you," he added. "Your father disapproves of me, your eldest brother detests me, and your aunt distrusts me. It's only you and Frank who have been my friends."

Frank was her soldier brother, and Jean adored him. She thought she could never care for any one but a soldier, till she encountered art and Lucas Vernon.

"Yes, Frank certainly does like you very much indeed," she said warmly.

"Don't you?"

"Yes," she answered firmly.

He smiled and bent towards her.

"Your hand on it!"

She held out her hand, and he took it and kept it.

(At that moment Mr. Walkingshaw was opening his front door.)

For a minute they sat in silence, and then she tried gently to draw the hand away.

"Let me keep it for a little!" he pleaded. "I'm going away. I shan't hold it again for Heaven knows how long."

His voice was so caressing that she ceased to grudge him five small fingers.

(Mr. Walkingshaw had removed his muffler and was hanging up his coat.)

"Are you at all sorry I'm going?"

"Yes," murmured Jean, "Frank and I—we'll both miss you."

The artist murmured too, but very indistinctly. The idea he expressed thus inadequately was, "Hang Frank!" But she heard the next word too plainly for her self-possession.

"Jean!"

(Mr. Walkingshaw was now ascending his well-carpeted staircase.)

She gave him one glance which she meant for reproof; but when he saw her eyes, so loving and a little moist, he covered the short space between them with one movement, and was on his knees before her.

"Do you love me?" he whispered.

Her head bent over his, and she answered very faintly something like "Yes."

Mr. Walkingshaw entered his drawing-room.

For a moment there was a painful pause. Jean's face had turned a becoming shade of crimson, and the artist was on his feet. Naturally the woman spoke first.

"I—I didn't expect you back so soon, father."

"So I perceive," said Mr. Walkingshaw.

The young man turned to him with creditable composure.

"One can hardly judge of the effect in this light," said he.

Mr. Walkingshaw had heard of people becoming insane under the stress of a sudden shock, and he wondered uneasily whether this misfortune had befallen Lucas Vernon or himself. The artist perceived his success, and hope began to rise afresh. He cocked his head professionally on one side and examined the confounded girl.

"We must try the pose in my studio."

Jean also saw the dawn of hope.

"May I inquire what you are talking about?" demanded her father.

"Miss Walkingshaw has promised to sit to me for her portrait," explained the artist. "We were trying one or two positions."

Mr. Walkingshaw breathed somewhat heavily, but

said nothing. Jean's color began to subside.

"Mr. Vernon was arranging my hands," she contributed towards his enlightenment.

Mr. Vernon was now gazing on her in the attitude which he had learnt from plays and poems conveyed to the laity the best conception of artistic fervor.

"The head a little more to the right!" he exclaimed. "The hands crossed! A smile, please! Now, sir, how do you like that?"

Mr. Walkingshaw ignored the question altogether and addressed his daughter.

"If Mr. Vernon can give any reasons why he should paint your portrait, I think he had better give them to me before the matter goes further."

His formidable eye supplied the addendum, "And you leave the room!"

She obeyed, and the painter was left with this singularly favorable opportunity of obtaining a commission at last.

CHAPTER III

"Well, sir?" said Mr. Walkingshaw.

Lucas was unused to the subtleties of diplomacy, but it seemed to him an evident case for tact.

"What do you think about it yourself?" he began cautiously.

"I think," replied the W.S., "that you'd be better back in England."

His eye again spoke for him, and this time it said, "There is no further use in attempting to deceive me."

The artist took the hint. His strong, pleasant face became a mirror reflecting the very truth; his blue eyes were filled with a light brighter even than the inspiration of art; his mellow voice burst out abruptly—

"I love Jean!"

The effect was rather like discharging a cannon and bringing down a scrap of plaster.

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Walkingshaw. "You mean my daughter?"

"I should think I do!"

"I merely asked for information, Mr. Vernon."

"Then I can guarantee your information!" Lucas smiled frankly, but he might as well have smiled at the hat-rack in the hall. "I'm quite aware you don't think me good enough for her—and I agree with you. But if it comes to that, who is? You may say my name's neither Turner nor Rubens; you may think it's like my dashed impudence asking you to let me make a short cut to heaven across your hearth—"

It was at this point that Mr. Walkingshaw discharged his ordnance.

"What is your income?" he inquired coldly.

His aim was more accurate. The artist descended to earth with a thud.

"My *income*?" he gasped.

"Your income," repeated the bombardier.

The artist ran his fingers convulsively through his hair.

"Now, what the deuce should I put it at?"

"An approximately correct figure," suggested Mr. Walkingshaw.

"To tell you the truth, I haven't the least idea."

"A thousand?"

"Oh, good God, no!"

"A hundred?"

"Oh, more than that."

"Can't you suggest a figure yourself?"

"Well, let's say that in a good year I make anything up to three or four hundred pounds, and in a bad year anything down to fifty or sixty."

"We'll say that if you like. Do you expect any legacies to fall in to you—anything of that kind?"

"Unfortunately I don't."

Mr. Walkingshaw regarded him with contemptuous severity.

"Then you propose to marry my daughter on maybe fifty or sixty pounds a year?"

"I told you that was in a bad year," protested the artist.

"Thank you, but I don't want any of your fluctuating incomes for my girl. I don't care if you earned ten thousand pounds this year. So long as you can't guarantee that to last, you're no better than a speculator—a hand-to-mouth, don't-know-where-you-are-to-morrow sort of person. Now, that sort of thing *won't do*, Mr. Vernon. Before you next think of marrying a girl in my daughter's position, let me give you this bit of advice: learn to paint your pictures on some kind of proper business principles. If you do them, say, once a month and sell them at a standard price—just as other folks have to manufacture and sell their goods—you'll not find yourself in the same ridiculous position you're in at this moment."

Mr. Walkingshaw rose to indicate that the interview was at an end; but the artist's endurance ended first.

"Mr. Walkingshaw! Did you ever *make* anything in your life?"

The W.S. stared at him.

"I have made most of what I possess, sir."

"Pooh! You're talking of money. Does your mind never run on anything but money? I mean, have you ever made a hat or a shoe, or a book or a picture, or even a cheese? Have you ever actually turned out anything that was the least use or pleasure to anybody?"

Vernon's blue eyes were bent upon him in such an extraordinarily intense and flashing manner that Mr. Walkingshaw found himself compelled to answer.

"That kind of thing is—ah—not in my line."

"Then," burst forth the artist, "you can no more judge

of my work than a toasting-fork can judge of a steam engine. The woman who cooks your dinner understands more than you do. She knows better than to think it costs no more time and trouble to cook an omelette than boil an egg. A picture a month, and the same price for each! Confound it, Mr. Walkingshaw, you make me ashamed of you!"

"Do you imagine, sir, that that affects me?"

"If I were you, I'd prefer my son-in-law to respect me."

Mr. Walkingshaw positively jumped.

"You mean to—er—"

"Marry her, whether you like it or not! I'm in love—and she loves me! There's not the least use trying to explain to you what love means. It would be like trying to explain a cigar to a chicken. You're too respectable. You can't understand."

The tirade ceased abruptly, and the young man smiled again upon the petrified Writer to the Signet.

"I am going back to London to-night. Just give me a year or two, Mr. Walkingshaw. I'll make an income for her."

Mr. Walkingshaw regained his senses.

"You will never be admitted inside this house in your life again, sir. You will never marry *my* daughter; and mind you, you needn't flatter yourself she will correspond with you or anything of that kind. My children have been decently brought up. What I say is done; and what I say shan't be done, is not done!"

He had recovered his formidableness now, and the

artist's face fell. For a moment he looked gloomily at his father-in-law elect, and then he turned for the door.

"We shall see," he said.

"You shall not see *her* again," retorted Mr. Walkingshaw.

The door slammed behind art and love and impracticability, and he stood in his vast drawing-room alone.

CHAPTER IV

It is a pleasant and an edifying thing to contrast the difference between the fates of the reputable and the Bohemian even in the lists of love. Clearly these matters are managed by some scrupulously equitable power. One hesitates to dub it Providence for fear of seeming sentimental, but one may safely describe it as something almost as wise and decidedly more respectable. Here was Lucas Vernon, without a settled income or any very coherent notion of how to make one, dismissed the house of the girl he was foolish enough to love. There, on the other hand, was Andrew Walkingshaw, who had first devoted himself to amassing and investing a handsome competence, and then, without any further difficulty to speak of, had selected and secured one of the most charming girls imaginable. In every respect but one he had chosen obviously well. She was fair to see, and hence very gratifying to be seen with; she was quite young, and therefore amenable and not too sophisticated;

and she came of so excellent and ancient a family that it was a pleasure merely to mention the name of his prospective father-in-law to his envious acquaintances. Archibald Berstoun, Esq., of that ilk, was the style in which that gentleman preferred to have correspondence addressed to him, accepting Berstoun of Berstoun as a less satisfactory alternative, and answering very briefly letters to plain Archibald Berstoun, Esq.

The only drawback to Ellen Berstoun was her father's unfortunate financial position. Andrew had to take her without a penny; but then, on the other hand, he might not have got her at all had her parents the wherewithal to display her charms in London ballrooms. Also, Archibald of that ilk might have looked for a showier mate for her under more prosperous circumstances. As it was, her parents spent a strenuous fortnight in persuading her to accept so excellent an opportunity of reducing their supply of marriageable daughters to the more reasonable number of five, and the approval of their creditors was practically unanimous.

They had been engaged for a month, when, upon that same afternoon, she arrived on a short visit to the Walkingshaw's house. Andrew would have met her at the station had her train arrived only twenty minutes later, but it was one of the most admirable features in his character that he made a point of never on any pretext leaving the office before the hour had struck. Frank, however, showed remarkable alacrity in offering himself as substitute. So zealous and obliging a brother was he that he started for the station with half an hour to spare, and whiled away a portion of that time in purchasing a bouquet of flowers and a very ornamental box of chocolates.

Holding the chocolate-box and his umbrella under one arm and the bouquet in his other hand, this best of brothers paced that eligible promenade, the platform of the Haymarket station. People, especially women, glanced at him with approval as the erect, military young figure passed and repassed on his vigil, marching as though on parade. He was twenty-five, bronzed of skin, well-featured, trimly mustached, modest and yet gallant of mien, attired in an overcoat drawn in at the waist and a hat becomingly cocked a little towards his left ear—in a word, a credit to that distinguished corps, the Cromarty Highlanders. At present they were in India, and he was home on furlough.

Sometimes his clear young eyes looked disconsolately into space, as though the saddest thoughts afflicted him; and then they would brighten with a sudden excitement. As these brightenings almost invariably coincided with the first rumbling of a train far down the line that glimmered beneath red lamps and green, leading from the north out of the gathered dusk, it seemed as though the cheering prospect came from thence. This probability would appear to be increased by the disappearance of the excitement when the train proved to come from some locality of no interest whatsoever. An observant female in glasses and a golf cape, who entertained herself by furtively studying this agreeable-looking stranger, smiled knowingly at each of these manifestations: *she* knew whom he was waiting for, even without the palpable evidence of the bouquet and chocolate-box, and the only thing that puzzled her was why he should have these very mournful lapses. A secret grief seemed inappropriate both to the gentleman and the obvious situation. But how could she guess that she was merely witnessing

an accentuated variety of the pleasure with which any good brother looks forward to meeting his future sister-in-law at the end of a cold journey?

"Yon's her noo," said a porter to whom the young officer addressed a question for the fourteenth time.

The north line runs for a long way very straight just there, and Frank could see the two round glows far off in the darkness grow larger and larger, brighter and brighter, with the furnace-lit smoke streaming ever more brilliantly above, till the shape of a great engine started out, thundering close upon him. And then the observant female was gratified by a glimpse of a slender girl, rather tall, smiling very kindly as the interesting unknown handed her down from her carriage and placed the flowers in her small gray glove. Her hair was dark; she wore handsome furs; she left the entire charge of her luggage to her escort, like a lady accustomed to be waited on; she moved down the platform with a graceful air of distinction, and as she passed close by, the observant female's heart was won by the sweet and innocent expression on her face. She thought them one of the nicest-looking couples she had ever seen.

Meanwhile, the man whose virtues had earned this charming girl, and whose high position could command the services of a Highland subaltern to do his station work for him, was dictating a letter to his typewriter.

But when Andrew sat down to dinner beside the lady of his choice, and felt that at last he could conscientiously lay aside the serious business of life for a little dalliance with the fruits of his industry, it was pleasant to see with what happy mingling of

pride and calm he accepted his good fortune. He conveyed that suggestion of having put the lady in his pocket from the moment she whispered "Yes," and kept her there among his keys as a valued, yet not foolishly over-valued, possession, which is so virile a characteristic of the thoroughly successful man. Now he was taking her out to have a look at her, and incidentally—as it were, unconsciously—exhibit his trophy to the company. As for Ellen Berstoun, she looked so kind, so delicately radiant, so gently bred, and so anxious to give pleasure, that she made just the contrast to her dominating betrothed that sensible people believe in. Here, they would tell you, was a match made in a more practicable place than heaven.

The rest of the company at dinner consisted of Mr. Walkingshaw, evidently proud of his future daughter-in-law, yet singularly silent and abstracted; Miss Walkingshaw, very erect at the end of the table; Jean, very downcast, poor girl (yet did she not deserve to be?); Frank, looking for some reason considerably less happy than when he handed Miss Berstoun out of her carriage; and Mrs. Dunbar. Madge Dunbar was a second cousin, and the widow of Captain Dunbar of Hammersmith's Horse, who was killed at Paardeberg. She was left with no children, a very small income, and a number of relatives occupying excellent stations in life. With one or other of these she generally stayed, but latterly had shown a decided preference for the hospitality of Mr. Walkingshaw. In fact, she had already been with them for three months, and as Mr. Walkingshaw was always very emphatic in his refusals to let her think of leaving, and remarkably gracious on every occasion on which they were seen in company, while his sister declared her to be one of

the best women she knew, acquaintances had begun to exchange whispers. She was forty-five, full-figured, though not yet precisely stout, dark-eyed, and irreproachably dressed. She was also irreproachably diplomatic.

Champagne was drunk in honor of Miss Berstoun, and as being the beverage most suitable to her pedigree (though, as a matter of fact, she had only tasted it twice before, since Archibald of that ilk confined himself to whisky, and his wife to dandelion porter). As the butler passed behind Mr. Walkingshaw's chair, his master arrested him by pointing to his glass. The vigilant Andrew bent forward in his seat.

"Are you giving the system up?" he inquired, with his cross-examining smile.

"I feel that a glass of wine would do me good to-night," his father replied with dignity.

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you enjoying yourself again, Heriot!" smiled Mrs. Dunbar.

"Thank you. Thank you, Madge," said he, and made a little courteously old-fashioned indication that he drank to her health.

The lady in a sprightly fashion returned his toast, and the junior partner frowned. He disapproved of Mrs. Dunbar, he strongly suspected her of ulterior designs, and he regarded the adoption of Christian names by second cousins as superfluous, and in the circumstances a little indecorous. His long upper lip grew longer as he addressed his relative.

"I was under the impression it was you who encouraged him to go in for this so-called system."

"Oh, but it's possible to overdo everything, you know," said the lady, with a smile whose sweetness he inwardly decided to be compounded of some base imitation of sugar. "Don't you agree with me, Heriot?"

"Absolutely," pronounced her host, with emphasis.

So passionate a lover naturally regretted parting even for a moment from his betrothed, yet under the circumstances Andrew felt decidedly relieved when the ladies left the room, and the three Walkingshaw men drew together at the end of the table. His father passed the port to his sons and then helped himself. Andrew frowned again: he believed in never neglecting an opportunity for salutary criticism.

"Oh, you're going to take port too?"

"I am," said Mr. Walkingshaw, and drinking his glass straight off, filled it afresh.

Andrew drew down the corners of his lips, raised his eyebrows, and glanced across at his brother; but Frank was staring abstractedly at the tablecloth.

The second glass seemed to revive their father. He smacked his lips over it with something of his old gusto, threw out his chest, frowned formidably, yet with a certain complacency, and said—

"I've had to perform an unpleasant duty this afternoon, Andrew."

Andrew pricked up his ears and looked sternly expectant. Yet on neither of them did the idea of an unpleasant duty seem to have a saddening effect.

"That fellow Vernon has been making love to Jean. I

ordered him out of the house. He's off to London again, I'm thankful to say."

"Upon my word!" said Andrew.

He looked as though he had been told of the attempted assassination of the President of the Court of Session. But on Frank the news produced quite a different effect. He started out of his reverie and exclaimed—

"You ordered him out? Poor Jean!"

The two older and wiser men turned upon him together.

"Yes, sir," said his father, "I did order him out. It would have been 'poor Jean' if I hadn't."

"I'd have kicked him downstairs!" said Andrew.

"You'd have had a devilish thin time if you'd tried," retorted his brother. "Vernon could take you across his knee. He's a good fellow—a deuced good fellow; he'd have made Jean a deuced good husband. Kick him downstairs? By Gad, you'd have squealed when the kicking began!"

He addressed himself entirely to his brother, though he had done no more than approve of the exiling of Lucas, and he spoke with a curious bitterness. Mr. Walkingshaw struck the table with his fist, not passionately, in any disorder of mind, but sternly and effectively.

"Hold your tongue," he said, and kept his eyes on him to see that he held it.

Frank rose.

"I beg your pardon," he said to his father, and, not looking again at his brother, walked out of the room.

The two wiser heads, being then left undisturbed by the follies of youth, discussed at length and in complete accord the outrageous episode of the afternoon.

CHAPTER V

Frank strode hurriedly across the hall, flung into the library, and there relieved his feelings by a few crisp expletives. Gloom succeeded anger, but after a few minutes youth began to prevail even over these high emotions. He turned up the light, adjusted his tie and smoothed his hair before the mirror over the mantelpiece, and ran upstairs to the drawing-room. Outside the door he paused, looking now like the expectant watcher on the platform. Faintly he heard Ellen Berstoun's voice, and the same look came into his eyes as when he caught the distant roaring of the train. He straightened his neck, banished all expression from his face as a soldier should, and entered the room.

It is generally conceded by such as have enjoyed the privilege of sitting in a drawing-room waiting for the gentlemen to lay down their cigars that no period of the day is more immune from the bustle and turmoil of modern life. But the peace of an ordinary drawing-room was a bank holiday compared with the Walkingshaws'. Not too much gas was burned, or too much coal, since money is not made and well-born

wives secured by waste of fuel. That leads to mere cheerfulness. The monastic atmosphere was completed by the Victorian upholstery and the hushed voices of the four ladies, so that even the young soldier instinctively trod more like a burglar than a Cromarty Highlander as he advanced towards one of the groups of two.

Near the fireplace sat Miss Walkingshaw and Mrs. Dunbar engaged on fancy-work, and occasionally murmuring references to "my last cook"—"that tall girl Jane." But it was not they that Frank approached. On two chairs very close together and far removed from the others, Jean and Ellen talked. Their voices, too, were hushed, but the subject of their conversation was evidently more agitating than cooks. In fact, there was something very like a sob more than once in Jean's voice, and Ellen held her hand and gently pressed it. But when poor Jean saw her favorite brother coming towards her with a warm sympathy in his eyes that told her he knew her trouble, she could control herself no longer. Up she jumped, and throwing him one wry, tearful smile as she passed, ran out of the room.

The two elder ladies looked up and then down again at their work. They had not yet heard of the painful episode. Frank came forward and took his sister's chair, which had been drawn so very close to Ellen's. He was thus able, by exercising caution, to take up the confidential conversation.

"I suppose she has told you?" he muttered, with a wary glance towards his aunt.

"Yes," murmured Ellen. "I'm so sorry!"

She looked nearly as distressed as Jean, and her

gentle voice made her words sound like a sweet lament for all unhappy loves.

"I call it the deuce of a shame!" said the soldier.

"Can't we do anything to persuade your father?"

He was conscious of a little glow at being adopted so instinctively as an ally.

"I've told him what I think about it."

"Have you?"—there was a sparkle in her eyes.—"How good of you! What did he say?"

"Told me to hold my tongue."

Her face fell.

"I must talk to Andrew about it."

Frank smiled sardonically.

"I'm afraid you won't find him very sympathetic either."

She looked down at her little pointed shoe and said nothing.

"Who isn't very sympathetic, Frank?" asked Miss Walkingshaw, suddenly looking up.

He started guiltily.

"Oh—er—a lot of fellows one can think of," he explained.

Mrs. Dunbar looked at the two young people curiously. She knew whom she herself did not consider sympathetic, and jumped to a conclusion. There was nothing the junior partner would dislike

more than being critically discussed by that dear girl who was so much too nice for him, and that engaging boy who was so infinitely better-looking. It seemed a pity they could not enjoy their conversation without interruption.

"Would you like me to play you something, dear?" she asked.

"Oh yes, dear," said Miss Walkingshaw. "Do, please!"

They were the most affectionate of friends. Indeed, it was touching to see how devoted Madge was to Heriot's wintry sister. Nobody else had ever seen so much in her to love.

The music began, and, once started, showed no sign of stopping. Over the top of her music Mrs. Dunbar's black eyes smiled a discreet approval of the confidential pair. She only wished that Andrew, gagged and bound beneath his brother's chair, was here to listen to them. She was sure they must be discussing something it would do him good to hear.

"Is Mr. Vernon a very nice man?" asked Ellen.

"One of the best. These artist fellows are apt to be a bit swollen-headed for my taste, but Lucas Vernon's a sportsman."

She appreciated the distinction succinctly indicated.

"He does sound nice," she said. "Oh, I wish everybody had enough money!"

Frank drew another distinction.

"Everybody who deserved it, anyhow."

"Well," said Ellen softly, "if I had the arrangement of

things, I would risk it and give *everybody* enough. It makes me so unhappy to see people longing for things they can never possibly get—whether they deserve them or not."

The young soldier looked at her oddly from the corner of his eye. Could it be possible that two people could sit so close together and speak in such hushed confidence, and yet that one of them could be so strangely oblivious as not to know when she had laid her slender little finger on the other's open wound? He had the strictest notions of duty and of honor: it was absolutely essential she never should realize: but, alas! the sympathetic widow was playing the most divinely romantic waltz. To complete the horrible temptation, Ellen looked suddenly at him with her tender eyes shining and her delicate skin gently flushed and murmured—

"It makes me wretched—I pity them so!"

The waltz grew more romantic with every note, the temptation to feel this pity soothe his own wound more irresistible.

"I'm one of 'em," he said.

He endeavored to compromise with duty by throwing the most unfeeling ferocity into his confession; but even the best drilled soldier cannot simultaneously advance and stand where he was.

Ellen's eyes were riveted on him now.

"I'm sorry. Have I said anything I shouldn't?"

She looked distressed, and he realized he had overdone the ferocity.

"No, no, I assure you. I only meant I—I—well, one

can't have everything."

He wished that delirious waltz would stop. It made it so hard to collect one's thoughts, and especially to recover the blank countenance he had managed to assume before he took this chair and heard that music and looked into those eyes. She smiled with playful kindness.

"Are you so frightfully hard up?"

"It isn't money! Oh, can't you—"

He didn't finish his sentence; nor did he need to. A sudden light dawned in Ellen's eyes; her lips instinctively parted; and then she turned her face away. And thus they sat for what seemed an hour, while the sympathetic widow poured out voluptuous harmonies without cessation.

In reality it was only two minutes later that Mr. Walkingshaw and Andrew entered: the senior partner looking, for a habitual diner-out, curiously flushed after his mild indulgence in port; the junior partner's full cheeks bulging with the backwash of a lover's smile. Frank sprang up, and his brother, smiling even more affectionately, took his chair. At the same moment the widow stopped playing, and the scales seemed suddenly to fall from the young soldier's eyes. He saw himself as the most despicable villain in Europe, and Ellen as lost for ever, whether as sister or friend. So distraught was he that he had nearly tried to open a mid-Victorian cabinet before he discovered it was not the door. Downstairs he hurried wildly, threw on an ulster and cap, and the front door banged behind him.

The unhappy young man looked up at the circle of

solemn mansions which towered above him, black against the dark gray heavens, and it seemed to him that each one as he passed it silently rebuked him; while the trees across the street, even though they were decidedly less solid, gave vent to their displeasure audibly. He had been brought up in the severest Scotch traditions, and though life in the army had vastly changed his outlook, it had in certain particulars but substituted "form" for "duty." To-night both standards rose spectrally and shook their awful fingers at him. He had let his heart get the better of his head! No member of his family (save luckless Jean) whom he ever knew or heard of had done such a thing before. Or if they had, the indiscretion had been judiciously hushed up, and the family escutcheon kept stainless. As for the divinity he had scandalized, she would never forgive him; she would always think of him as a traitor to his respectable brother!

At this point a little star peeped out of the hurrying clouds and vanished again instantly. It was as though some power above had winked.

On he strode through the steep, empty streets, lines of black freestone houses, built by regular church-goers and unbreathed upon by scandal ever since, frowning upon him perpetually; and the wind, which had risen greatly, wailing and booming all sorts of morals. And now a fresh trouble agitated him. He was growing less contrite! He kept seeing his brother's bulging cheeks, and Ellen's innocent, kind smile, and all sorts of backslidings suggested themselves. He had been criminal enough to fall in love, and now was added another crime—he could not fall out again. Never had he dreamt of such depths of depravity in him, Frank Walkingshaw.

Again a little star twinkled for an instant.

It was a full two hours later that he returned home, footsore (for he had been walking in his pumps) and with a mind as far from calm as ever. He assumed that everybody would be in bed, but no sooner had he shut the door than Jean appeared, flying downstairs to meet him.

"Oh," she cried, with a note of disappointment, "I hoped it was the doctor!"

"The doctor!" he exclaimed.

"Hush!" she whispered, and came close up to him. "Father has suddenly been taken very ill."

At that moment Andrew also appeared, to see who had entered. He looked portentously grave.

"Well," he said, "what have I been saying? It's happened just exactly as anybody but a fool might have known it would—just precisely. He's no one to blame but himself for it—and his precious Mrs. Dunbar."

He rubbed his hands almost pleasantly.

"That quack's done for him—and his wine to-night finished the job. Well, I warned him against both. People that will not take advice must bide the consequences. Are you going to stay up for Dr. Mackenzie, Jean?"

"Of course," she said.

"Well then, I might as well get off to my bed. If there's any immediate danger,"—his face grew very solemn,—"if the end's expected in the night, or

anything like that, just knock on my door."

The junior partner bade them a grave good-night and retired; and such imaginative persons as are not satisfied with this bald record of facts, may picture him either as offering up a brief prayer for his father's happy recovery, or meditating upon the image of his betrothed—or both.

CHAPTER VI

Fortunately, it proved unnecessary to disturb the junior partner during the night, but next morning, when he had heard the doctor's report and personally visited the sick-bed, he took the most serious view of the situation. He summoned his two married sisters, urging them to lose no time; he spent only half an hour at the office; and then he sat down with his *Scotsman* in the library (his Bible accessible in case of emergencies) to await the developments that he grieved to think were now practically inevitable. The doctor had paid a second visit and given the gloomiest report. Put in a nutshell, it came to this: that he could make neither head nor tail of his patient's symptoms, but that, as they were clearly the result of a course of treatment at the hands of an unqualified practitioner, it was improbable that Mr. Walkingshaw would recover from the consequences of his error.

In the afternoon he was told that his father would like to see him. He had finished the *Scotsman* and begun a conversation with his betrothed in a gently

facetious vein, but it took him not a moment to adjust his features to the rigidity of an urn, and save for the faint squeaking of his boots, he ascended the stairs with noiseless solemnity. He found Mr. Walkingshaw propped up on pillows and breathing heavily. The demeanor of both was exactly becoming to the situation.

"Are you suffering much pain?" inquired the son in a hushed voice.

"It comes and goes," sighed the father. "It was just diabolical a few minutes ago; now it's a wee thing better, thanks."

"A kind of temporary relief," suggested the son.

"Possibly, possibly. I'd like to think it was going to last, though."

"I wish I could hold out hopes," said Andrew sympathetically.

Mr. Walkingshaw stirred suddenly.

"The doctor's not given me up yet, surely?" he exclaimed in a louder voice.

"Hush, hush! It'll only hurry things if you let yourself get excited."

"But, Andrew, my dear boy, tell me what he said to you."

The junior partner shook his head, kindly but resolutely.

"No, no; not yet awhile. So long as your mind remains clear, just keep composed; and then, when you feel any decided change, I'll hold nothing back

from you, and we can get the rest of the family round the bedside. You'll agree that's the best thing."

The orthodoxy of this programme ought, one would think, to have soothed the W.S. But it is strange what fancies sick men take.

"I don't agree at all," said Mr. Walkingshaw warmly. "In fact, I may tell you Cyrus warned me there might be kind of temporary complications."

He looked at his son for a moment and then added, with sudden decision—

"Andrew, I'd like to see Cyrus."

A grim smile dilated Andrew's cheeks.

"You'll have to catch him first. He's off."

"Off?"

"Bolted this morning as soon as he heard he'd done for you. I hear he owes a couple of hundred pounds in the town, one way and another. That's your Professor for you!"

Mr. Walkingshaw groaned. His son thought it well to improve the occasion, since he did not expect to have many more.

"Him and his radio-electricity! What was it he was going to do—renew the cells of the body?"

"Well, why shouldn't cells be renewed?" protested the invalid weakly.

"There will be," said his son facetiously. "He'll find himself in one again or I'm mistaken."

Mr. Walkingshaw lay silent for a few minutes. Then

suddenly he groaned.

"Another of them coming on!" he muttered, and twisted his face away.

It was a few minutes more before he spoke again.

"I trust they'll catch the rascal! Andrew, my boy, can you not do anything to assist the police?"

It was impressive to see how adequately the junior partner handled each fresh development of the situation. At these last words he looked exceedingly grave.

"Had your thoughts not better be turning to other things?" he suggested.

The invalid's head started forward from the pillow.

"Will you have the kindness to mind your own—" he began; and then, in judgment, another spasm assailed him.

Andrew closed his eyes, drew down the corners of his mouth, and his lips moved silently but evidently piously. It was impossible to remain callous to such an elevating influence.

"You are right, Andrew; you are right," said his father. "And now, just supposing I was taken, you'll see that affair of Guthrie and Co. through the way we decided on?"

Andrew opened his eyes immediately and exhibited a fresh instance of his adaptability to each changing circumstance.

"I've just been thinking of a better method still," he answered promptly. "Why should the creditors get

any more than they're legally entitled to? You mind yon five thousand pounds invested in the Grand Trunk Railway?"

"Perfectly, perfectly."

"Well, when one goes into the thing, they've really no more than a moral right to that; and if one once begins on moral rights, there's no end to them."

"That sounds a bit worldly-wise, Andrew; but as you like—as you like."

His junior partner regarded him severely.

"I may remind you that I'm only following your own precepts."

"One says things in health that one repents of on a bed of sickness. Manage Guthrie and Co. as you like, but don't quote me if you mean to neglect moral obligations. I had the decency never to quote my own father, and it's the least you can do for yours, Andrew."

Andrew still looked displeased. It seemed to his fastidious ears that there was an unpleasant smack of something remotely resembling cynicism in this speech. It sounded almost as though he were expected to acquiesce in the outrageous proposition that members of his family occasionally allowed moral to be overridden by practical considerations. He could not conceive of himself admitting the possibility of such a thing even in the secret recesses of his soul. It was most uncomfortable to listen to his own father going on like this. He must be very ill indeed—evidently at death's door.

He walked to the window and looked out gloomily

upon the gray clouds driving over the black chimney-cans. The wind had risen to a moderate gale, and the air was filled with sounds. It struck him as a very uproarious day for a Writer to the Signet to be going to his long home. He had given his father credit for soberer tastes. In fact, he was reminded unpleasantly of the riotous people he had heard of who passed away in company with a pint of champagne and a cigar. This sort of thing would really not do.

"About my will, Andrew," said his father's voice.

He turned with remarkable alacrity and a forgiving eye. At once he was the deferential offspring.

"You'll find you're left very well off," continued Mr. Walkingshaw.

His son's cheeks bulged in a melancholy smile; precisely the right smile under the circumstances.

"Not at the expense of the others, I hope," he answered modestly.

"Oh, I was meaning you'd be well off as a family."

The smile subsided.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Andrew.

"But of course you'll get the bulk."

The smile mournfully returned.

"You have the position to keep up, and I thought it only fair to you," said Mr. Walkingshaw.

Andrew bent his head in solemn acknowledgment of the truth of this observation and the justice of the arrangement.

"There's just one little addendum I want to make. This unpleasant affair of Jean's has set me thinking, and supposing I'm taken, Andrew—just supposing—"

"Assuming it's as we fear—I understand, I understand."

"Well, then, you see, I'll not be here myself to keep Frank and Jean from doing foolish-like things if they happen to have a mind to; and they're not like you and their sisters. You've all chosen sensibly, but they're in a kind of way different. I ought to have had them educated at home."

"What I've always said," his son agreed.

"Anyhow, it's too late now, and what I'll just have to do is this—introduce a clause making them forfeit their shares if they marry without your consent in the next five years."

"Would ten not be safer?" suggested Andrew.

"We'll say seven, then. And of course you'll not withhold your consent unreasonably? I'll trust you for that."

Andrew's attitude expressed to such perfection the confidence that might be reposed in him that his father shed him a satisfied smile.

"And now," said he, "I wonder had you not better get me my will?—or we might wait till to-morrow, and see how I'm feeling then."

If the junior partner had looked grave before, he looked funereal now.

"Your mind's clear now," he said. "I wouldn't put it off."

"Well, well," said Mr. Walkingshaw, "there are my keys on the dressing-table: you know where to find the will."

Andrew went downstairs as solemnly as he had come up, and with the same faint squeak.

CHAPTER VII

It never occurred to Frank and Jean to blame their father in any way for electing so boisterous a day for his probable decease. Clearly they had not so fine an instinct for respectability as their brother. Their orthodoxy, compared with his, was built upon a sandy foundation: warm hearts can never hope to sustain, in its impressive equipoise, the head of an Andrew Walkingshaw. One might as well expect to find sap running up the legs of his office stool.

That afternoon they instinctively drifted away from the others and sat unhappily together. The gusty booming of the wind and the clash of branches in the garden across the gale-scourged street tormented them with fancies. It seemed as though a thousand riotous misfortunes were buffeting their hearts.

"Rain!" cried Jean, with a little start and then a shiver.

"Isn't it beastly?" muttered Frank, his eyes on the carpet.

It came on with the sudden violence of a thunder-clap. In a moment the tossing trees became

gesticulating ghosts seen dimly through a veil of glistening rods of water sharply diagonal—nearly horizontal; and even through the musketry rattle on the window-panes they could hear the pavement hiss beneath their deluge.

"Oh, Frank dear!" murmured Jean.

Giving way to illogical tenderness, the young soldier took her hand and held it.

Of course, the least turn for hard argument would have reassured them. The storm would blow over; they could find new lovers; their father, even suppose he died, would receive suitable interment. Besides, they would be the richer by his decease. But they remained foolishly moved.

"If anything does happen to father," said Jean sorrowfully, "I shall never forgive myself."

Frank looked surprised.

"Forgive yourself—for what?"

"For not loving him more. I almost hated him yesterday."

Her voice sank very low and she looked apprehensively at her brother. But he did not rebuke her as he ought.

"It's jolly difficult to love him sometimes," he admitted sadly.

She seemed to gain courage.

"Frank," she said, "have you *ever* actually felt as affectionate about him as one ought?"

He shook his head.

"He never struck me as wanting that kind of thing. I've respected him, of course."

"Oh, so have I—enormously."

"Well," said Frank, "that's all he wanted out of us, I fancy."

"Still," she murmured, "we might have given him something more."

"'Pon my word, I don't know what he'd have done with it."

She could not but admit that that, in fact, was just the difficulty. The cultivation of sentiment had not been included in Mr. Walkingshaw's youthful curriculum. His father before him had enjoyed but two forms of relaxation from his daily burden of obligations to clients and Calvin—a glass of good claret, and a primitive form of golf played with a missile of feathers in the interstices of a tract of whins. His mother had not even these amusements. Small wonder Heriot Walkingshaw found it a little difficult to sympathize with soft creatures who demanded hot-water bottles at night and affection by day. Jean had a weakness for both, and had only managed to obtain the hot bottle—and even that was a secret.

The deluge continued and the wind bellowed. Lower and lower sank their spirits.

"I sometimes wish I were more like Andrew," sighed Jean.

The young soldier started.

"Oh, Heaven forbid!" he exclaimed, and then in a moment added in a low voice, "I wish I had his luck, though."

Jean softly pressed his hand. She understood.

"I wish you had, Frank," she whispered.

As if in rebuking answer to these impious desires, the portly form of Andrew filled the doorway. He looked like the reincarnation of all the mourners who had ever followed a hearse.

"He is worse," he said in a sepulchral voice. "The end's not far off. You had better come up and see him."

In the sick chamber they found already assembled Miss Walkingshaw, Mrs. Dunbar, Ellen (who kept in the background and never caught Frank's eye once), and their two elder sisters. Of this pair, Maggie, the eldest of them all, had long been coupled with Andrew as the two greatest credits to the family. She was the wife (and incidentally, it was said, the making) of Ramornie of Pettigrew, a laird of good estate in the kingdom of Fife. Her business capacity was almost equal to her brother's. She had extracted Pettigrew from the hands of the friends who had been "doing him no good," paid off the bonds on his property, presented him with three creditable children, including the necessary heir male, and would undoubtedly have put him into Parliament could she have ensured her own presence always at his side. But as he would have to deliver his speeches himself, even if she composed them, she was content with making him a deputy-lieutenant. In person this lady suggested the junior partner as well as in mind. She, however, was blonde, and though her cheeks

took after his, her upper lip was not quite so substantial.

Gertrude, the second sister, was now Mrs. Donaldson, wife of Hector Donaldson, advocate. At the time, it was considered a middling sort of marriage; since his cross-examination of the co-respondent in Macpherson *v.* Macpherson and Tattenham-Welby, it had been considered a creditable marriage; and if his practice continued its present rate of increase, it would soon become a good marriage. In any case, she had justified the Walkingshaw reputation for investing money or person soundly and shrewdly. She resembled her father, and he had always been considered a fine-looking man. Both Andrew and Maggie thought she got too many of her clothes in London. They made her a little conspicuous, and they hoped she could afford it. Still, one heard very encouraging things said of Hector nowadays.

Mr. Walkingshaw was evidently weakening. He lay back with his eyes closed till they were all assembled, and then Andrew, who seemed to have the entire management of the melancholy ceremony, stepped up to the bedside and, with lowered eyelids, murmured—

"They are all here now."

Mr. Walkingshaw opened his eyes.

"I'm likely to be taken," he said in a weak voice. "Andrew'll have told you."

He paused: and one little stifled sob was heard, too gentle to catch his ear. It came from Jean.

"I'd just like to say a word to you all before I go. I've

tried my best to do my duty by my children and my sister and my kinsfolk."

At this specific inclusion of herself the sympathetic widow could keep silence no longer.

"Indeed you have, Heriot!" she murmured.

"Hush!" said Andrew sternly.

"Let them say what they feel, Andrew," said his father, with a glance of melancholy kindness at the widow. "It's natural enough."

Mrs. Ramornie at once took that hint, and her brief words of eulogy were corroborated by a general murmur.

"Thank you, thank you," said Mr. Walkingshaw. "I may possibly have made mistakes now and then—I am but human. At the same time, I think there's none will gainsay I've shown a kind of respectable example. It's a great thing to be thankful for if one can die without making an exhibition of oneself—a great thing to be thankful for."

The master of ceremonies by a grave glance indicated to the company that another approving murmur would be appropriate, and his own voice led the hum.

"I've another thing to be thankful for," resumed the invalid, "and that's my eldest son. Andrew'll take good care of you all—of you and the business both. Oh, Frank, my lad, he's a fine example to you; just as your sister Maggie is to you, Jean. Mind you both follow them. You'll never give folks reason to talk about you then. Don't get yourselves talked about! That's the main thing. Of course, you'll take every

opportunity of bettering yourselves, both of you; but do it in a kind of sober, decent way. Do it like Andrew: I can say no more than that."

All eyes were sadly fixed on the two distressed young people, but they made no answer, and the affecting scene now terminated with these last few words—

"If by any kind of chance it happens I'm given a year or two more after all, I'll take no more part in worldly matters. I'll leave things to you, Andrew, just the same as if I was gone. If I linger on, a chastened man, taking for a wee while an interest in your welfare, that's all that will be left to me—that's the whole I look forward to."

Andrew's sorrowful eyes replied, "And that's more than we do," as he silently shook his father's hand. Then the company tiptoed sadly out of the sick-room.

CHAPTER VIII

Of all the anticipatory mourners, the most demonstrative was the sympathetic widow. She could barely control her emotion till she reached the drawing-room. There she broke down quite.

"Oh, Mary, Mary!" she sobbed.

They were alone together—Mary, commonly styled Miss Walkingshaw, and she. The exemplary spinster was likewise distressed, but in a calmer manner, as became a lady who had shared Heriot's Spartan upbringing.

"Whisht, whisht," said she. "He'll maybe get over it yet."

"No—no, he won't! That horrible beast will see that he doesn't!"

Miss Walkingshaw started nervously.

"You're not meaning the nurse?"

"I mean that—ugh!—that Andrew!"

A bright pink spot appeared in each of Miss Walkingshaw's cheeks. But the widow was too agitated to observe either them or the horrified stare with which she greeted this outburst.

"I believe he would *kill* him to spite me!"

"Madge!" said the exemplary spinster in a voice which for the first time reminded her of Heriot's.

Mrs. Dunbar collected herself. Doubtless she realized the injustice she was doing that excellent man.

"I am sorry, Mary," she said gently. "I don't know what I'm saying. I admire Andrew as much as any one. I didn't mean it. It was only that I felt I *had* to blame some one for this terrible sorrow."

Her friend continued to look at her with decidedly diminished warmth.

"Our religion forbids us—" she began austerely; but the sympathetic widow hurriedly anticipated her.

"I know, I know, dear—so it does. How true, Mary; oh, how true! How sweet of you to remind me."

She turned her large black eyes, glistening

pathetically, full upon her friend; but for some reason Mary continued to regard her with a new and curious expression. A trace of suspicion seemed to be among its ingredients.

Meanwhile her slandered nephew was in the library with his two elder sisters. The gas was now lit and the storm curtained out. Mrs. Ramornie and Andrew talked in decorously lowered voices; Mrs. Donaldson more loudly, and almost more airily, as became her dashing appearance and smart reputation. Yet she too had a nice sense of the solemnity of the occasion, and they forgave her elevated voice, since they knew several people of rank who talked like that.

"An irretrievable loss," Andrew was saying; "an irretrievable loss."

They agreed with him as heartily as people could who were feeling so depressed.

"A public loss," he added; and again they concurred.

"That will have to be taken into consideration in making the arrangements," he went on.

They looked graver than ever.

"Something like Sir James Maitland's?" suggested Mrs. Donaldson.

"Something of the sort," said he.

"I only hope it will not be a wet day," said Mrs. Ramornie. "George caught lumbago at his last funeral —Lord Pitcullo's, you know."

George was the laird of Pettigrew. Nowadays his wife saw that he mixed with none but the most desirable company, whether it were alive or dead.

"Oh, my dear, he must come over for it!" said her sister.

"He will," replied Mrs. Ramornie; and they knew that point was settled.

"To tell the honest truth, I'm devoutly thankful for one thing," observed Andrew, with the first smile he had permitted himself, and even it was appropriately grim: "this will put Madge Dunbar's nose out of joint."

"Thank Heaven for that!" replied Mrs. Ramornie devoutly.

"She meant to get him," said Mrs. Donaldson. "I never saw a woman try harder."

"If you'd been living in the house, you'd have seen still more of her trying," replied her brother.

Another fierce shower beat upon the window, with it the gale rose higher and the branches clashed more noisily. Even behind curtains one felt in the presence of something elemental. Silence fell on the three, and when they spoke again it was more solemnly than ever.

"It will make a considerable difference to us all, of course," said Mrs. Donaldson.

Her brother seemed to take this as a question, for he nodded gravely and answered—

"Oh, decidedly it will make that."

She mused for a moment and then turned to her sister.

"What was the name of the shoot the Hendersons had

last season?"

"Glenfiddle."

"They paid two hundred, didn't they?"

"Two hundred and twenty," said Andrew.

He was a mine of information on the affairs of his acquaintances, especially on what they paid for things.

"Can you not get enough invitations in the meantime?" asked Mrs. Ramornie.

"Oh, dozens. But we want a little shoot of our own—when we can afford it."

"I only mean to build that new conservatory we've always been talking about," said Mrs. Ramornie; and Andrew pursed his lips and nodded his approval. The pursing was meant as a hint of criticism on their too dashing sister.

It was at that moment that there came the first gentle tap upon the door.

"Come in," said Andrew, and the invalid's nurse entered.

"Mr. Walkingshaw would like a pint bottle of champagne," said she.

The junior partner stared first at her and then at his sisters. They in turn opened their eyes.

"Is it the—er—usual thing?" he inquired.

"The doctor said nothing about it. Who would ever imagine he was going to want champagne again?"

"Is it ever given?" asked Andrew cautiously.

"Oh, I know it's given," interposed Mrs. Ramornie decisively. "George's uncle drank it up to five minutes before he died."

George's uncle had been a very bad example. At the same time he had been a baronet, and Andrew swithered between the dissoluteness of the request and a certain stylishness it undoubtedly possessed.

"Mr. Walkingshaw is very determined for it," said the nurse.

"Very well," he answered. "I'll get it for you."

He went out with her and then returned to his sisters.

"Does it mean the end is near?" asked Mrs. Donaldson in a very hushed voice.

"It means it's nearer," he answered grimly.

Undoubtedly this was a wild end for one of the most respectable lives ever lived in Edinburgh. Outside, the gale was now positively shrieking; and inside, he presumed the cork was already popping.

"What a pity!" said Gertrude.

"Oh, I don't know about that," replied her sister. "It keeps them happy. George's uncle tried to sing after they thought all was over."

Her brother frowned. The possibility that the head of Walkingshaw & Gilliflower might exit singing exceeded his gloomiest forebodings. He wished women did not have that habit of talking about unpleasant things. Could they not keep the like of

that to themselves?

Even as he frowned the second tap disturbed them.

"What is it now?" he snapped.

"Could you tell me," asked the nurse, "where Mr. Walkingshaw keeps his cigars?"

"Cigars!" he cried.

"He is very set upon one."

Andrew silently opened a cupboard and handed her a box of cigars. Then, still in silence, he seated himself before the fire and frowned at the dancing flames. Behind his back his sisters talked in low voices, but he seemed to have no taste for further conversation.

A few minutes later came the third tap, and this time there was so curious a look in the nurse's face that the junior partner was on his feet in an instant.

"Is it—shall we come up?" he exclaimed.

"Mr. Walkingshaw would like to know what there's to be for dinner," said the nurse.

He looked at his sisters and they at him, and then he rang the bell. Nobody spoke till the butler came up.

"Will you ask the cook what's for dinner? Mr. Walkingshaw wants to know."

Andrew threw into this speech all the concentrated bitterness of his soul. Here was the quintessence of unorthodoxy in the very home of Walkingshaw & Gilliflower! The head of the firm proposed to die not merely drinking and smoking, but, if possible, feasting. They might be in some wretched Bohemian

den.

In a few minutes the butler returned with a menu. Andrew read it with a sardonic smile.

"Tell him," he said, "that he can have cocky-leeky soup, boiled cod and oyster sauce, loin of mutton, apple charlotte, and cheese straws—any or all of them he likes."

"Thank you," said the nurse.

Andrew planted himself before the fire.

"A fine story this is to get about!" he exclaimed darkly.

"But surely father must be light-headed," said Mrs. Ramornie.

"Umph," he replied.

He clearly did not consider this a very creditable excuse.

"Or perhaps he is really feeling better," suggested Gertrude.

"Better! A man at death's door one minute—given up by the doctors—and wanting to eat his dinner the next!"

He started.

"I wonder's that nurse fooling us! I didn't like the look of the woman from the moment she came into the house. I don't believe in your good-looking nurses."

On this point his sisters cordially agreed with him.

Still they didn't believe it was the nurse.

"Then what is it?" he demanded. "If he's light-headed, why does she pay any attention to him?"

The door opened, this time without a tap, and in petrified silence they beheld the portly form of Heriot Walkingshaw, arrayed in a yellow dressing-gown, holding between his fingers a cigar, and smiling upon them with a curious blend of satisfaction and meekness.

"I have recovered," said he.

As he made this simple announcement he blew luxuriously through his nose two thin streams of smoke, while the meekness of his aspect seemed to make some conscious effort to keep on terms with the satisfaction.

A duet of questions and exclamations arose from the two ladies, and again some conscious restraint appeared to underlie the paternal calm with which he answered them.

"Yes," said he, "it is probably one of the most extraordinary recoveries on record. It began all of a sudden. The spasms passed completely away, my temperature fell to normal, and I felt a curious sensation almost of exhilaration. It grew stronger and stronger till at last I could keep in bed no longer. I felt livelier than I have for years."

He passed the cigar under his nose, drew in his breath, and smiled at it with a kind of partially chastened affection.

"Do you think could we not have dinner put on a little earlier, eh?"

A cry from the open door startled them. The sympathetic widow, her black eyes dilated, was gazing at the patient.

"Heriot!" she exclaimed, and there was a note in her voice that came very near to damping the junior partner's enthusiasm at finding the head of his firm restored to him.

"Yes, Madge," said Mr. Walkingshaw, his beatific smile still blander, "I have indeed been spared."

He drew another deep whiff from his cigar, and added gently—

"For maybe a few more years of quiet usefulness."

PART II

CHAPTER I

Down the steep street where stands the office of Walkingshaw & Gilliflower, careers a hat. It is a silk hat and of a large size, the hat of a professional man of the most dignified standing and evident brain capacity. Nothing could show better the innate depravity of March winds than their choice of such a hat to play with. They had thousands to choose from —bowlers, caps, wideawakes, all kinds of commonplace head-gear—and here they have selected for their sport this cylinder of silk,

symbolical of all most worthy of the city's respect. It leaps and bumps and slides, propelled by the breeze and the law of gravitation, down the decorously paved hill, in company with a little cloud of dust and some scraps of dirty paper. And behind it, now at a canter, now at a panting trot, ambles the portly form of Mr. Heriot Walkingshaw. The very devil must be in the wind to-day.

At the corner of Queen Street the hat met the full force of the easterly blast, and bidding good-by to gravitation, turned at right angles and skimmed for forty yards through space as though the brothers Wright had mounted it. Then it resumed the action of a Rugby football, pitching now on its end and now on its middle, and behaving accordingly each time. Mr. Walkingshaw, perceiving that it was now bouncing in the direction he desired to go, fell for a moment to a walk and looked around for some assistant. But the only spectators within hail happened to be two errand boys who had not seen a circus for some time and evinced no desire to interrupt the entertainment. So off he started again, his white spats twinkling beneath his flapping overcoat, and covered the first fifty yards in such promising fashion that he was able to strike the revolving rim a series of smart raps with his umbrella before the wind had recovered its breath. Then suddenly up leapt the hat, cannoned from a lamp-post on to the railings of the Queen Street Gardens, from them across the pavement into the gutter, and there, getting nicely on edge, careered like a hoop, with the thud of Heriot's footsteps growing fainter behind.

Down the next cross street came two acquaintances of the Writer to the Signet, and they stopped at the

corner in amazement.

"Good God, that's Heriot Walkingshaw!" cried one.

"A man of his age!" replied the other; "he's running like a wing three-quarter—look at his stride!"

A benevolent lady half stopped the hat with her umbrella. The W.S. was up to it. He stooped to reach it—a quick grab and he had it by the rim.

"Well picked up, sir!" cried one of the acquaintances.

Mr. Walkingshaw did not hear. He was on the other side of the street and engrossed in brushing his quarry with his coat sleeve.

"It's a wonderful performance," remarked the other acquaintance; "but it ought just about to finish him."

"Will it? Look at him—he hasn't turned a hair!"

"It's amazing—positively amazing!" they murmured together as they watched their elderly friend not only replace his trophy on his head, but cock it at an angle that breathed reckless defiance to the March winds.

"Did you ever see Heriot Walkingshaw with his hat at that angle before?"

"As often as I've seen him do even time chasing it!"

Off he strode, breathing faster than usual, and his hat still a little ruffled, but otherwise as jaunty a figure as ever left an office; while his two acquaintances went away to narrate to the wondering city what their astonished eyes had seen.

Meanwhile the junior partner was unburdening his soul to the confidential clerk.

"That's the end of Guthrie and Co.!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "The whole thing settled in a fortnight—we might be a marriage registry! It's just been 'we agree to this,' 'we agree to that,' 'we agree to anything you suggest.' We haven't fought a single point. I'd have made those creditors whistle a bit before they saw yon five thousand pounds! But what's my father say? You heard him yourself—'moral obligation'—'might be fought!'—'get it settled.' He's botched the whole business."

Mr. Thomieson shook his grizzled head.

"It's certainly not been our usual way of doing business."

Andrew glowered at his desk.

"He said he was going to leave the business to me, and in forty-eight hours he was taking more responsibilities on his shoulders than he had for years! He barely has the decency to ask me for my opinion now; and when I give it, he tells me it's timid. Timid!" The junior partner's voice rose to a shout. "He just goes at things like a bull, and before I've time to get in two words edgeways, the thing is settled and he's out of the office whistling!"

"That whistling's a queer thing he's taken to," observed the clerk.

"He was doing it coming home from church last Sunday."

"Verra strange, verra strange," commented Mr. Thomieson.

He seemed more struck with the peculiarity of the senior partner's conduct; Andrew with its offensiveness.

"He shows a fine grasp of things all the same," added the clerk. "In that way it fairly does me good sir, to see him so speerited. It minds me of old times."

"A proper like business we'd have had to-day if he'd gone on like this in old times!" grumbled Andrew. "He gets through things quick enough, I admit; but I tell you he does not take the same interest in them. He talks of 'dry details'!"

"Is that so?" said Mr. Thomieson, his eyes opening.

"It's a fact. And he's started cracking jokes with the clerks."

"Aye, I heard him yesterday myself. It sounded awful bad in this office."

"I tell you what it'll end in," said Andrew. "It'll end in our losing our business—that'll be the end of it. And this is what he calls 'a few years of quiet usefulness'!"

The junior partner's upper lip seemed to hang like a curtain half covering his face. Behind it he swore so distinctly that the confidential clerk discreetly withdrew.

CHAPTER II

"It's quite remarkable how well I'm keeping—quite astonishing," said Mr. Walkingshaw to himself, as he

continued his walk with his recovered hat perched at the angle that had so surprised his acquaintances.

A month had passed since the stormy afternoon when he had said farewell to his family, and he now looked back upon that adieu as the rashest and most premature act of his life. Andrew must have frightened him; that was the only conceivable excuse for his conduct, seen in the white light of his present rude health; and he secretly decided that the junior partner had been getting a little too much rope. If you once let these lads kick up their heels, the deuce was in it. He would do nothing unjust, but he would see that he didn't encourage Andrew to alarm him again. Thus does the virtue even of the most exemplary occasionally over-exert itself.

Meanwhile, it was uncommonly pleasant to be able to chase one's hat for a quarter of a mile and feel not a twinge of gout or rheumatism after the merry pursuit. Mr. Walkingshaw felt half inclined to give his hat a start again. What a joke it would be to kick it over the railings next time! At this very undignified thought, he recollected himself and for a few minutes looked as decorously pompous as the head of the firm should. But somehow or other that run seemed to have stirred his blood. The fun of kicking his hat over the railings returned so forcibly that there spread over his ruddy face a smile which greatly surprised the wife of one of his most respected clients passing at that moment in her carriage. She too returned home to talk of Mr. Walkingshaw's curious demeanor in the public streets of his native city.

The kicking fancy, by a natural chain of thought, reminded him that the England and Scotland

International was being played next Saturday. He must be there, of course; and wouldn't he shout himself hoarse for Scotland! He had a moment's dismay when he remembered that old Berstoun had made an appointment to come in on Saturday and see him about his confounded money affairs. Then he cheered up again. Let the old chap be hanged! He would wire and put him off. In fact, he must be put off. For had not Madge Dunbar promised to come to the match with him? By this time he had reached the door of his house, and it occurred to him forcibly that afternoon tea was always a much pleasanter function if Madge were present. He hoped she wouldn't be out calling.

The dignified twilight of his hall sobered him considerably. He had been following a strangely frivolous line of thought, he told himself. Certainly he must never allow his hat to escape again. That run had quite upset his equanimity: he found himself going upstairs two steps at a time, and had to pause and shorten his stride.

In the drawing-room he found his sister and the widow.

"Hullo!" said the W.S. before he could recollect himself.

"Hullo!" smiled the widow archly.

He had felt ashamed of the exclamation the moment it escaped him, but finding it received so prettily, he secretly resolved to say it again some day—after a week or two had elapsed, perhaps; confining himself to more dignified remarks in the interval.

"You look as though you had heard good news," said

Mrs. Dunbar.

"I've been chasing my hat," he chuckled.

He had meant to make no allusion to the undignified episode, and here he was blurting it out first thing! He began to feel puzzled by this odd persistence of high spirits.

"Not in the street, surely?" said Miss Walkingshaw, with her longest face.

"Oh, I hope it was in the street!" cried the widow. "I'd have loved to see you!"

Her dear friend regarded this speech with the strongest disapproval; in fact, she had never quite approved of Madge since those unlucky words of hers. But Mrs. Dunbar had ceased for some reason to show the same marked regard for her opinion. It was Heriot who had again refused to hear of her leaving, and she seemed content to win his approval.

"It was in the street," smiled Mr. Walkingshaw. "I chased it for quite half a mile, and ran it down single-handed. I wish you had been there, Madge. You'd have seen there was life in the old dog still!"

He had doubled the distance and forgotten the lady with the umbrella; but then, as Andrew had remarked, a distaste for dry detail had suddenly become characteristic of his recovered health.

"Too much life sometimes, I think!" she exclaimed coquettishly; and Mr. Walkingshaw winked in reply.

He was inwardly as surprised at the wink as he had been at the "hullo." These aberrations seemed to

come quite spontaneously. He wished he could understand what caused them.

"Have you had a tiring day at the office?" asked the dry Scotch voice of his sister.

Her familiar accents instinctively banished the aberrations.

"Tolerably, tolerably," he said, with his old air. "We had the affairs of Guthrie and Co. to settle up. I settled them, though."

"Andrew would be a great help," she replied, with an apprehensive glance at him. She was much in her nephew's confidence at present.

"Andrew, pooh!" said his father. "He'd talk the hind leg off an elephant. When things need settling, I just settle them myself and leave him to grumble away to Thomieson."

Miss Walkingshaw gasped, and the widow gave the sweetest little laugh.

"Poor Andrew!" said she.

"Poor Andrew indeed," retorted her friend, with more indignation than she had almost ever permitted herself in the presence of her formidable brother.

He looked at her in genuine surprise. So subtly had his point of view altered that he quite failed to grasp her cause of complaint.

"What's the matter, Mary?" he asked.

"Oh, if you don't see, what's the good in my trying to explain?"

He merely stared at her, and the widow tactfully

interposed.

"Of course you are going to the match on Saturday?" said she.

"Of course, Madge."

"Have you forgotten Mr. Berstoun is coming to see you?" asked Miss Walkingshaw.

He waved aside this objection with a dignified sweep of his hand. A piece of cake happened to be in it, and the icing flew across the floor. On the instant he was on his hands and knees collecting it.

"Berstoun's a mere nuisance," he answered from the carpet. "He'll never get out of debt if he lives to a thousand. What's the good in his coming to see me? Let him tell his creditors to go to the devil; that's the only sensible thing to do."

He rose chuckling—

"He'll go himself some day; so they'll meet again."

His sister's face was too much for the widow's gravity. She began to laugh hysterically, her black eyes dancing all the time in the merriest fashion at her host. It was so infectious that in a moment he had joined her.

"Won't they?" he kept asking through his chuckles. "Won't they, Madge?"

She kept nodding, choked with laughter, and another strange sensation began to puzzle Mr. Walkingshaw. It was not so much something new as something forgotten which was beginning to return, and it concerned this very sympathetic widow. She was an

uncommonly nice woman—really uncommonly: and what an odd pleasure he began to feel in her society! He felt even more satisfaction than when he had run down his hat.

CHAPTER III

It was upon a fine April morning that Mr. Walkingshaw made his momentous discovery. His sister had left her room on her way to breakfast when she heard his voice calling her. It had so curious a note of excitement that she got a little flustered. Whatever could be the matter? She hurried to his dressing-room door and tapped with a trembling hand. She was not easily agitated as a rule, but her brother had been very disconcerting for the past few weeks, and now his voice was odd. She remembered reading of gentlemen lying on their dressing-room floors with razors in their hands—

"Come in!" he cried impatiently.

She found him dressed all but his coat, and he was standing by the window looking out over the street and the circular garden.

"Come here, Mary," he said, and pointed at the houses seen through the leafless trees. "Have they been doing anything to the Hendersons' house?"

"What doing to it?" she exclaimed.

"Painting it, or brightening it, or—or anything of that kind?"

"Who ever heard of painting a house!"

From which it may be gathered that the good lady was not in the habit of visiting other cities.

"Well then, washing it?"

"Mr. Henderson washing his house! Whatever would he do that for?"

"Tuts, tuts," said her brother, "I'm only asking you. It looks so uncommonly distinct. Can you not count the chimney-cans?"

"Me? You must get younger eyes than mine, Heriot."

"I can count them," he answered.

"*You* can! But I thought you'd been complaining you couldn't always recognize people across the street nowadays."

"I can count those chimneys," he repeated. "I've counted them five times, and they come to fourteen each time. I'd like to get some one younger to count them too. Where's Madge Dunbar?"

He started impetuously for the door.

"She's dressing!" cried the horrified lady. "You can't get her in here—you with your coat off, too!"

Mr. Walkingshaw turned back.

"Well, anyhow," said he, "I'll lay you half a crown there are fourteen chimneys on Henderson's house. Will you take it up?"

"When did you hear I'd taken to betting?" she gasped.

He waved aside the reproach airily, much as he

waved aside everything she said nowadays, the poor lady reflected. His next words merely deepened her distress.

"Look at my face carefully," he commanded. "Study it—touch it if you like—examine it with a lens—give it your undivided attention while I count twenty."

He counted slowly, while she stared conscientiously, afraid even to wink. "Now, what have you observed?"

"You're looking very well, Heriot," she answered timidly.

"Did you ever see a man of my age look better?"

"N—no," she stammered.

"Well, don't be afraid to say so, for it's perfectly true. Do you mind a kind of deep wrinkle under my eyes? Where's that gone now?"

"I can't imagine, Heriot."

"Well, don't look distressed; it's bonnier away."

"Yes," she said in a flustered voice, "you do have a kind of smoother look."

"Smoother and harder," he replied, prodding his ribs with his fingers.

She gave a little cry of distress.

"You're growing thin! Your waistcoat's hanging quite loose. Oh, Heriot, it's terrible to see you that way!"

Her heart might be a little withered by all those northern winters, with never another heart to keep it warm, but it could still beat faster at a breath of

suspicion cast upon her hospitality. She had not been feeding her only brother properly!

"Tell me yourself what you'd like for your dinner!" she entreated him.

He laughed at her genially.

"Pooh! Tuts! Did you ever in your life see me eat a better dinner than I've been taking lately? You might give one a suet pudding oftener, but that's all I have to complain of."

Heriot had always been addicted to suet pudding, but for a number of years past his doctor's opinion had been adverse to this form of diet for a gentleman of gouty habit.

"But what about your gout, Heriot?" she asked.

"Gout? Fiddle-de-dee! Who's got gout? Not I, for one."

He had been glancing complacently at his improved reflection in the mirror. Abruptly he stepped up close to the glass and examined his visage with unconcealed excitement.

"Good God!" he murmured.

Then, with much the expression Crusoe must have worn when he spied the footprint, he turned to his sister, and, grasping a lock of hair upon his brow, bent his head towards her, and demanded—

"What color's that?"

"Dear me," she said, "it looks quite brown. I didn't know you had any brown hair left."

He raised his head and looked at her in solemn silence till she began to feel dreadfully confused. Then he bent again.

"Do you notice anything else?"

"N—no; unless your hair's got thicker. But that's not likely at your time of life."

"It is *not* likely," said he. "It is most improbable—in fact, it is practically impossible; but it is thicker."

He rubbed his chin and gazed at her with the queerest look. Mary had known him since he trundled a hoop, but she never remembered him go on like this before. As for Heriot, he seemed to be debating whether he should spring something still more surprising on her or not. But she looked so uncomfortable already, so totally without the least clue to his mysterious words, so unconscious of anything stranger about him than his shirt-sleeves and loss of weight, that he only uttered something between a gasp and a sigh, and, turning away from her, took up his brushes to smooth his augmented hairs.

"I'll be down to breakfast in a jiffy," he said.

Miss Walkingshaw thought that an odd kind of phrase for Heriot to be using.

CHAPTER IV

Andrew no longer walked to the office with his father in the mornings. Not that *he* had anything to

do with the altered custom: in fact, he was always most careful to assure his friends that he had more than once waited as long as five minutes to give his father the opportunity of having his company—if he was wishing it. But Mr. Walkingshaw was never less than ten minutes late nowadays.

On this particular morning he set forth a full half-hour after his son. He had been very absent-minded after his talk with his sister,—not even Mrs. Dunbar could keep his attention for more than a moment,—and he had sat for the best part of twenty minutes thoughtfully putting on his boots. One or two acquaintances who saw him on the way from his house to his office often recalled his demeanor that morning. Now he would loiter along with bent shoulders, his hands behind his back, trailing his umbrella and brooding as though he contemplated bankruptcy. Then suddenly his pace would quicken, the umbrella whirled round and round like a Catherine wheel, and with his head held jauntily and the merriest smile he would swagger along like a young blood of twenty-six who had just been accepted by an heiress. And then abruptly he would lapse into his mournful gait.

"I want to see Mr. Andrew," said he, as soon as he was seated in his private room.

The junior partner entered with a melancholy visage and a reproachful eye.

"Oh, you've come at last," he remarked, too quietly to be rude, too pointedly to be pleasant.

But his father seemed not to have heard.

"Sit down, sit down," he said; and then in an earnest

manner and with the gravest face began, "I've something to tell you, Andrew, that I think you ought to know."

Andrew's visage relaxed. This gravity promised better than anything his father's behavior had led him to expect of late.

"Something most extraordinary has happened. You've noticed a little kind of difference in me of late, possibly?"

"I have," said Andrew, with an intonation that made his acquiescence particularly thorough.

"A sort of cheerfulness and healthiness, and so on?"

"And so on," assented Andrew.

"Well, I've accounted for it at last!"

"Oh?" said Andrew.

This did not strike him as quite so interesting. He thought of the papers he had left, and glanced at his watch.

"You mind my telling you about Cyrus's theory of the cells of the body—that all they needed was the proper kind of stimulation, and they'd be as good as new? Well, he went one better than that sometimes. I never told you what his idea was—it sounded kind of daft-like when you didn't hear him laying it down himself—but I'll tell you now."

His voice sank impressively, and his junior partner grew vaguely uneasy. This was a most unsuitable place and hour to be discussing quack medical theories. He didn't approve of it at all.

"His idea was that every cell of the body—mine and yours, Andrew,"—(Andrew grew exceedingly uncomfortable: this verged on the indecent),—"every single cell of them is just a kind of wee vessel in which chemical and electrical changes are going on. While they keep brisk we keep young, and when they get off the boil, so to speak, we grow old. Well now, what's to hinder one stirring them up to boil faster and faster, instead of slower and slower? And if they once did that, of course you'd begin to grow young instead of going on getting old. Andrew, it's happened to me."

Andrew started.

"What has?"

"I'm growing young again!"

His junior partner looked at him for half a minute in dead silence. Then he decided that this statement had better be answered humorously.

"Is this story a sample?" he inquired.

"You don't believe me?"

Andrew's cheeks bulged in a faint smile.

"Am I expected to?"

"Look at my waistcoat—when did you ever see it as loose as that, and me healthier than I've been for years, and eating more? Look at my face—where are the wrinkles gone? Look at my head—how long is it since you've seen a patch of brown hair there?"

To complete this overwhelming series of proofs, he leapt up, and with an agile jump on one foot whirled the other leg clean over the back of his chair.

"It's twenty years and more since I last did that!"

Andrew was fairly startled out of his skepticism now. He had the eyes of a goldfish, and his upper lip and swelling cheeks twitched nervously.

"What an awful thing to happen!" he murmured.

"It has happened, though," said his father.

"But surely—oh, it must just be temporary. You don't think it will last, do you?"

"I think nothing," replied Mr. Walkingshaw, with conviction. "I have no settled opinions left. I am a mass of cells in active eruption."

He began to chuckle.

"I'm like a dashed volcano, Andrew!"

His son looked at him piteously. To suffer this sea change was bad enough, but to laugh about it was diabolical. Mr. Walkingshaw could not but sober down under such an eye. He gathered his countenance into an aspect as portentously solemn as his dwindled wrinkles could achieve. His son grieved afresh to see how their passing diminished the once overpowering respectability of his parent.

"It's an awful predicament," said Mr. Walkingshaw, shaking his bronzing head.

"Awful—just awful! What will people say?"

"That's just what I've been wondering. How am I going to break it to them?"

"You're not going to tell people!"

"But they'll notice for themselves."

Andrew gazed at him gloomily.

"It may pass off,"—his face cleared a little,—"in fact, it's certain to."

"It doesn't feel much like it at present: I'm fairly bursting with spirits," smiled Mr. Walkingshaw, and then recollected himself and grew grave again. "What's to be done supposing people do notice?" he asked.

"We'll just have to stretch a point," said Andrew somberly, "and give some other explanation."

"We might give some decent, respectable doctor the credit for it," his father suggested.

"They'd all be afraid to take it, if it went on any further. Imagine a respectable doctor admitting he'd made a man grow younger! I dare say they might be proud of such a performance in London, but they've more decency here!"

It seemed characteristic of Mr. Walkingshaw's calamity that he should bounce up like a tennis ball after each well-meant effort to depress him.

"In that case," said he cheerfully, "we'll just have to say I am trying to make myself more of a companion for you."

Andrew started violently.

"We'll say no such thing! Do you suppose *I'm* going to have my name mixed up with it?"

His father remained serene.

"Well then, what do you suggest?"

Andrew's cheeks drooped, carrying the corners of his mouth down with them.

"There's no good in suggesting. You can trust your friends to do that for you. Pretty stories they'll be circulating!"

Mr. Walkingshaw regarded him with dignity, mingled with a trace of good-natured contempt for such a lack of spirit.

"My dear Andrew," said he, "you need not be under the slightest apprehension. Whatever my external appearance may become—and I trust it will remain not altogether unpleasing—I shall see to it that my conduct rebuts any breath of scandal. I shall be, if possible, more circumspect, more scrupulously observant of the rules which should regulate the behavior of a man in my position, more discreet both in speech and conduct. The tongues of the libelous will be effectually silenced *then*."

Mr. Walkingshaw accompanied these excellent sentiments by gently swinging himself to and fro in his revolving chair and rolling a scrap of blotting-paper into a pellet, which, at the conclusion of his speech, he absent-mindedly discharged at the office clock. His son seemed as impressed by these movements as by his words.

"You'll find it easier," he began bitterly, "to set people talking than to—"

"When you come to think of it, the situation is not without decided advantages," his father interrupted, springing up and pacing the room with an animated air. "Just think of the renewed opportunities for

doing all kinds of useful and beneficial things! I might take a more prominent part in public life: I might even go in for politics. I certainly shall take a bit of salmon-fishing. The study of some of our classical authors suggests itself as a relaxation for my leisure moments. The subjects of aeroplanes and national defense are worthy of consideration, too. I should like to visit several of the continental countries—our own colonies are even more attractive; there wouldn't be the same difficulties about the language. Or, by Jingo, Andrew, I might learn French and Italian! Yes, the position is not without its compensations."

He stopped beside his son and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"I propose to widen greatly the scope of my energies, without in the least forfeiting the respect of my fellow-citizens. That is my ideal, Andrew. Ah, my boy, you and I will have some great times together! By that I mean, of course, some beneficial and profitable times."

He took a sudden step forward and kicked the wastepaper-basket into the fireplace.

"I might even take up football some day, if this goes on," he smiled, and then abruptly recovered his solemnity.

"Beneficial and profitable," he repeated gravely. "Those are to be our watchwords. Will you have a weed?"

The junior partner started out of the reverie into which he had fallen.

"Are you going to start smoking *here*?" he cried.

"Why the deuce shouldn't I? It's my own office. These old-fashioned ideas of yours about not smoking on business premises are getting out of date. Besides, it keeps the flies away. And now I must get on to my correspondence."

With a cigar in the corner of his mouth and humming something resembling an air, the senior partner dashed into his day's work with the ardor of an egg-collector.

CHAPTER V

In the meantime, the two least satisfactory members of the family were sadly enduring the consequences of their foolishness. To Frank and Jean the world seemed a very gray place at present; and even the daily increasing juvenility of their parent failed to enliven them. They were too engrossed in their own unhappiness to take much notice of it; and what they saw merely distressed them, for so far his beneficent projects had not included them. Frank moped about the house, consorted occasionally with an acquaintance, now and then went away for a day's golf, and at frequent intervals confided to Jean his disgust with the arrangements of the universe. Ellen Berstoun was to have paid them another visit, but for some reason she put it off; and at this decision he was plunged for forty-eight consecutive hours into a frenzy, alternately of relief and despair, which left him at last more lackadaisical than ever. A few days after his father's momentous interview with Andrew, he was roused to fresh anguish by the junior

partner's departure to spend a week-end at Berstoun Castle, and his state of mind now became so unbearable that he abruptly announced to his sister —

"I can't stick this any longer! I'm going up to town."

"What for?" she asked.

"For a bust," he answered desperately. "I'm going to try to—to—to forget."

And the poor youth strode hurriedly out of the room to examine the state of his silk hat and his finances.

Jean devoutly wished she too could fly to London! Like a dutiful girl, she had returned, at her father's peremptory bidding, two unopened letters received from that city. Frank knew his address and forwarded them for her. Once or twice after that he himself received a letter in a hand suspiciously resembling the writing on the unbroken envelopes, and it certainly was a fact that on each of these occasions the erring pair were closeted for long together, and that Jean's spirits rose a little for a few hours afterwards. But they soon sank again.

After Frank had announced his desperate resolution she sat alone for some time in the drawing-room. Everybody else was out, and the house seemed prodigiously silent and vast. At last she heard a little noise, which presently took the form of footsteps bounding upstairs, accompanied by a cheerful tuneless whistling. The door was flung open, and her father entered.

It was only at that moment that Jean realized he was a curiously altered man. He was dressed in brown tweeds and a light waistcoat; his face was flushed,

and a smile danced in his eyes.

"I've been for a bicycle ride," he announced.

She could hardly believe her ears.

"You—on a bicycle?" she gasped; for Mr. Walkingshaw had been born long before bicycles.

"Yes; I've had a couple of lessons—only two, and I went for a six-mile ride all alone to-day!"

"Then weren't you at the office?"

"In the morning; but one gets no exercise in that beastly office. I need a lot nowadays."

He threw himself into a chair and a smile broke over his face, in which, to her further bewilderment, she recognized an unmistakable flavor of roguishness.

"Thinking of him?" he inquired.

Poor Jean nearly jumped out of her chair.

"Of—of whom?" she gasped.

"The artist fellow, what's his name—Vernon."

"Father!" she said in a low, pained voice.

"Eh? What's the matter?"

She looked at him between grief and amazement.

"You said that his name was never to be mentioned. Do you mean to—why do you—what do you mean, father?"

Mr. Walkingshaw was finding it harder every day to retain his old attitudes in all their dignity. He was altering at an astonishing pace. How many years

younger he had become already he could not compute. He had tried once or twice to calculate about where he stood but the surprising thing was that he found he cared less and less what was happening, and how fast it happened. He enjoyed himself amazingly so long as he did not worry; and the obvious moral was—don't worry. At the same time, he had no intention whatsoever of forfeiting the respect of his fellow-citizens, still less of his family. It was true this proviso occurred to him more often after than before he had surprised them by some trifling deviation; still, when it did occur, it occurred forcibly. On this present occasion he suddenly became preternaturally solemn, coughed with a little dry, respectable sound, and replied severely—

"I meant that it must never be mentioned by you, but —ahem—it is—ah—different with your father. I still leave myself at liberty to mention him with reprobation."

Jean jumped up with a sparkling eye.

"In that case I'll leave you. I've obeyed you so far, but I certainly shan't obey you if you tell me to sit and listen to *anything* against him!"

And she started for the door.

"My dear girl!" cried Mr. Walkingshaw.

He jumped up too, caught her by the hand, and led her to the sofa.

"Now, now," he said kindly; "sit down and tell me all about it."

She looked at him in fresh amazement.

"All about what?"

He found it a little difficult to explain precisely what he meant. He only knew that he felt an unwonted expansion of his heart towards this really charming little daughter.

"All about the weather and crops," he suggested playfully.

Jean began to tremble a little.

"I—I don't understand you at all," said she.

He smiled pleasantly.

"Am I such a very mysterious old fellow?"

At this odd and novel mixture of kindness and queerness she felt her words choking her, as much with fear as anything.

"We—we never have understood each other," she found herself saying.

He looked startled.

"What? You don't mean to say you—But I'm your father."

"I suppose that's the reason."

"I have always tried to do my duty."

"The trouble is, you succeeded."

"What!" he exclaimed. "Do you actually mean to say you—ah—didn't appreciate my duty?"

She was sitting by his side on the sofa, her eyes downcast and her lips obstinately set. Never before in her life had she stood up to him like this, but now

that she had begun she was discovering to her surprise that she had more of her father's temper than she had dreamt of.

"No," she said. "I didn't sometimes."

Instead of getting angry, Mr. Walkingshaw seemed merely astonished and interested.

"Perhaps it was the way I did it," he suggested.

She looked up quickly.

"Yes," she answered.

"Well, my dear, I have lately discovered that I shall never be too old to learn. Just tell me how you'd like to be treated, and I'll try to manage it. I am very fond of you, Jean."

Her mouth lost its obstinacy; her eyes and voice grew kind.

"Father dear, if only you'd show it! If only—"

He interrupted her by a resounding kiss.

"More that kind of way?" he smiled.

For answer she threw her arms round him and gave him what he immediately decided to be the pleasantest hugging he had ever enjoyed. This was a method of doing his duty that must certainly be repeated; he had no doubts about that. It led to such surprising results, too. In a few minutes he found himself embarked upon the most charmingly confidential conversation.

"It was a little rough on you," he confessed.

"You mean—?" she hesitated.

"Well, well, perhaps we'd better not allude to it again," he answered kindly.

But apparently she had no intention at all of avoiding the subject.

"Oh, yes," she said eagerly. "I'd like to talk about it with you now."

It did not seem to occur to the W.S. that he might end by committing himself to some expression of sympathy he would repent of later.

"Capital," he answered genially. "You still like the fellow, then?"

"Like him!" she exclaimed. "Oh, father, I—I still love him."

"I wish he'd brush his hair a little better and wear a respectable tie; still, he undoubtedly has some original ideas."

Mr. Walkingshaw found himself musing on the artist's outrageous opinions with a new catholicity. They had staggered him at the moment: they began to interest him now.

"It's a pity he can't make a little more money," he added.

"But I don't need a large income to be happy, father."

"Eh?" said Mr. Walkingshaw.

This was going rather too fast; yet when he looked into her shining eyes, he found it really very difficult to keep severe.

"Money is a very important thing, my dear," he replied.

"It's not nearly so important as love! Surely, father, it's far, far better that two people should be very, very fond of each other than have plenty of money! You do agree with that, don't you?"

It was at this moment that there came to the little advocate-for-love's assistance a recollection of the sympathetic widow. In his mind's eye Mr. Walkingshaw suddenly saw a vision of her black eyes vivaciously beaming, and for some reason this enabled him to regard Jean's point of view in a wholly new and original light.

"Well," said he, "I'm not sure that there isn't something in what you say. I do believe you're right, my dear—in fact, I'm positive you're right. The love for a fine woman—well, it's a first-rate sensation—most refreshing."

"For a woman?" asked Jean, a little surprised. "But we were talking about a man."

There was no mirror available, but Mr. Walkingshaw had a strong suspicion that he must be blushing.

"For a man—of course," he said hastily. "I meant for a man. But in a general way I think I may say that love's the thing for everybody! It's the thing for you and me anyhow, eh, Jean?"

Jean felt as though she had scrubbed a lump of crystal and found it to be a diamond. How was it she had never before discovered these depths of affection and geniality below his awe-inspiring exterior? She had not scrubbed hard enough!

"Yes, indeed!" said she. "Oh, I do understand you now. Father, I'm so happy! And you won't think too hardly of Mr. Vernon, will you?"

"H'm," smiled her father. "That's a matter we might well take to avizandum, I think."

For a daughter of a Writer to the Signet, Jean was woefully ignorant. She did not know what avizandum meant in the least. But she felt sure it was the name of one of the roads to happiness; and she hugged him again.

It was in the midst of this embrace that Mrs. Donaldson entered. She had always esteemed the author of her own existence and her family's prosperity, but she had never hugged him; nor had he shown any evidence of desiring such an operation.

"Good gracious, Jean!" she exclaimed.

"We are arranging a bike ride," beamed her father.

To complete the confusion of his more creditable daughter, this improbable announcement was accompanied by an unabashed wink, directed at his less creditable child apparently for the superfluous purpose of assuring her he jested.

That evening Mr. Walkingshaw began to be discussed by his fellow-citizens in earnest.

CHAPTER VI

"You're not drinking, Andrew," said Mr. Walkingshaw. "Go on, fill up your glass. Man, do you call that filling a glass? Here's the way."

Leaning across the table, he poured in the port till it stood above the rim, with the steady hand of a man of forty. He was hardly as young as that yet, but he was amazingly rejuvenated. It could not possibly last, Andrew said to himself; still, he felt dreadfully uncomfortable.

"You seem very anxious I should drink," he said gloomily, looking askance at his brimming glass.

"You're so dull, my boy," his father answered genially. "There's no life in you at all. You for a lover! You ought to have come back looking happy. One would think she'd broken it off."

It was the evening of the same day. Andrew had returned from his visit to the Berstouns shortly after Mrs. Donaldson departed, and as Frank was dining out, he and his father sat alone together over their wine.

"I've no reason to feel particularly happy," he said.

"Eh?" cried his father. "Nothing gone wrong, is there?"

"I don't understand these women."

"No," said Mr. Walkingshaw, with jovial candor, "you'd be a bit of a stick with the sex, I can well imagine. You haven't the cut of a ladies' man: but it's all a matter of practice, my boy; just a matter of learning experience as you go along. What did she say to you?"

Andrew was divided in mind. This tone exasperated him beyond measure. He felt inclined to leave the room. Yet, on the other hand, he judged himself ill-used by his betrothed, and when he had any ground

of grievance, he had the pleasant habit of venting his complaints as long as his audience would listen to him. To-night the habit proved even stronger than his distaste for his high-spirited parent.

"She was queer," said he.

"They're all that," replied Mr. Walkingshaw knowingly. "The great thing is not to mind what they say. It's what they do that counts: and she'd be affectionate, I suppose, eh?"

"I've never gone in for much of your spooning and kissing and that sort of thing," began Andrew.

"The more fool you!" interrupted his parent. "What do you think a girl gets engaged for if it isn't to be cuddled?"

He surprised himself by his own acumen. The late Mrs. W. had not been in the least that sort of lady, and he had never been engaged to anybody else; yet here he was laying down the law with the serenest confidence. Some divine instinct must be inspiring him. His son seemed less favorably impressed with his sagacity.

"Ellen's not that sort of girl," said he.

"My dear fellow, they're all that sort. At least, that's my view of the matter. Well, what's gone wrong?"

"I don't know," said Andrew sourly. "I can't make her out. She's different somehow. It was almost as though she wasn't so fond of me."

"Are you sure you've done nothing to annoy her? They're very touchy, you know."

"I haven't done a thing to annoy her. I can swear to

that."

"Then," said Mr. Walkingshaw, with inspired conviction, "there's some other fellow cutting you out."

Andrew started.

"Who?"

"Oh, I don't know all her neighbors. It's nobody she's met here, I suppose."

"She never saw a man when she was here but Frank and me."

"Then it's some one in Perthshire," pronounced Mr. Walkingshaw, emphatically but cheerfully.

Andrew frowned at his still brimming glass. He trusted that he did not overvalue himself; at the same time, the idea of another being preferred by a girl who had once enjoyed the privilege of being engaged to Andrew Walkingshaw struck him as far-fetched.

"I don't think it's another man," he said.

"It's my opinion it is, Andrew; and I'm not wanting to lose so nice a daughter-in-law, so you've got to see that she doesn't turn round altogether. You've got to go in and win; make sure of her, my boy!"

Mr. Walkingshaw grew more and more animated and his son more and more distressed. He was behaving so unlike the senior partner in Walkingshaw & Gilliflower.

"What are you wanting me to do?"

"Behave less like a damned umbrella," pronounced Mr. Walkingshaw, with a startling lapse into epigram.

Andrew stared.

"Oh?" said he.

"Be lively, and—er—amorous, and—ah—sparkling; that's the sort of thing. Go in for a few new ties and waistcoats. Socks, too, are things that the young men display considerable enterprise in. I was tempted myself this afternoon by a shop window full of really remarkably chaste hosiery—pale green with stripes! you'd look first class in them. I came to the conclusion at last that perhaps I was hardly young enough for them yet; but I invested in half a dozen ties of quite a tasty design."

"*You* bought half a dozen ties!" exclaimed Andrew.

"I did; and you're welcome to any of them you like. Or will you come with me and we'll choose something?"

"Thank you," replied his son sardonically; "but on the whole I'd sooner trust to nature."

"In that case, Heaven help you, my poor boy! You have your good points, but beauty's not among them. Imagine you as a statue, Andrew! Eh?"

The worthy gentleman laughed genially, but the unhappy lover did not join in his mirth.

"I am glad I amuse you," he said, and rose to leave the table.

"Sit down, sit down, man," his father commanded; "I

haven't half finished with you yet. Have you read any poetry to her?"

"I have not."

"Well, read some; try a bit of—er—I'm not so well up in the poets as I hope to be soon, but I fancy Byron has written some very stimulating verses; or why go over the border for them—why not try her with Burns? What's finer than—

"'Had we never loved sae kindly,
Had we—um—um—sae blindly,
Never—something—um—um—
parted,
We should—something about
being broken-hearted?'"

"It's very sentimental, I've no doubt," answered the junior partner, in a tone which implied that he was uttering the last word in caustic criticism.

But his father merely grew the more enthusiastic.

"And what else have you got to be but sentimental? My dear boy, my eyes have been opened this very afternoon. I've never been sentimental enough with my children; and what's the consequence? Here's you letting a pretty girl slip through your fingers because you don't let yourself loose on her! Now what you ought to say to her is something like this: 'My own darling—or sweetheart—or even duckie,'—use some popular symbol, as it were, of affection,—'I am so passionately'—or fervently, if you like—let us say, 'so fervently in love with you that I can't hold out'—or perhaps you might find a better word than that; you want to inflame the lassie without startling her. 'I can't endure'—that's a better word—'I can't endure for another month. Marry me four weeks from to-day!' And there you have the whole thing done."

Andrew had remained standing beside the table.

"Is that all now?" he inquired.

His father regarded him with a fine jovial scorn, much as Sir John Falstaff might have regarded the inventor of lemonade.

"I doubt you're a hopeless case," said he. "There's ginger enough in an ordinary policeman to make three of you. But I'm not going to let you lose Ellen Berstoun if I can help it. Run away now and complain to your auntie."

In pointed silence Andrew availed himself of this permission, while his father remained to light a cigar and meditate upon the disadvantages of unalloyed respectability. A fine example in many ways Andrew undoubtedly was, just as he trusted he had been himself; but he showed up poorly when it came to love-making. He was too old for his age; that was the trouble with Andrew. Now that he came to think of it, there was something uncompanionable in elderly people. It was surprising he had not noticed it before, but lately it had occurred to him forcibly. A brisk young fellow like Frank, a pretty girl like Jean—one felt more in touch with them. Perhaps they were a trifle on the juvenile side: the choicest, the most sympathetic period of life was undoubtedly that attained by—Mr. Walkingshaw jumped up, laid down his cigar, and started for the drawing-room. What a fine woman Madge was!

He spent a delightful hour in the ladies' society. The obliging widow was easily prevailed upon to gratify a passion he had lately developed for tuneful and romantic melody, and she thrummed through five waltzes and the whole of two comic operas, while he sat on the sofa holding Jean's hand and exchanging confidential smiles. Jean was in the seventh heaven of happiness; the widow enthusiastically approved of the symptoms; and the only critic present appeared to be his exemplary sister. She listened to the concert with a bleak face, and regarded the dalliance on the sofa out of a troubled and uncomprehending eye.

Aglow with sentiments, which from being mere amorphous ecstasies were rapidly developing into shapely visions of black eyes and well-nourished contours, Mr. Walkingshaw bade good-night to the ladies and settled himself comfortably in his easy-chair before a friendly fire and in company with a fragrant pipe. How delicious his tobacco tasted! Evidently this last tin must be of a superior quality. He resolved that he should insist on being supplied with the same high-class variety in future.

At this point his pleasant reverie was interrupted by the entrance of Frank, just returned from dining with a friend. His father greeted him genially.

"Well, my boy, help yourself to a drink and light your pipe."

Frank glanced at him suspiciously. He had never before been encouraged either to drink or to smoke; indeed, he had more than once complained that his father seemed to forget he was now a grown-up man. What his sudden cordiality meant he could not divine; but on general principles he feared it. This did not prevent him from accepting both overtures and sitting down on the other side of the fire. Mr. Walkingshaw asked him a few questions about how he had spent the evening, always with the same friendly air, till the young soldier began to suspect he had negotiated some peculiarly fortunate business transaction. He became emboldened to approach what he feared might prove a delicate subject.

"I'm thinking of running up to London for a week or two," he began.

"An excellent idea," said his parent. "It must be rather slow for you here."

Frank got more and more encouraged.

"The only trouble is, I find myself rather short of funds."

"How much do you want?"

The going was too smooth to last, thought Frank. He became cautious.

"Oh, a tenner or so, I suppose," he suggested.

"A tenner!" exclaimed his father.

"Say a fiver, then," said Frank hurriedly.

"A fiver for a week or two in London? My dear boy, you don't know how to do the thing at all. Your return ticket will cost you over three pounds; supposing one averages your dinners at ten shillings a night for a fortnight—that's seven pounds more; suppers, even if you supped alone" (here he winked upon his startled offspring), "will run you at least as much. Put railway and grub at thirty pounds—just to be safe. Then you'll be going to theaters and music-halls, and taking cabs, and having a week-end at Brighton—and the Lord knows what else. My hat, it will be a spree!"

With sparkling eyes and a beaming smile he leant forward in his chair and tapped his son upon the knee.

"I'll come with you, Frank."

"You!" gasped the poor youth.

"Yes," said Mr. Walkingshaw, apparently more to himself than to Frank, "that's the way to set about it!"

He beamed upon his son confidentially.

"I've got a splendid idea, and you're just the very chap to help me. I won't spoil sport, my boy, but I'll travel up with you—and, by Jove, we might stop at the same hotel, if that wouldn't embarrass you. Would it?"

"N—no," said Frank, "n—not at all."

"Just what we were needing—a little blow-out in London, eh?"

Frank gave a little nervous laugh.

"Do you really mean it?"

Mr. Walkingshaw was now standing in front of the fire, alternately rising on tiptoe and thumping down on his heels.

"Don't I just! When shall we start—to-morrow morning?"

"To-morrow! But I haven't done any packing."

"Well, no more have I. We'll just chuck in a few things and buy anything else we want in London. I need practically a new outfit myself. Can you introduce me to a good tailor?"

"Ye—es," stammered Frank.

"That's all settled, then."

Mr. Walkingshaw began to laugh mysteriously.

"I'd like to see Andrew's face when he learns I've gone!"

"But aren't you going to tell him?"

Mr. Walkingshaw's voice sank.

"Not a word to any of them, Frank! You put my things into your cab without any one noticing; I'll say I'm going to the office; and we'll meet at the station. I don't want to get talked about, you see."

It was reassuring to find that Mr. Walkingshaw still valued his reputation, even though the measures he took to preserve it were not excessively convincing.

"All right, then," said Frank; "I'd better go and pack now. Good-night."

"Good-night, my boy," his father answered fervently. "God bless you!"

The Cromarty Highlander had been through some nerve-testing experiences, but, as he went to his room, he realized that the severest ordeals often occur in civil life.

Meanwhile, his parent at a leisurely pace was following him upstairs when he perceived a light still burning in the drawing-room. He gently pushed the door open, and a smile of peculiar pleasure irradiated his rosy face. There, busy at the writing-table and quite alone, sat the sympathetic widow. He remembered how prettily she had answered a simple interjection once before.

"Hullo!" he warbled.

CHAPTER VII

The widow started and turned in her chair. This time she did not archly cap his greeting. Instead, her

exclamation had a tincture of alarm. He was so very unlike his usual self.

"Writing a billet-doux?" he inquired, still smiling.

He softly closed the door behind him, and approached her with a kind of jaunty, springy gait that increased her perplexity. She loved to see him lively, but this smirking manner was really almost peculiar.

"May I sit at your feet, Madge?" he asked, and without waiting for an answer, drew up a footstool and planted himself so close to her knees that the sense of propriety felt by all fine women with any experience of life impelled her to withdraw them some three inches farther from his shoulder. At the same time she bent her head a very little forward and gently drew in her breath. The late Captain Dunbar had possessed in addition to the virtues of a dashing temperament, certain of its failings, and her cousin's demeanor decidedly reminded her of his conduct after particularly convivial evenings at the mess. But the test was reassuring. Her nose was keen, and she noticed nothing—absolutely nothing.

"What a beastly big barn of a room this is," he began.

She was at a loss quite what to answer. Could he mean this: he who prided himself on the becoming stateliness of his house?

"Oh, I think it is a very fine and—and—impressive room, Heriot," she answered guardedly.

"It's too big and gloomy for a widower. It makes one feel kind of lonely."

The widow smiled sweetly. She quite understood

what he meant now. The reminiscence of the late Captain Dunbar faded away, and once more she was sympathy itself.

"Are you often lonely?" she inquired softly.

He looked up into her face with a curious hint of boyishness in his face.

"Not while you are here, Madge."

Again a species of divine instinct possessed Mr. Walkingshaw. Without permission asked or given, he took his fair cousin's hand and gently held it. At the same time a longing to be confidential invaded him. He had a really prime secret to share with her.

"I am going up to London to-morrow morning!" he announced.

It did not surprise her that business should take him up to town; it did that his eyes should twinkle at the prospect. She began to feel a trifle less sympathetic.

"Oh," she said, "why are you going?"

For a moment he hesitated. Could he venture to confide in her? The young and amorous Heriot said, "Of course! Such a divinity will be all sympathy." But the senior partner in Walkingshaw & Gilliflower emphatically retorted. "Never tell a woman what you don't want the whole town to know!" He was still old enough to obey the more prudent counselor.

"I'm going to see my old friend Colonel Munro."

Decidedly Mr. Walkingshaw was fast acquiring that quick adaptation to circumstances which is the hall-mark of youth. He had not thought of his old friend Charlie Munro for the last year or more, and here he

was coming in most usefully just when he was wanted. Heriot recognized with a touch of awe his own unwonted fertility.

"Don't tell any one!" he added, and then immediately realized that at the same time he must be losing a little of that valuable discretion which had characterized the head of Walkingshaw & Gilliflower.

"My dear Heriot, this sounds suspicious."

He realized now the penalties for indiscretion.

"I am going to see him on particularly private business. We do not wish it to get talked about."

He thought he had recovered his old manner to a nicety, but what was his surprise when his cousin shook a well-manicured finger in his face, and cried —

"What a naughty boy you are getting! I wonder whether I ought to tell on you or not?"

This time he tried another of his ingenuous smiles.

"*You* wouldn't tell on me, Madge!"

"Oh, indeed! Why should I care about your reputation?"

Mr. Walkingshaw deliberately faced the situation. He had not meant to commit himself that evening—not, in fact, till he had enjoyed an untrammeled week in town; but he had placed his reputation in this charming lady's hands, and he realized he must obtain a receipt for it.

"Don't you care about me?" he inquired tenderly.

"What—what do you mean, Heriot?" she faltered.

"You are everything to me," he answered, and looking into her black eyes, inwardly decided that this expressed very little more than the precise truth.

It was a very few minutes after this that he found himself seated very close to the sympathetic widow's side, with one arm encircling a considerable segment of what had been a remarkably trim waist, and the other hand toying with a collection of ruby and amethyst rings.

"I do hope I shan't disappoint you, Heriot," she murmured.

"No fear of that, my dear," said he, pinching one of her plump fingers.

"It will be rather a Darby and Joan marriage, of course," she smiled.

"Will it?" replied Heriot, with a glint out of the corner of his eye that reminded her forcibly of the late Captain Dunbar.

"Oh, Heriot!" she expostulated. "Remember you're the father of a grown-up family."

"Well," he replied, with amorous facetiousness, "what man has done, man can do."

The lady endeavored gently to withdraw her hand, but he held it firmly.

"Will it be a long engagement?" she asked, with a colder smile.

"By Jove, not very!" he whispered riotously.

She felt like one of those intelligent persons who pull the triggers of supposititiously unloaded guns. By a supreme effort she mastered her emotion and remarked—

"I wonder what your family will say."

He kissed her demonstratively and cried—

"My family be hanged! I'm not going to tell them yet."

"When will you?" she asked, disengaging herself with a difficulty that impressed her still further.

"Time enough when I get back from London."

The widow was not altogether unsophisticated. This blend of abandonment and secrecy impressed her unfavorably. She had known of more than one ballroom proposal where the gentleman was just sufficiently master of his emotions to stipulate for silence till he had departed on a twelvemonth's furlough.

"How soon are you coming back?" she inquired.

"Week or two," he answered airily.

"A week or two to see Colonel Munro!"

"Intricate business," he answered her, with a fresh salute.

"Poor old Charles Munro is a kind of relation of mine," she observed.

He eyed her with more surprise than passion.

"Oh! I didn't know that."

"I haven't written to him for years. I think I must send him a letter this week."

Mr. Walkingshaw realized that he was marrying brains as well as beauty. He also realized that Colonel Munro was now part of his London programme. However, on second thoughts, Charlie Munro was a dear old fellow, and very likely he'd have been looking him up in any case. His spirits bounded up again. In fact, why should they ever sink with such a fair creature by his side?

"Do, darling," he whispered.

She surrendered herself to his affection and sighed happily. Why should she feel disturbed with one of the most respectable of Writers to the Signet pledged to devote his declining years to her consolation?

"I trust you, Heriot," she murmured.

"My little duck!" he answered tenderly.

At twelve o'clock next morning the London express thundered on to the bridge across the Solway. Mr. Walkingshaw looked up at his son.

"We're out of Scotland now," he said, with a sigh of reminiscent ardor. "Home and beauty are far behind us, Frank."

Then in a different key he added—

"It is curious that my spirits should keep rising."

From which it appeared that he had grown young enough to realize that though lunch may be over, there is always dinner to look forward to.

PART III

CHAPTER I

Colonel Munro drew the ends of his white tie through the loop in the middle with infinite care. In a very wide circle of acquaintances he was universally known as "Charlie" Munro; and you had only to look at him to see how appropriate was this gallant diminutive. His head was bald at the top, but cleanly and beautifully bald, like a head of the finest marble; on either side and behind, his hair was both white and curly; his eye was bright, his features remarkably handsome, his mustache a slender ornament of silver, and his figure tall and slender. At sixty-three he was probably handsomer than he had ever been before in his life; and that was saying a great deal. He lived in very pleasant bachelor chambers in St. James' under the charge of a competent valet.

"Let me see that card again," he said, as he gave his tie those little finishing touches that converted it from an elegant accessory into a work of art.

The valet went to his sitting-room and returned with a calling card on a tray. Colonel Munro studied it a

trifle lugubriously.

"James Heriot Walkingshaw," he read, with this addendum in pencil, "Shall call for you 7:30. Count on your company at dinner."

The Colonel buttoned his white waistcoat.

"Didn't you tell Mr. Walkingshaw that I would probably be engaged?" he asked.

"Well, sir," said the valet smoothly, "the gentleman seemed such an old friend of yours, I thought perhaps you wouldn't like to miss him."

"One's oldest friends are sometimes d——d nuisances, Forman."

The Colonel saw the pleasant evening he had contemplated spending in the society of two or three of the gayest old bloods in London darkening into a *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Walkingshaw at his portentously respectable club, and regretted he had allowed Forman to lay out a clean white waistcoat; for he was, by force of circumstances, economical as well as gallant.

"I tell you what," said he, "I don't mean to wait a minute after 7:30. If he turns up late, you can make my apologies, and say I'll be happy to lunch with him to-morrow."

He put on his coat, added an overcoat and white scarf, cocked his opera hat on his shapely old head, and sat confronting his sitting-room clock. At 7:29 he rose briskly, and then with a sigh sank back into his chair. He heard a footstep on the stair.

"Mr. Walkingshaw," announced the valet.

The Colonel advanced with that courteous smile for which he was renowned.

"My dear Charlie!" cried his visitor.

"Well, Heriot," smiled the Colonel, looking a little surprised at the remarkable joviality of this greeting.

He surveyed his old friend up and down, and seemed still more surprised.

"What a buck you are!" he exclaimed.

In truth, Mr. Walkingshaw, arrayed in a new opera hat, a new and shining pair of dress boots, and a fashionable new overcoat, cut a very different figure from the sedate W.S. of the Colonel's previous acquaintance.

Heriot looked a trifle self-conscious.

"I hope I haven't overdone the thing," said he.

"Not a bit," smiled the Colonel, as a bright inspiration struck him. "The only criticism I'd make is that you are really thrown away on the members of your very sedate club, Heriot."

"Oh, but I didn't mean to dine you at my club."

Colonel Munro opened his eyes and smiled again.

"Where do you propose?"

"Well, I thought perhaps you might advise me."

"Let me see," mused Charlie, with a pleasant air.

"What about the Carlton?"

"First-rate, if you care to run to that."

"I've booked a table there on spec," said Heriot.

The Colonel beamed.

"I say, you're coming out, Heriot. Blowing the expense this time, what?"

"I don't care what I spend!" replied his old friend, in a burst of confidence.

"Then let's start," said the Colonel. "Like to take a cab?"

"I've got one waiting."

"After you," said Charlie, holding the door open.

He was struck by the agility with which his old friend descended the stairs, and smiled afresh at the increasing possibilities of the situation.

"I say, this is very pleasant," beamed Mr. Walkingshaw as they jingled off in a hansom.

Rather bashfully he took from his overcoat pocket a pair of dazzling white kid gloves.

"These are the proper things in the evening, aren't they?" he inquired. "I notice you've got on a pair."

His guest chuckled.

"They'll do to dance in afterwards if we go on to Covent Garden," he laughed, and then added waggishly, "How would you like to go to a fancy dress ball, Heriot?"

"Is there one on to-night?" asked Heriot.

"Yes."

"Are you going?"

"Oh, I've given up that sort of thing years ago; but of course, if you're keen to go, I might stretch a point."

Mr. Walkingshaw looked at him doubtfully out of the corner of his eye and answered nothing.

A little later the two old friends had grown more merrily confidential than they had been since the days of their youth. Charlie Munro was a little puzzled by the subtle alteration in his host, but he was not in the least disposed to criticize it. He felt more and more inclined to tempt him into a further display of frivolity.

"Well, now, what about the Covent Garden ball?" he suggested.

Heriot's eyes grew bright, but his mouth pursed cautiously.

"Aren't they rather—er—fast?" he inquired.

"As fast as you choose to make 'em."

"But aren't the ladies rather—er—rather—well—"

"Not a bit," said the Colonel. "There's a mixture, that's all."

"But I say, Charlie, what about being seen by any one we know?"

"We'll get a disguise for you," smiled Charlie.

"Really, can you?"

"Oh, I'll see to that."

He began to picture a very amusing evening with his

old friend Heriot.

Mr. Walkingshaw drank off his glass of champagne.

"Well, if you're game—" said he.

"I'm game for anything, my dear fellow, so long as I've you by my side," laughed Charlie. "When you're tired, I'll promise to take you away. Shall we call it arranged?"

"I'll risk it," said Heriot stoutly.

CHAPTER II

Round came the big man in the purple domino and the long false nose, hopping blithely to the crashing waltz, his arm encircling the waist of a little lady attired to represent a hot cross-bun. Then he was lost in the crowd, and the Colonel's eyes, in which for a moment a spark of wonder had burned, grew old and tired again. As he stood there alone, with youth and recklessness gamboling before him, he realized somberly that for him this revel was ended. How he would have enjoyed it once! But never, never again. His straight, soldierly back bent with weariness; he jerked back his shoulders, but they slipped forward, forward, and he let them stay. How little the fair faces interested him; how stupidly riotous these young fellows were!

Round came the false nose again, and this time the empurpled figure unclasped one hand of the hot cross-bun and waved a genial greeting as they stampeded by. And again a gleam, almost of fear, lit

the Colonel's weary eyes. It was horrible, grotesque, inhuman, to see the friend of his youth, a man older than himself, the honored head of a respectable firm, the father of five grown-up children, going on like this. The Colonel had thought it would be funny, but as hour succeeded hour, and the ringleader of the frolic gradually became a wearied spectator, this superhuman display of high-spirited energy grew long past a joke. Charlie had never been austere, but there were limits to all things. Good Gad, there were limits! If the man had got drunk or grown vicious, he might have excused him. But to see him interminably bounding round that floor behind six inches of pasteboard nose! He began to move away. He could stand the spectacle no longer.

Again the false nose hopped by, and this time disengaged himself hurriedly from his partner and hastened after the retiring Colonel.

"You're not going, Charlie?" he cried.

His friend turned and stared at him piteously.

"For Heaven's sake, take off that nose, Heriot!"

The W.S. removed it with a laugh.

"Put it on yourself, Charlie, and have a turn with my partner," he urged. "She dances really magnificently, you know."

Colonel Munro laid his hand beseechingly upon his arm.

"Come home, Heriot! You'll be devilish sorry for this to-morrow, as it is; and if you dance any more, by Gad, you may kill yourself! My dear fellow, think of your age."

Heriot received this objection with a cheerful laugh.

"You're not going yourself, surely?" he inquired.

"I am."

Mr. Walkingshaw looked at him anxiously.

"I say, you do look tired, Charlie. How's that?"

"I am sixty-three," replied the Colonel, with an instinctive lowering of his voice. He never stated his age if he could help it.

Mr. Walkingshaw continued to gaze at him oddly.

"I had forgotten how one feels at that time of life," he said musingly, "quite forgotten. Poor old Charlie; I oughtn't to have kept you up so late. I'd have felt like that at sixty-three myself. Well, my dear fellow, I'm glad we were able to have this night together before it became too late. It has made me feel quite old again to see you."

Colonel Munro seized his arm and drew him towards the door, with all the vehemence of which he was capable.

"Come along—come along, Heriot!" he implored him; "you have had a little more to drink than you quite realize!"

Heriot disengaged himself very easily from his trembling grip.

"My poor old boy," he smiled, "I'm as sober as you were when you started! I positively require the exercise. Besides, you must remember that this sort of thing is only just beginning for me; don't grudge me my fling. Get you to bed as quick as you can,

Charlie. Sleep is what you're needing."

"And do you know what you need?" exclaimed the Colonel, with another grab at his sleeve.

"A taste of life!" cried Heriot, evading his old fingers with wonderful agility, and slipping on his pasteboard nose.

He waved a gay farewell, threw his arm round the waist of the hot cross-bun, and waltzed out of the Colonel's vision.

It was not till two hours later that Heriot Walkingshaw, smiling with reminiscent pleasure and perspiring freely, set out on foot for his hotel. A brisk walk in the early morning air was the only pick-me-up *he* needed.

CHAPTER III

During their descent upon the Metropolis of England, Mr. Walkingshaw and his son were residing at the Hotel Gigantique, that stately new pile in Piccadilly, so styled, it is understood, from the bills presented when you leave. On the morning after his evening spent with Charlie Munro, they met as usual at breakfast. Fortunately, the state of Mr. Walkingshaw's health did not in the least seem to justify the forebodings of his friend. On the contrary, he tackled a fried sole with confidence, even with ardor, and put a great deal of cream into his coffee.

"What were you about last night?" he inquired

genially.

"I dined with one or two fellows at the Rag," said Frank.

"Doesn't sound very lively," observed his father, "that's to say, at your age," he hastened to add; for he still believed in retaining the confidence of his children.

Frank smiled dreamily. This "bust" in town was proving less solacing than he had hoped. Now that he had got here, he found himself too lovelorn to bust with any relish. At the same time, it was pleasant and soothing to enjoy each day the society of so charming a parent. Any disquietude he felt at the singular nature of the change had been allayed by one of his friends, an R.A.M.C. man, who assured him that a serious illness at his father's time of life was not infrequently followed by a marked rejuvenation of the patient; so that he was able to regard with unqualified gratitude the generosity and kindness of the truant Writer to the Signet.

"What were you doing yourself?" he inquired presently.

"Dining with Colonel Munro," replied his father, truthfully if a trifle meagerly.

He sipped his coffee, and then remarked—

"Poor Charlie Munro is growing old, I'm afraid. He knocks up very easily."

He sighed and added, "It's a melancholy thing, Frank, my boy, to see one's old friends slipping away from one."

"What! Is he seriously ill?" asked Frank.

"Oh, I don't mean that. I mean—well, everything has its compensating disadvantages. Mine is that my contemporaries are outgrowing me. Charlie and I started the evening in capital style; he was up to anything, and I was on for anything. But by the end of the night we were quite out of sympathy. The fact is, he is still in the sixties. However, my duty has been done; I've seen him, and that's over."

He helped himself to some more fish, and continued with animation—

"Now I can carry out my idea! I may or may not set about it the right way, but I do want to make you all happy Frank."

It was perhaps well for his continued equanimity that during the first part of this speech Frank was lost in contemplation of a singularly vivid image of Ellen Berstoun. She had a distracting habit of appearing like that to the young soldier, of which he was unable to cure her. He started out of his reverie with the last words.

"My dear father, you're the best sportsman I know," he replied warmly.

Mr. Walkingshaw looked highly gratified at this compliment.

"That's what I'm aiming at," he answered.

He leaned over the table and continued confidentially—

"Of course you are happy, Frank. There's really nothing Providence could do for you except put a little money in your pocket, and give you a good time—eh?"

"Oh—er—nothing."

"What's the matter? That doesn't sound very cheerful."

"I assure you I'm as cheerful as—er—er—anything," said Frank heroically.

"I was sure of it. But poor Jean—she's got her troubles, eh, Frank?"

Frank warmed up at his sister's name.

"She has," he admitted.

Mr. Walkingshaw thoughtfully piled several slices of bacon on his plate. It would have reassured Colonel Munro greatly to have seen him.

"I wish I was sure that Vernon was good enough for her."

Frank looked up quickly.

"I don't think anybody is quite good enough for Jean; but Lucas Vernon is really a deuced fine fellow."

Mr. Walkingshaw still seemed doubtful.

"A bit lazy, I'm afraid."

"I assure you he's not," said Frank. "He works, sir, like the very dickens."

"He can't sell his pictures," replied his father. "I'll never believe in an artist till he can sell what he paints."

"The difficulty for a painter is to get hold of the right man—the fellow with the money," urged Frank.

"That's a mere matter of time," said his father; "they are sure to meet sooner or later, and then the point is, has he painted anything worth selling? If Vernon can manage to prove that, I may begin to believe in him. If he's a fraud it is time the thing was stopped for Jean's sake."

He looked much more like the old Heriot Walkingshaw than he had for some weeks. Then he smiled, though still with an exceedingly shrewd air.

"Well," he concluded, "we'll see."

CHAPTER IV

There is a by-street which opens out of the King's Road, Chelsea, and for a short distance pursues a course as respectable as the early career of Mr. Walkingshaw. Then, not unlike that gentleman, it diverges at right angles; and having once begun, goes on doubling for the remainder of its existence, shedding, as it gets round each corner, the more orthodox houses that once bore it company, till at last it becomes a mere devious lane, the haunt of low eccentric buildings; in places, owing to a casual tree or two, positively shady. The eccentric buildings, one is not greatly surprised to hear, are nothing more decorous than the studios of Bohemian painters. Such are the dangers of deviating from a straight and adequately lamp-lit route.

In one of these studios a young man fiercely painted. His powerful, loosely clad figure stepped nervously back and forward, his brush now poised trembling in

the air, now dabbing and swishing on the long-suffering canvas. His mop of brown hair had started the day brushed back and comparatively sleek; it was now a mere tousel. His butterfly tie had been a thing of some esthetic pretensions; it was become a tangle of silk. His smile had been bland and his manner courteous; he now resembled a buffalo with a bullet in it.

"The beastly thing won't come right!" he roared.

Another young man reclined upon a deck-chair in company with three cushions. His appearance was equally artistic, but he seemed less strenuous. He was pale, slim, rather pretty than handsome, and engagingly polite.

"Cheer up, dear old fellow," he suggested.

"Damn!" muttered Lucas.

He toiled in agitated silence for some minutes, and then burst out again.

"No one will ever exhibit the thing; no one will ever look twice at it; there's not a fool big enough in England to buy it! And it's all but the best bit of work I've ever done."

"That 'all but' lets you down, I suppose," observed the other gently.

"One could fill a lunatic asylum with you alone," replied the painter. "Why don't you go off and do some work instead of exhibiting your incompetence here?"

"I told you I'd a headache," said the young man in the chair languidly.

"What the devil's in your head to ache beats me," declared Lucas, accompanying this unkind speech by a brutal onslaught on the canvas.

"Dear Lucas!" smiled his friend. "You seem to have come under some softening influence lately. Can you be in love?"

The painter turned and confronted him with a less furious air.

"You know I am," he replied, and strode to the end of the studio and back, while the other contemplated him in pitying silence.

"I feel a fraud, Hillary," he resumed.

"So long as you aren't found out—" began Hillary.

"I have found myself out," retorted Lucas. "I boasted I could make an income for her—and look at this daub!"

"The public likes daubs."

"If they know the signature; yes, by all means. But who knows mine?"

"Some Jews are great picture-buyers," suggested Hillary.

An answering gleam lit Lucas's eye for an instant, and then burned out.

"For the artist there are three ways of making a living," he pronounced. "One is painting for the million—children with rosy cheeks and large wheelbarrows; beds with angels hovering over them and kind doctors with stethoscopes sitting beside them—that sort of thing—the obvious road to the

heart. The second is hitting the superior kind of idiot in the eye—inventing a cheap new formula—putting a goblin upside down in one corner, an immoral-looking woman in another, and passing the arrangement off as an allegory. Then up jumps an interpreter and booms you. The third is slowly making your name by the sweat of your brow, and selling your pictures when you are fifty-five to people who never recognized their merit till they had been told you were famous."

"Well," said Hillary, "that gives you a biggish target."

"Does it? I have no popular knack; I lack the conjurer's instincts; and I don't mean to wait for Jean Walkingshaw till I am fifty-five."

"Must it be she?" asked Hillary.

"It must!"

"Her father won't help?"

"If he wasn't so infernally respectable he'd shoot me at sight."

"Run away with her. Once you've got her, he won't be heathen enough to let her starve."

"In the first place," replied Lucas, "she wouldn't run away with me. That's the infernal, charming, irritating, splendid thing about her—she is true to us both."

"Won't chuck you and won't chuck the old boy either?"

Lucas nodded.

"The thing can be done," said Hillary languidly; "it

only wants a little energy and enterprise. Great achievements are never accomplished by slackness. Woman was created to yield to the energetic advances of man. Remember that, Luc—"

"Besides," interrupted the painter, who had paid singularly little attention to this stirring speech, "I happen to be handicapped by a little pride. Can you imagine me helping her to compose begging letters to her father? 'We are in great distress this winter, and a check for twenty pounds will be gratefully, etc. etc. etc.!' Can you see me stooping to that sort of thing? What?"

"I merely threw out the idea as it were tentatively," said Hillary mildly.

Lucas gave his mustaches a fierce twist and planted himself firmly with his back to the despised picture.

"It must have been a practical joke of the Devil's that gave Jean that father and then threw me in her way. Old Heriot Walkingshaw is one of those men who were created as an antidote to human affection. He stands between his children's hearts and the sunshine outside like the brick wall of a prison. His virtues are those of a paperweight. Neither his daughter nor his fortune are likely to blow away while he is planted on them; and there his merits end."

"What a dreadful fellow," murmured Hillary.

"And the worst of such fellows is that they are infectious. One can catch grimness and hardness of soul just as one can catch high spirits and courage. Bah! I won't think of him any more. I'll have another shot at this thing."

He took his brush again and faced the canvas. For a few minutes he labored painfully, and then turned with an exclamation.

"The memory of the old devil has got into my brush —" he began, and then stopped.

There was a knock upon the studio door.

"Hullo! A patron?" said Hillary.

"A dun more probably," muttered Lucas.

He opened the door and found himself confronting the rubicund countenance and imposing form of Heriot Walkingshaw. Over the shoulder of this apparition he looked into the clear eyes of Frank. They were trying to convey a caution to use whatever tact he possessed; but the artist was too dumbfounded to heed them.

"Well?" he demanded.

CHAPTER V

"Good-day, Mr. Vernon," said his guest.

He held out his hand, and Lucas mechanically shook it.

"May we come in?" he asked.

"If you want to—certainly," said Lucas; and they entered.

"A fellow-artist, I presume?" inquired Mr.

Walkingshaw, glancing at the pale and pretty youth.

Lucas automatically introduced them.

"Very happy to meet you, Mr. Hillary," said the W.S. genially. "Let me introduce my son."

Leaving the two young men to entertain each other, he walked aside for a few paces with his host. His countenance was composed and his air dignified; though, as he thoughtlessly took Vernon's arm to direct his partially paralyzed movements, the artist began dimly to apprehend that no overt outrage was premeditated.

"I say," he began in that pleasantly unconventional vein which appeared to afford his vigorous reflections the readiest outlet, "this must seem a bit odd and so on, but why the deuce should we go on quarreling just because we've once begun? We're above that, eh?"

"I have no wish—" began the artist.

"Exactly, exactly," interrupted his visitor breezily; "we both mean the same thing, so that's all right. Perhaps we misunderstood each other on a previous occasion. Of course perhaps we didn't—we may be a couple of scoundrels just as we imagined, eh? Ha, ha! Still, let's assume there was a little misunderstanding. Now what have you been painting?"

The artist's blue eyes looked at him fixedly.

"I am addressing the same Mr. Heriot Walkingshaw?" he inquired in a voice compounded of several emotions.

"The same, my dear fellow—essentially the same. I

look better—younger—fitter, I dare say, eh?"

"Yes," said Lucas, still eyeing him curiously, "you do."

"But you see I am still Frank's father."

He laughed genially, and this argument at last seemed to convince the young man that he was not the victim of a strange delusion.

"I am sorry for being a little hasty—" he began, with a candid smile.

"Not at all," interrupted Mr. Walkingshaw good-humoredly. "Don't mention it. There was a lady in the case; that's excuse enough for any two men quarreling. By the way, my daughter is not with me, but she would no doubt wish to have her kind regards—that is to say—well, well, let me see the pictures."

In the course of this speech the affable gentleman had been reminded by the senior partner that one must be careful not to commit oneself rashly. It was odd how often he required these warnings nowadays —and how frequently they came just half a sentence too late.

"Brush been busy?" he added hastily.

Lucas pointed to a dozen or more canvases stacked against the wall.

"Fairly," he said.

"May I look at them? Oh, don't trouble to take them off the floor. I'll just turn them over for myself, if I may."

He stooped over the stack and moved each canvas in

turn till he could catch a glimpse of its face. With this ocular demonstration that there actually were pictures upon all of them he seemed content, for he turned to his host with an approving smile.

"You have not been altogether idle, then?"

"Altogether idle!"

Hillary turned at the exclamation.

"Poor old Lucas is working himself to death," he said, with his gentle and insinuating air.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Walkingshaw, and surveyed the artist with increased respect.

"Hillary is inclined to talk—" began Lucas, but was silenced by a ferocious stamp of Frank's boot.

"Hush, you idiot!" he murmured.

"No, Lucas," said his friend readily, "I am not inclined to talk as a rule, but I cannot bear to hear you maligned. I never saw a man work as you do."

"Is that your candid opinion of our friend?" smiled Mr. Walkingshaw with a pleasant air.

"It feebly endeavors to express my opinion," replied the engaging young man. "He paints on an average one picture per six hours of daylight; and the most astounding thing sir, is their consistently high merit."

Lucas looked decidedly uncomfortable.

"I don't sell them, unfortunately," he blurted out.

The W.S. turned grave.

"None of them?" he inquired.

"I haven't sold much lately."

"How's that?"

"The public is not yet educated up to him," said Hillary. "But between ourselves, Mr. Walkingshaw, if I had a thousand pounds at this moment, I should put it all in Vernons; they'll be worth five thousand in ten years' time at a modest estimate—a very modest estimate."

"You are a critic?" inquired the W.S.

"I am considered so," answered the youth modestly.

Mr. Walkingshaw turned to the embarrassed artist.

"At the same time, I gather that whatever your merits, this is one of your lean years, eh?"

"Devilish," said Lucas.

"That must be discouraging?"

"It might be if I let it."

"That is a damned good answer, Vernon," said Mr. Walkingshaw emphatically.

Before the three young men had recovered from the sympathetic surprise which this reply occasioned, he had planted himself in front of the unfinished picture on the easel.

"What's this you're doing? A wood? Ah, yes, I recognize the trees. Very lifelike indeed—most creditable. What's the price of it, if I may ask?"

"What I can get," replied Lucas, with a reminiscence of his afternoon's despair.

"Still the same unpractical fellow!" smiled Mr. Walkingshaw. "You're not very strong on figures, eh?"

"I don't meet many," said the artist candidly.

"Well," suggested his visitor kindly, "what about fifty pounds?"

"I'd think myself devilish lucky."

"May I have it at that?"

"*You?*"

"It isn't booked already, I trust?"

"N—no."

"That's a bargain, then?"

Lucas's eyes were again fixed in a strange stare. Then a quick change of expression broke over his face.

"You're very kind, Mr. Walkingshaw!" he said warmly.

"Tuts, tuts, not a bit. I want to warm up my study with a splash of color. That's the way you artists would put it. Eh?"

"A splash of color—yes."

"You see, I'm getting the hang of your lingo already, Vernon. And now, what else have you got for sale? What do you recommend, Hillary, eh?"

That young man displayed a sudden aptitude for business which had never characterized his own efforts to make a livelihood.

"As a work of art likely to rise enormously in value, I conscientiously recommend that," he said, pointing to another canvas.

"A nice head," commented Mr. Walkingshaw. "High-toned yet spiritual, one might term it. I like the way the eyes seem to look out of the paper—or is it canvas it's done on?"

"Oh—er—I beg your pardon," said Lucas, waking suddenly from his reverie; "I—I'll let you have that thrown in."

"Wits a wool-gathering, Vernon?" smiled his patron indulgently. "But I dare say you've some excuse. I'll take the picture with pleasure, but I insist on paying for it. Let us put this at twenty-five pounds."

"I won't let you!" cried Lucas. "I give it you—I make you a present of it. You've been so kind already—"

"Pooh! Come, come," interrupted Mr. Walkingshaw kindly, yet firmly. "You've got to make your way, and how will you do that if you give away your—fruits of the brush you'd call them, I suppose, eh?"

The artist could not but admit the force of this argument, and in the course of an hour had the satisfaction of selling, at considerably above his usual market price, no fewer than four of his masterpieces; while Mr. Walkingshaw, on his part, became the fortunate possessor of a promising but unfinished sylvan scene, the portrait of an unknown lady, a rainy day upon the Norfolk coast, and (what he considered the gem of the collection) a recognizable panorama of Edinburgh from the north, including among its minor details a splash of red ocher which he felt certain was the grand stand at

the Scottish Union's football field. This recalled the sympathetic widow, and gave the picture a sentimental as well as an artistic value. He could have wished that on this, as indeed on most other occasions, the artist had paid more attention to verisimilitude and less to mere vague harmonies and so forth, but as he was assured by that intelligent young Hillary that this method was all the Go at present, and that his friend Lucas was recognized as a rising Dab at it. That at least is how he retailed the argument afterwards.

At the conclusion of these arrangements he again drew the artist aside.

"Would you like a check immediately," he inquired, "or upon delivery of the pictures?"

With considerable animation Lucas assured him there was no hurry at all.

"There is a distinction between punctuality and hurry," replied Mr. Walkingshaw. "I recommend it to your notice, Vernon. As to the date of payment, I suggest by the first post after the delivery of the pictures. Does that satisfy you?"

"Quite," said the painter, with a subdued air.

"Strenuous work, patience, and the cultivation of business habits are the recommendations I make to you, my dear fellow—as I would to any other young man. They have been, if I may say so, the secret of any little success I may have achieved myself. Good-by, Vernon, good-by!"

He departed thus upon a note of austere benevolence, leaving behind him a grateful yet chastened artist.

"Well, Frank," said he, as they drove back together, "that young fellow has managed to sell one or two pictures, I'm glad to find."

His eyes twinkled merrily as he spoke, but before his son had time to reply the senior partner spoke again.

"I only hope he keeps it up," was his addendum.

For a young man, Frank had remarkable discretion (apart from his one lamentable lapse). He dutifully agreed with this sentiment, and then proceeded to congratulate his parent on the taste with which he had selected his pictures and the excellence of the investment he had made. Mr. Walkingshaw appeared gratified by his approval.

"I don't throw my money away, Frank," he said complacently. "By the way, what's the cab fare?"

"One and six," said Frank.

In the temporary absence of the senior partner, Mr. Walkingshaw handed the man half a crown, and entered the hotel humming a romantic melody.

As he crossed the hall a deferential attendant approached with a telegram.

"Hullo!" said he, "a wire. I wonder who the deuce this is from."

CHAPTER VI

It is a lamentable fact, remarked upon even by popular politicians, that the very measures which

give the highest satisfaction to some people produce the profoundest depression in others. And it is worth adding that it is not always the most original reflections which have procured for their authors the widest reputation (though, if one wanted to quote an authority for this last axiom, one would perhaps turn rather to the popular theologians).

Of the truth of the first proposition, that worthy young man, Andrew Walkingshaw, was an unhappy example. It is the case that his parent's disappearance was not without compensating advantages. He was spared a number of minor annoyances, which of late had been the undeserved accompaniment of his blameless life; but then, the mystery of that disappearance, its unorthodoxy, its appalling suggestions of scandal! He knew now what it must feel like to have a relative engaged upon fashionable divorce proceedings or conspicuously notorious on the music-hall stage. For, despite his industry in circulating a circumstantial account of the business that had called the head of the firm so suddenly away, he thought he observed in the face of every acquaintance a kind of sly and knowing expression. "Aha!" every one of them seemed to say, "I've got my knife into *you*, Andrew!"

Beneath the roof of the respectable mansion in which he had hitherto spent a life unsullied by mystery or romance he found, to his horror, that these sinister manifestations were even more marked than in his club. The restored happiness of Jean was a bad sign, very ominous under the circumstances. It is true that she professed complete ignorance of their father's movements, but Andrew was too astute a lawyer to pay much attention to what people said; it was how they behaved that he went by; and Jean's conduct

was suspicious. Why should she be smiling while this dark cloud hung over their reputations? The like of that looked very bad. He resolved to probe the matter a bit further.

"There's some one wanting to know where Frank has got to," he began, with an ingenuous air, when he met her next.

"What does he want to see him about?" inquired Jean.

"He didn't say, but I thought perhaps you had heard Frank mention where he was going. Did you by any chance?"

His air remained as ingenuous as ever, but Jean looked at him doubtfully. For a moment she hesitated.

"Yes," she said.

"Oh, where was it?"

"Of course I don't know whether he has gone there."

"The chances are he has," said Andrew. "What was his intention?"

"Who was the man that wanted to know?"

Andrew was particularly scrupulous never to deviate far from the high road of truth. Of course there were footpaths alongside that led to the same place, and gave one a certain amount of latitude; but beyond these no moral or respectable man should venture. Supposing one were caught in an adjoining field cutting a corner!

"That's neither here nor there," he said evasively.

"Was there really anybody at all asking for him, or is the 'some one' yourself?"

Her brother looked severe.

"Look here, Jean," said he, "you know where he has gone—I've got that much out of you; and it's your duty to tell me."

Her eyes were fixed on him steadily.

"You think Frank and father have gone off together?"

"I know nothing about that."

"And that's why you are suddenly so curious about Frank?"

He regarded her in injured silence; but instead of appearing affected by his unspoken reproach, she continued with an air of knowing both his intentions and her own.

"If father wanted you to know he would have told you himself."

"It is for his own sake I want to find out."

"Then you admit you were trying to find out about father! What benefit would it be to him if you knew?"

"It is most inconvenient at the office not knowing his address."

"If it really were very inconvenient, father would be certain to think of that and send you his address himself."

"He has not thought of it."

"Well then, there can't be any great inconvenience."

Not for the first time in his life Andrew wished that all humanity belonged to his own sensible, candid, trustworthy sex.

"I tell you there is," he insisted.

"I trust father implicitly," she replied.

"Oh, you think his recent behavior has been the kind of thing to inspire confidence?"

"It has in me!" she answered enthusiastically.

"You have a high opinion of his sense," he sneered.

"A great deal higher than I have of anybody else's in the world—in Edinburgh, anyhow!" she retorted, and with her chin held high broke off the conference.

This was sufficiently exasperating, but it was not the worst that treacherous sex could do. The widow's demeanor was a hundred times more menacing. She was so motherly towards Jean, so sisterly towards his unfortunate aunt, so skittishly condescending towards himself, that his previous suspicions of her were sunshiny compared with the dark convictions that lay heavier upon him each day. Her black eyes danced mockingly whenever he looked into them; she seemed always to be hugging the most delicious secret. Andrew doubted she had hugged more than a secret in this house.

It was a further confirmation of her perfidy that ever since his father's flight she had made a point of being down to breakfast before him, so that he could never see what letters she received. That was damning evidence against her—damnable evidence, in fact, for it argued a degree both of intelligence and energy

for which he had not given her credit. Like his father before him, he was discovering that there was more up this sparkling lady's sleeve than met the eye.

A few mornings after the disappearance he thought he had caught her. When he entered the room she was reading a letter. He snapped up the chance instantly.

"Is that my father's writing?" he inquired, dissimulating his acuteness under an easy conversational air.

"It's a little like it," she replied, with an amiable smile, slipping the letter into its envelop and turning that face downwards on the table.

The W.S. began to respect as much as he detested her. All through breakfast she rippled with the happiest smiles and the gayest conversation. At the end, his detestation had again got its head in front of his respect.

But the following morning he himself received a letter which threw the widow and her smiles so completely into the background that for the next forty-eight hours he was scarcely aware of her existence. It ran thus:

> "250 BURY STREET,
> ST. JAMES', S.W.
>
> "MY DEAR ANDREW,—It is with the greatest concern and regret that I feel myself compelled to write to you on the subject of my old friend, your poor father. No doubt you will be able to judge better than myself how far he is responsible for his conduct, and whether or not there is any serious need for

anxiety; but I consider I should be doing less than my duty if I failed to inform you of the risks to his health and his reputation which he is running at present. I spent last night with him; in fact, it was only in the small hours of this morning that I left him still dancing at the Covent Garden Fancy Ball. I assure you I am at a loss how to express my consternation and alarm at his peculiar behavior. Are you aware that he has taken to dyeing his hair and doctoring his face, so that at first sight one might almost mistake him for a much younger man than we know him to be? The extravagance of his language and restlessness of his movements lends color to the suspicion that he is a little wrong in his head. I do not wish to alarm you unnecessarily, but if you had seen him galloping about in a domino and a false nose at two o'clock in the morning I cannot help thinking you would share my concern. He seems also to have lost all his old caution about money matters. Are you aware that he is stopping at the Hotel Gigantique, of all places, and doing himself and your brother Frank like a couple of millionaires? I cannot help considering this a very remarkable symptom.

"I myself am in bed to-day, so pray forgive the handwriting.—With kind regards to you all, believe me, yours sincerely,

"CHARLES MUNRO."

The firmament seemed to darken as though a thunderstorm brooded over the devoted house.

Already in fancy Andrew could hear the first crashings and flashes of the coming scandal. His appetite vanished, his coffee grew cold, and presently he rose and silently left the room. Yet the man of superior mental equipment rarely fails to extract some crumbs of consolation out of the direst disaster. Andrew extracted his by summoning Jean before he started for the office and handing her the terrible letter. As he watched her read it, the phrase shaped by his countenance might be read without the aid of any signal-book—

"What did I tell you?"

Certainly there was a well-earned morsel of satisfaction to be derived from her startled eyes and the little catches in her breath. She could believe him now! When she spoke at last her first words were exceedingly gratifying.

"What a horrid old man he must be!"

He looked suitably reproachful.

"That is strong language to use of your father."

Her eyes blazed.

"I am talking of Colonel Munro! The idea of giving father away like that. It's one of the very meanest things I ever heard of! I sincerely hope he may be in bed for a month."

She swept away, and her brother was left to brood gloomily upon the selfish perversity that thus actually defrauded him of his legitimate triumph.

CHAPTER VII

"Well," said Andrew, "what is to be done?"

The problem was undoubtedly delicate. He had paid it the compliment of summoning his two sensible married sisters to aid him with their counsel; and even they, though not lacking in decision as a rule, regarded first the Colonel's letter and then their brother with disturbed and doubtful eyes. He gave them no hint of the dreadful and disreputable change in their father's very being; that was positively too shocking to confide even to a sister (besides, they wouldn't have believed him), but he considered that the essentials of the problem were now fairly grasped by them both, and he was pleased to find a sympathetic unanimity of horror.

"He can't be allowed to go on disgracing himself in London; that much is perfectly clear," said Mrs. Ramornie.

"Not to speak of ruining us all," added Andrew.

"Can you not go and fetch him home?" asked Mrs. Donaldson.

Andrew pursed his lips.

"In the first place, would he come? You know how infernally obstinate he can be. In the second place, do we want him making an exhibition of himself here?"

"He would not have quite the opportunities here."

"Not for spending money, I admit; but we don't want him taking the chair and making speeches at the

W.S. dinner to-morrow night in his present condition."

"Will he not remember and come back for it, anyhow?" suggested Mrs. Ramornie.

He shook his head.

"He has never spoken about it for a long while. I'm practically positive he has forgotten."

"But do you not need him at the office?" asked Mrs. Donaldson.

"*Need* him!"

"I can only tell you," she replied, "that Hector says he gets through business in a most surprising way, for all his eccentricity."

"Very surprising," he retorted sarcastically.

"Oh," she said airily, "I know you fancy yourself, but Hector declares father is the man for his money nowadays."

Andrew's cheeks drooped gloomily. He had heard hints of this preposterous opinion once or twice lately, and they disgusted his sense of fitness. How could a man possibly be good at business if he rushed through it like a steam-engine? Supposing one of the telegraph posts at the side wanted a touch of tar, how could you notice it going at that pace! But what was the use in arguing with a woman?

"Well, I can only tell you this," he snapped: "there's Madge Dunbar waiting for him here with her mouth open."

The two sisters immediately relinquished all idea of

bringing him home.

"But if we let him stay in London, he'll be bankrupt in a month!" cried Andrew desperately.

"What the deuce is to be done?"

They pondered for a few minutes in silence, and then Mrs. Ramornie exclaimed, with an inspired air—

"He must go abroad!"

"And how are you going to manage that?" inquired Andrew.

"You've got to go and take him."

"Me!" he cried. "But—but, dash it, Maggie, he'll never go with *me*."

"You will have to dissemble a little, of course; pretend you want a holiday too, and take him to—to, well, we must look up some inexpensive French watering-place."

Gertrude smiled her approval.

"That's the idea, Andrew! Go up in a white felt hat, and tell him you know of a naughty little place in France where you can get dancing. He'll jump at it!"

Their brother regarded them with ever-increasing gloom.

"That kind of thing is not in my line—" he began; but once more he was impressed with the disadvantages of a bi-sexual world. The two ladies seemed positively incapable of grasping his objections, either to wearing a Homburg hat or recommending a naughty French watering-place.

"I don't insist on its being white; grey will do," said Mrs. Donaldson.

"Of course, I should never dream of taking him to a really disreputable place," said Mrs. Ramornie; "you only want a Casino and a little promenading, and so on."

"It will be great fun, Andrew!"

"It is your duty, Andrew."

"Yes, yes; of course we know you are an Elder of the Kirk and all the rest of it; but on an occasion, don't you know, Andrew!"

"What alternative do you suggest, Andrew?"

Yet he was still hanging fire when Jean entered. It had been tacitly understood that her presence was not required at the council of war, and the marked silence which followed her entry might reasonably have warned her that matters were being discussed too complicated for young unmarried girls. Yet she closed the door behind her and came forward with a quietly resolute air.

"I've only just heard you were here," she said. "You are talking about father, I suppose."

"We are," replied Mrs. Ramornie briefly.

Jean sat down.

"What have you decided?" she asked.

"We have decided he should go abroad with Andrew for a little change."

"Why?"

"Do you need to ask why, Jean? Surely you don't want him to go on making a fool of himself in London?"

"I don't see why he shouldn't go to a dance occasionally if he wants to."

"Go to a dance!" exclaimed Mrs. Donaldson.

"My dear Jean! do you suppose this was an ordinary —"

"Hush, Gertrude," said their brother austerely.

"Anyhow," said Mrs. Ramornie, "it is quite settled that he must leave London at all costs, and that it is inadvisable he should return to Edinburgh at present."

"But Aunt Mary was only saying to-day that he has to preside at a dinner to-morrow night."

"Oh, he'll forget all about that," said Gertrude, "and, of course, we don't mean to remind him."

"Why not?"

"Because he is not to be trusted at present," said Andrew.

A quick flush irradiated Jean's clear face.

"He *is* to be trusted. He is to be trusted far more than ever before in his life!"

The three counselors exchanged glances.

"We know better than you do," said Mrs. Ramornie severely.

But Jean was not easily to be quelled.

"I think it will be a perfect shame if you allow father to forget his engagement," she protested.

Her eldest sister's face grew more like Andrew's than ever.

"He must *not* come home at present, and we trust that Andrew will do his duty and not permit him to stay in London."

"Andrew!" exclaimed Jean. "How can he prevent him?"

Their brother hung back no longer.

"I shall go up to London to-morrow morning," he announced.

"Splendid!" cried Gertrude.

He looked at her coldly.

"I do not propose to do anything ridiculous. If I can get him to go to some place in the south of England and stop for a month or two, that will be quite sufficient; and I do not propose, either, to wear any other clothes than what I've got at present."

Having thus asserted his independence of conduct and apparel, he turned again to Jean.

"That is what we have decided," he said.

She jumped up, her lip quivering a little. Then she controlled herself, and as she left the room only said quietly—

"Thank you for telling me."

The council was then able to conclude its deliberations without further interruption.

CHAPTER VIII

After dinner that night, Andrew found Mrs. Dunbar alone in the drawing-room, and immediately turned to withdraw.

"Are you not going to have coffee, Andrew?" she asked.

There was something different in her manner; something almost nervous; something apparently less hostile. Andrew glanced at her suspiciously. What new move in her diabolical game did this signify?

"I've got letters to write," he answered coldly, and shut the door decisively behind him.

The fair widow sighed, and again picked up a letter lying in her lap and looked at it unhappily. She had kept her word and written to Charlie Munro, and unfortunately Heriot had forgotten to warn him that his answer to any such communication must be exceedingly discreet. No wonder she seemed distressed.

Naturally, the junior partner gave his fair enemy no information regarding his movements. She saw him leave in the morning as usual, apparently to go to the office, and it was not till some time later that she learned from his aunt of his departure for London. Curiously enough, she seemed rather pleased than otherwise by this move. Her correspondence with Colonel Munro had left the most unsettling effects.

Meanwhile, Andrew was nearing London. He was pleased to find his train arrive upon the stroke of 6:15, for he valued punctuality above everything except his reputation. From the station he drove to

the large political club where he always put up, ate a dinner that exactly accorded with his station in life, and took a horse bus to the Hotel Gigantique. (Motor buses were only just beginning to be seen upon the streets at that time, and he was always suspicious of noisy innovations.)

By the merest chance, the first person he saw in the hall of the hotel was Frank, attired in overcoat and opera hat, and evidently bound for some extravagant expedition, the cost of which would no doubt be defrayed by his parent to the detriment of his brother's and sisters' patrimony.

"Well, Frank," said the elder brother, "where's your father?"

The "your" was a subtle indication of the depth to which Mr. Walkingshaw had fallen in the estimation of the right-minded.

"Out of town," said Frank briefly.

"Where's he gone?"

Frank shook his head.

"You can ask at the office," he suggested.

"Do you mean to say you don't know?"

"I mean to say it's none of my business."

Andrew had begun the conversation in a decidedly hectoring manner. He now began to alter his key a little.

"Look here, Frank, things are pretty serious. We've got to stop this tomfoolery."

The other interrupted him.

"What tomfoolery?"

"Making an exhibition of himself all over London, and wasting his money at a place like this. You know perfectly well what I mean."

"I only know that he's in the best form I've ever seen him in my life. He's just a devilish kind and sporting guv'nor, that's what he is."

"If you mean going about the most disreputable places in London in a half-intoxicated condition—"

"That's a lie, anyhow," said Frank calmly, yet with a glint in his eye.

His brother recoiled a pace, but his manner grew none the less uncompromising.

"I suppose you'll say he's moving in fine high-class society, do you?"

"It's a lot better than anything he ever found in his office."

"Thank you," replied the junior partner; "and now perhaps you'll tell me when he's expected back?"

"Day or two," said Frank shortly.

Andrew pondered for a moment.

"Oh?" he remarked at length, and without so much as a good-night he turned on his heel and walked out of the hotel.

Frank's conscience harassed him for a long time after this interview. He wished he could be quite certain that his manner towards his brother was entirely the result of Andrew's disagreeable references to their

father. He would be the most ill-conditioned sweep unkicked, the most dishonorable sneaking blackguard, if by any chance he had allowed his luckless passion to prejudice him! He began to wish he were back in India again. Was this beastly furlough never coming to an end? And so he drove off in his hansom, alternately sighing and cursing himself, to watch what he had selected from the pictures in the illustrated papers as the most sentimental drama in town.

The advantage of living a well-regulated life was never better illustrated than in the person of his brother Andrew. No qualms of conscience annoyed him as he drove back economically in his bus. He knew that he was right, and that people who violated his standards, and disagreed with him impertinently were wrong; and secure in that knowledge, he was enabled to hug against his outraged feelings the warm consolation of a grievance. All through his life this form of moral hot-water bottle had kept Andrew snug during many a painful night. It is worth being consistently righteous for the mere privilege of possessing this invaluable perquisite.

He decided to wait in London for twenty-four hours longer on the chance of his father returning, and so it happened that he found himself in his club reading-room on the following afternoon at the hour when the *Scotsman* appeared to cheer the exiles from the north. He secured it at once, and with a consoling sense of homeliness proceeded to turn its familiar pages. All at once he was galvanized into the rigidity of a fire-iron—

"Writers to the Signets' Annual Dinner. Remarkable speech by Mr. Heriot Walkingshaw."

It was a few minutes before he summoned up his courage to read any further.

> "Mr. Walkingshaw began by remarking that it was by the merest chance he was present among them to-night. He had been so engrossed by the attractions of London (laughter)—he did not mean what they meant (renewed laughter)—that he had positively forgotten all about his duty to his convivial fellow-practitioners till he was reminded by a telegram from a young lady (a laugh). He alluded to his daughter (cheers). Several morals might be drawn from this little incident. The advantages of the sixpenny telegram and the even greater advantages of getting on the right side of the fair sex (cheers and laughter); these were two morals, but what he proposed to bring more particularly under their notice to-night was this: that if a respectable old chap like himself could enjoy himself so thoroughly as to forget his duty, there was hope even for the oldest of them (slight applause). What satisfaction was it to become prosperous and respected if at the same time one became a bugbear to one's children and a bore to one's acquaintances? Supposing that one of the old and valued friends he saw before him could suddenly see himself with the eyes of a young man of forty, or better still of thirty, what would he think of himself?—He would desire to drive a pin through the old fossil's trousers and wake him up! (a laugh). He would realize he was out of touch with life;

> that he was neglecting a dozen opportunities a day for giving pleasure to people who were still young enough to enjoy themselves, and thereby bucking himself up too. Mr. Walkingshaw begged his audience, particularly that portion of it over fifty, to beware of the fatal habit of growing old. How was this to be avoided? Well, everybody could not hope to have his own good fortune, but he could give them a few tips. In the first place, they should make a point of falling in love at least twice a year (laughter). The old duffer who ceased to fall in love was doomed. Then, while leading a strictly abstemious life on six days of the week, they should let themselves go a bit on the seventh; and when in that condition (a laugh)—he did not mean 'blind fu',' but merely a little the happier for it—while in that condition they should unlock their cash boxes and distribute a substantial sum among the poor and deserving young. Furthermore, they should make a point of mixing at least twice a week in fresh society —Bohemians, sportsmen, and the like. Also, nothing should be allowed to degenerate into a habit, especially churchgoing—"

Andrew read no further. Half an hour later he was driving for King's Cross as fast as a cab could take him.

CHAPTER IX

It was characteristic of Andrew's serviceable and soundly unimaginative intellect that it should decline to grasp such a phenomenon as a father who was rapidly approaching his own age. It accepted the fact, since the evidence was now becoming overwhelming, but it firmly refused to go an inch beyond this concession. If one were seriously to regard his conduct as the natural result of youth and high spirits, there would be in a kind of way an excuse for it; and once you started that line of reasoning, where were you? You would be pardoning beggars because they were hungry, and bankrupts because they had no money, and all kinds of things. Andrew's conceptions of justice were not to be tampered with like that. It therefore followed (since he was extremely logical) that his parent must be looked upon simply as an erring and impenitent man. His age did not matter. That was his business. His son's was to see that, whether Mr. Heriot Walkingshaw professed to be eighty or eighteen, he conducted himself in a manner befitting the head of so respectable a family and firm.

The only defect in this pre-eminently honest way of regarding the matter was that it handicapped the junior partner when it came to forecasting his parent's probable movements. If you persist in basing your calculations on the assumption that a bird *ought* to be too old to fly, when it actually isn't, you will probably be wrong in expecting to find it always in your garden.

Andrew let himself into the house about the hour of 8:30 a. m., and almost fell into the arms of the agitated widow.

"Have you found him? Where is he? What has happened?" she implored him.

It was another of Andrew's wholesome peculiarities that, having once distrusted a person, his suspicions could hardly be allayed, even by evidence that would have satisfied a hypochondriacal ex-detective. This safeguard against deception effectually preserved him from the dangerous extremes both of indigence and greatness. He looked upon his second cousin with a shocked and doubtful eye. She had come very close. Did she expect *him* to toy with her?

"Have I found who?" he inquired coldly.

"Heriot!"

"If you mean my father, I did not find him."

He looked at her sarcastically, and added, "He didn't mention that himself, of course?"

"I haven't seen him!" she almost shouted.

He looked thoroughly startled now.

"Hasn't he been here?"

"He was only in the house for an hour. That was the day before yesterday. He didn't let me know he was here—he didn't let his sister know—nobody knew but Jean!"

"Where was he staying?"

"At an hotel."

"An hotel!" exclaimed Andrew in horror. "Going to all that expense, with his house standing waiting for him? That beats everything I've heard yet! Is he there

still?"

"No, no, he's not!" she cried, almost sobbing. "He's gone back to London."

"Gone back to London!"

"And Jean's gone with him!"

"Jean! Has he not got enough bills to pay at that infernal millionaire's hotel without hers?"

"I don't know," wailed the lady. "I don't understand him. I thought he cared for me—and he didn't even let me know he was here!"

In spite of his anger with his erring parent, he was sufficiently master of his emotions to feel a lively concern at all this speech suggested.

"I must get my breakfast," he observed icily, and was starting for the dining-room.

She collected herself instantly.

"Andrew!" she said, "you've got to go after him."

He stared at her, first in extreme surprise, then with an exceedingly sophisticated smile.

"Thank you, I've got my business to attend to."

"You can go to the office first. There's a train about two."

"I'll not be on it," he replied.

"Some one's *got* to go and fetch him back."

"It won't be me."

She looked at him for a moment with an expression

which did not interest him. He neither professed to understand women nor to think it worth while trying.

"Very well," she answered.

They went in to breakfast, but throughout the meal she never referred to Heriot again. Andrew flattered himself he had choked her off *that* subject.

CHAPTER X

While Andrew was still patiently waiting in London, a south-bound express swung down the long slope from Shap; past Oxenholme, past Milnthorpe, past Carnforth, out into the green levels of Lancashire. In one corner of a first-class carriage sat Jean Walkingshaw, her eyes smiling approval at that very paper which was to disturb her brother's serenity a few hours later. Her father sat opposite watching her.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he inquired.

"I think it's most amusing and—and—"

"Spirited?"

"Oh, very spirited!" she laughed. "In fact, I think it's a splendid speech."

He seemed gratified.

"Some fellows didn't seem to care for it," he observed.

"They must have been very stupid, then!"

"Old buffers generally are," he replied. "Some of the young chaps thought it first-rate, even though they were a little startled for the moment. Though why people should feel startled by anything so self-evident as my remarks beats me. Be hanged to them for silly idiots! Eh, Jean?"

His momentary expression of chagrin made way for a merry smile, which set his daughter smiling gaily back.

"If they disagree with you, father, they must be!" she laughed.

They sat silent for a few minutes, Jean watching the green fields and trees and gates and walls rush past to join the jagged fells behind them, her father watching her.

"It's awfully good of you taking me back with you," she said presently.

"If it's a treat for you, you deserve it," he answered affectionately; "and if it's not—well, anyhow, it's pleasant for me having your company."

"It is a treat for me, though I don't quite see what I've done to deserve it."

"You have stood by your father, my dear; and one good turn deserves another. I'd have been most infernally sick if I'd forgotten that dinner. It gave me the very chance of saying a word or two in season I'd been longing for. I only hope it will do the old fogies good."

He took up the paper and glanced again at the report.

"'Remarkable speech,' they call it," he continued complacently. "Well, they are not very far wrong. It *was* a remarkable speech. Eh, Jean?"

The good gentleman seemed unable to obtain his daughter's approval often enough. The fact was he had been a trifle disappointed with the attitude of some of his old friends last night. There was no doubt about it, he must go to the young folks for the meed of sympathy he deserved.

Jean again looked out of the window, but she ceased to pay much attention to the backward-drifting landscape. Her heart was too full of hopes and questionings and restless wonder. In a little she turned to her father again and said, with an eye so candid and a smile so kind that many members even of her own sex would never have suspected a hint of ulterior design—

"Do you know, you are the very best of fathers!"

He replied in the same spirit of affection, and she continued—

"I can't tell you how much I am looking forward to being in London again! You couldn't have done anything I'd have liked better."

"Yes," he confessed, "London is an amusing place."

"And one always meets so many people one knows there. That is one of its attractions."

He agreed that it was.

"I wonder who I'll meet this time?"

She spoke with an air of the most innocent speculation, but the nature of her parent's smile

changed subtly.

"Goodness knows who one will meet in London," he replied. "Not Andrew, we'll hope, eh? I wonder where he is now."

At this change of subject her breast gave a quick little heave that might have marked a stifled sigh, but she dutifully joined in what she could not but think an unnecessarily prolonged series of speculations regarding the movements of a quite uninteresting young man.

But her eyes were very bright indeed and her face distinct with suppressed excitement as they drove from Euston Station into the life of the streets. All the while she kept looking out of the cab window, as though amid the passing myriads she might happen already to recognize one of those acquaintances she hoped to meet. At last she was in London! And London in early spring; London with the smuts washed off by torrential showers and then flooded with glorious sunshine; London with the young leaves like a thin veil of green on the limes and elms, and the tassels hanging from the poplars, and the sycamores and horse chestnuts already casting grateful shade; London with the mowing machines whirling in the parks and the watering-carts swishing down the streets—is a fairy city for a young girl with a large hotel to live in, a generous father, and a lover somewhere hidden in those mysterious miles of crowds and houses. Jean half wished she could feel a little less impatient, so that she might relish every passing moment to its dregs.

Her father, Frank, and she dined sumptuously and went to the most entertaining play afterwards—a stimulating medley of waltz refrains and gorgeous

clothes and a funny man and fifty pretty girls. She did not pose as a dramatic critic, and thought it splendid. Then they had supper at the Savoy, and—so to bed.

But though she had gone to her room, Jean lingered for long before her open window, looking wistfully over the humming, lamp-lit town. *His* name had not been mentioned.

CHAPTER XI

Lucas painted, but not so fiercely as before; and again from the deck-chair Hillary watched him. He rented the studio next door, and having a comfortable private income of £80 a year, generally spent his afternoons encouraging his friend. Occasionally, however, he considered it advisable to supply chastening reflections.

"I don't like it," he observed.

"Don't like what?"

"If he really meant to buy those pictures, I can't help thinking you would have heard from him again."

The artist turned abruptly.

"It was only three days ago. I don't expect to hear yet."

"Dear old Lucas, I don't want to discourage you, but I call it fishy. Supposing he has met some one since who really knew something about pictures?"

His friend resumed work in silence.

"There is also another possibility," continued Hillary in his gentle voice. "He struck me as suspiciously extravagant—supposing he has gone bankrupt? I noticed, too, that his complexion was somewhat rubicund—supposing he has had an apoplectic fit? In that case, would his executors be bound by his verbal promise? Honestly, Lucas, I don't think so."

There came a sharp rap on the door.

"It will relax the strain on your intellect if you go and see who that is," suggested the painter.

"A telegram," said Hillary, strolling back from the door.

"Good heavens!" cried Lucas. "Read that."

Hillary read—

> "Come immediately. Unfortunate complication here. Require you to explain fully.—HERIOT WALKINGSHAW."

He looked considerably sobered.

"Of course I didn't really mean what I was saying—"

Lucas interrupted him brusquely.

"I'm off. Look after things here. What the devil—"

He strode down the lane, hailed a cab, and drove off to an accompaniment of the most anxious speculations.

"This way, sir," said the attendant at the Hotel

Gigantique.

Lucas followed him, still racking his brains for some explanation not too disastrous to his hopes. The man opened the door of a sitting-room and closed it quietly behind him. In the room there was only one person, a girl with the sunniest hair and the straightest little nose and the most delightfully astonished face imaginable.

"Jean!" he cried.

He took a quick step towards her and then remembered the gravity of the summons.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"Then it was you!" she exclaimed.

"Me?"

"Father only told me that some one—a man—"

He held out the telegram abruptly.

"What do you make of that?"

She read it, and then read it again, and her bewilderment seemed to change into another emotion.

"What did your father tell you to do?" asked Lucas.

She gave him the queerest look.

"Get rid of the man if I could," she said.

He ran his fingers through his mop of brown hair.

"But I don't understand—what's the 'complication'?"

She began to smile shyly—

"Lucas, don't you think—don't you see—there's nothing else. *I* must be the complication here."

"Ahem!" coughed Mr. Walkingshaw.

The lovers endeavored to look as though the artist had been merely posing his patron's daughter.

"Well?" inquired that patron genially.

Lucas had not altogether lost his ready audacity.

"I came at once, sir," he replied, "and I have explained fully. The complication has been cleared up."

Laughing gleefully, chattering away much more like the prospective best man than the future father-in-law, he led them (an arm thrown about each) towards the sofa, where they sat together, crowded but happy.

"What would you put your income at now, Lucas?" he inquired mischievously.

Lucas looked a little rueful.

"The same fluctuating figures, I'm afraid," he confessed.

"My dear fellow, don't worry," said Heriot kindly. "Money isn't everything in this world. Youth and love and pluck are the main things. Hang it, what if you do get into debt occasionally? You've got a pretty oofy father-in-law. Of course, my dear chap, I don't encourage extravagance; far from it"—he glanced complacently at the chaste upholstery of the Hotel

Gigantique. "I believe in paying your way, and laying by for a rainy day, and all that kind of thing, just as much as ever I did—in theory, anyhow. But in practice I may just as well tell you at once, to ease your mind, that Jean will have three hundred a year to keep the pot boiling."

He pooh-poohed their gratitude with the most genial air.

"Don't mention it, my dear young people, don't mention it. It comes out of Andrew's share, so it's all right."

"But I couldn't dream of robbing Andrew!" cried Jean warmly.

"He spends his days in robbing our clients," chuckled the senior partner, "so you needn't worry about him. Besides, he doesn't know how to spend money even when he has got it." He lowered his voice confidentially. "Andrew hasn't a spark of the sportsman in him; he's all very well as a partner—one wants 'em tough; but as a son—good Lord!"

And then the good gentleman tactfully retired to the billiard-room, leaving behind him the two happiest people in London.

CHAPTER XII

Naturally, Lucas stayed to dinner, and naturally also he and Jean were left in uninterrupted occupation of the private sitting-room, while her father and Frank smoked and talked together in a quiet corner of the

hall. Mr. Walkingshaw was radiant with the reflection of the happiness he had brought about. He could do nothing but make little plans for introducing Lucas to his picture-buying acquaintances, select eligible districts of London for their residence, and jot down various articles of furniture or ornament that he could spare them from his own mansion. Frank seemed equally delighted, though his good spirits were occasionally interrupted by fits of reverie.

"Somehow or other," said Mr. Walkingshaw, "I feel more and more like a friend of Jean and you, and less and less like your father. Odd thing, isn't it, Frank?"

"A jolly fine thing," said Frank warmly. "By Jove, sir, I can't tell you how much I prefer it!"

"Do you really? Well, then, I won't worry about the feeling any more."

Mr. Walkingshaw had not given the impression that he was worrying about that or any other feeling, but one was bound to take his word for it.

"I enjoy the sensation far more myself," he went on. "It produces a kind of mutual confidence and that sort of thing. I hardly feel inclined to explain the cause of this improvement yet, Frank; but you may take my word that there is nothing in the least discreditable about it. In fact, when one comes to think of it, there's nothing so very extraordinary either. It's a perfectly sound scientific idea, perfectly sound; so you can make your mind at ease too, Frank."

As a matter of fact, Frank's mind had already

wandered far afield from these interesting but slightly obscure speculations.

"Oh, that's all right, I assure you," he answered vaguely.

"It's a grand thing to know that Jean's love affair has turned out so happily," his father continued. "I can't tell you what a satisfaction it is to me."

"Yes, isn't it?" Frank murmured from the clouds.

"I only wish I could feel as sure of Andrew falling on his feet."

Frank's wits were wide awake now.

"Andrew!" he exclaimed. "Good heavens, do you mean to say you don't think he has fallen on his feet?"

His father shook his head dubiously.

"But, my dear father, I thought you agreed with me—agreed with all of us, I mean—that Ellen's just the—well, the—er—the—er—the nicest girl in the world."

"Oh, she's all that."

"Then what on earth do you mean?"

Mr. Walkingshaw leant confidentially over the arm of his easy-chair.

"Between ourselves, Frank, I'm rather doubtful whether she thinks Andrew the nicest man in the world."

"But—but—surely she—er—I mean, they are engaged."

"Frank, my boy, not a word of this to a soul—not even to Jean or Lucas. I may be wrong, and I don't want to make mischief; but I have a strong suspicion there's another fellow."

"What kind of fellow?"

"A rival."

"Good God!" cried Frank. "Who the devil is he?"

"Hush, hush—not so violently, my dear fellow. It's pretty sickening, of course; but till you know who he is, you can't knock him down."

"Well, then, tell me who he is."

"That's just what I'd like to know myself. It's some one in Perthshire."

"How do you know?" demanded Frank.

He controlled his voice, but in his eyes burned a light that boded ill for his brother's rival when he caught him.

"Well, you can judge for yourself how I know. Andrew noticed the change in Ellen's manner the first time he saw her after she'd been staying with us. The only fellow she met in Edinburgh was yourself, so it must be some one in Perthshire."

The militant Highlander fell back in his chair with a gasp, and the light of battle died out of his eyes.

"Don't you agree with me?" asked his father.

"I—er—I don't know," he stammered.

Mr. Walkingshaw had grown none the less shrewd as

his weight of years was lightened.

"Eh?" he demanded quickly, "what do you know about it? Be perfectly frank with me."

"But why should you think that—er—I—"

"Tell me this—do you know of any one who's been paying attention to Ellen Berstoun?"

Poor Frank's color grew deeper and deeper.

"There—there was one fellow, I'm ashamed to say."

"Ashamed? Why should you be ash—" Mr. Walkingshaw broke off suddenly and gazed at his son with very wide-open eyes. "Frank—it was yourself!"

The treacherous brother hung his head. And then, in the depths of his penitence, he heard these extraordinary words—

"My dear, dear chap, this is almost too good to be true!"

"Too *good*!" gasped Frank.

"What did you do—kiss her?"

"No, no; not so bad as that!"

"You let her know, though? There's no mistake about that, eh?"

"I'm afraid I did."

His father took his hand.

"She is yours," said he.

"*Mine?* But, my dear father, she is Andrew's!"

"She was; but he's such a perfect sumph, I'm thankful she's got quit of him."

"What! Is it broken off?"

"It will be."

"An engagement?"

"What's an engagement? Speaking as a lawyer of many years' standing, I may tell you candidly that engagements, and agreements, and bargains are simply devices for keeping rascals from swindling one another. If honest men agree, they don't need a stamped bit of paper; and if they disagree, where's the point in leashing them together, like a couple of growling dogs? And the case is a thousand times stronger when it comes to a man and a girl. I was only afraid I should lose a charming daughter-in-law, and now you've taken that weight off my mind. I can't tell you how happy I feel!"

Frank's young face was grave and his candid eyes looked straight at his father.

"Look here," he replied, "I'm going to do the straight thing by Andrew. I don't know that I've ever loved him as much as I ought, but that's all the more reason why I shouldn't chisel him now."

"Oh, that's your military idea of discipline and all the rest of it; but let me tell you, falling in love is a different kind of thing from forming fours."

For the first time the young soldier clearly disapproved of his father's rejuvenation.

"Duty is duty," he persisted, "and I tell you honestly I'm not going to sneak in behind my brother's back."

"Is Ellen to have nothing to say in the matter? Do you propose to marry her to the man she doesn't love, instead of the man she does, without so much as giving her the choice?"

The soldier met this flank attack by a change of front.

"But Andrew has the means to marry her, and I've not."

"I'll give you the means," said his father.

Frank began to realize that Duty was in a very tight corner.

"But I haven't any grounds whatever for thinking that Ellen cares for me."

"I have."

"You'll have to convince *me*."

"Is it not clearly your duty to settle that point first?"

Frank hesitated.

"Well—perhaps it is."

The crafty strategist smiled.

"We'll settle it!"

"When?"

"At once. Where's a time-table?"

"But look here, my dear father, there's the question of honor to be settled after that."

"After that—exactly; I'm with you all the way. But in the meanwhile, first get this into your head. An

engagement is an affair of two hearts, not of two pockets or two heads. If the hearts are off, the bargain's off. That's the whole ethics of an engagement. And let me tell you I'm not without some experience."

"Heriot!" exclaimed a familiar voice.

The W.S. looked round with a start. There, through the middle of the hall, attired in a most becoming traveling coat of fur, advanced the sympathetic widow.

"My dear Madge!" cried her betrothed.

Almost in the same instant his off eye signaled to his son a hurried but expressive warning.

CHAPTER XIII

The hour was late, but in spite of Heriot's kindly suggestion that the rapture he anticipated from her conversation should be postponed till she had recovered from the fatigues of her journey, his fiancée unselfishly preferred to recompense him immediately for his prolonged deprivation of her society. He acceded at once to her wishes, with the most amiable air imaginable.

"And now, my dear Madge," said he, when they were seated in a secluded corner of the lounge, "tell me all your news. In the first place, how's my own precious?"

"I am very well, thank you," replied the lady, a little

coolly.

"Delighted to hear it!"

"You could, of course, have discovered it sooner by simply writing to inquire," she pointed out, with the same air.

"But I did, my dear girl, I did."

"Once."

"Only once, was it? Now, I could have sworn it was twice."

"And did you think twice was often enough?"

"Well, you see, Madge," he explained, "we got engaged in such a deuce of a hurry, and I had to rush off next morning, and so on. I didn't have time to ask you how often you wished me to write."

"Didn't my last two unanswered letters give you any idea on the subject?"

"Two letters, Madge? Now, do you know, I could have sworn it was only one."

She looked at him steadily.

"Heriot, what is the meaning of your conduct?"

"To what points in it do you refer, my dear?"

"I may tell you I have heard from Charlie Munro."

It was remarkable how quickly Mr. Walkingshaw had developed. That reputation he still clung to when he saw her last was no longer a brake upon his downward career.

"Poor old Charlie!" he laughed. "By Jove, Madge, I jolly well hoisted him with his own thingamajig!"

She regarded him stonily.

"And what of the business you went to see him about?"

"Did I say I was going to see him on business?"

"You did!"

"Oh, no, no, my dear girl; you must have misunderstood me. Of course, it was natural enough; we were both rather carried away by our feelings that night, weren't we, Madge?"

He took her hand and pressed it affectionately, but it made no response.

"Why didn't you come to see me when you were in Edinburgh?" she inquired.

"I ought to have," he answered, with an expression of the sincerest apology. "Yes, I suppose I ought to have."

"You suppose! Didn't it occur to you at the time?"

"Oh, yes, it occurred. In fact, my difficulty was to keep myself away from you."

"May I ask why it was necessary to make the effort?"

"Well, the fact is," he explained, "I had a little scheme for Jean which I wanted to keep a secret—"

"And you couldn't trust me!" she interrupted.

"A charming woman and a secret?" he smiled archly.

"My dear girl, your rosy lips would have gone chatter, chatter, chatter all over the town!"

She snatched her hand away with some degree of violence.

"You talk like an idiot!" she replied.

"My dear Madge! This is your own Heriot?"

She took out a little handkerchief of lace and gently touched first one eye and then the other.

"I don't believe you love me!"

Heriot's kind heart was sincerely moved.

"I adore you!"

A faint smile at last appeared upon her face.

"How can you possibly when you go on like this?"

"Like what?"

The smile died away and a quick frown took its place.

"Heriot! Do you mean to say you think your behavior has looked like loving me?"

"It's the heart that counts, Madge, not the behavior," he assured her.

She sat up in her chair with an air of decision.

"The behavior does count; so please don't talk as though you thought I was a fool. For your own sake, for the sake of your reputation and your family, you've got to come back with me to-morrow!"

He seized her hand.

"My dear Madge, that's just what I meant to do."

He rose and bent over her with every symptom of affection.

"And now you must really go to bed. You're looking tired; really you are. It quite distresses me."

She still kept her seat.

"You promise to come with me?"

"I assure you I've got to come."

"I must have your promise."

He looked hurt.

"Hang it, Madge, can't you trust me?"

"No, I cannot. Give me your promise."

His air of affection decidedly diminished, but he gave the pledge—

"I promise to go north to-morrow."

"I can really trust you?"

He began to frown.

"Implicitly."

She rose at last, and they went together towards the lift.

"When do you breakfast?" she asked.

He answered somewhat stiffly—

"There is no necessity of starting before two o'clock. Breakfast when you like."

"We shall say ten o'clock, then."

"That is fairly late, isn't it?"

"You forget that I have had a tiring day, and perhaps you hardly realize whose conduct has tired me. Good-night."

"Good-night," he replied in an unimpassioned voice.

As the widow ascended she told herself that she had adopted entirely the right attitude. She might relent to-morrow, but till then it was well he should be deprived of the sunshine of her smiles.

Next morning at the hour of 10:15 she stepped out of the lift to find Jean waiting in the hall. She greeted Mrs. Dunbar with a markedly composed air.

"I hope you won't mind breakfasting alone?" she said.

It was evident that the widow did mind.

"Do you mean to say your father has actually breakfasted without me?"

"Unfortunately, he had to."

"Had to!"

"He and Frank found they must catch the ten o'clock train."

Mrs. Dunbar gasped.

"He—has gone?"

"Yes."

"But he promised to go with me!"

"I understood him to say," said Jean quietly, "that he

had merely promised to go north."

"Oh, indeed! Then he has run away?"

"From whom?" asked Jean demurely.

The widow bit her lip.

"I consider his conduct simply disgraceful—"

Jean interrupted her quickly—

"I had rather not discuss my father's conduct. Don't let me keep you from breakfast."

Mrs. Dunbar remained standing in silence, a magnificent statue of displeasure. In a moment she inquired—

"And why are you waiting here?"

"Father thought you might like my company on the journey."

"How very thoughtful of him! Then you go at two?"

"Yes."

The widow gazed at her intently.

"I can hardly believe this of Heriot. Is all this his own idea?"

Jean flushed slightly, but answered as demurely as ever—

"It is his wish."

"Ah, I see!" exclaimed Mrs. Dunbar bitterly, "I thought there was a woman's hand in this affair."

"Do you mean another woman's hand?"

The injured lady began uneasily to realize that there was a fresh factor in the situation. But who would have dreamt of little Jean Walkingshaw being dangerous? As Madge traveled north that afternoon, uncompromisingly secluded behind a lady's journal, she could not get out of her head the uncomfortable fancy that her trim, fair-haired escort sat like a protecting deity (heathen and sinister) between Heriot and all who desired, even with the most loving purpose, to chasten his faults and moderate the exuberance of his too virile spirit.

Jean herself was warmly conscious that some such duty was surely laid upon her. With what less reward could she repay all he had done for her? It will be discovered, however, from the succeeding instalment of facts, that though the guardian angel of Heriot Walkingshaw might go the pace with him thus far, it would probably have been beyond the power even of a genuinely celestial spirit to keep at his shoulder when he spurted.

PART IV

CHAPTER I

Archibald Berstoun of that ilk ("of y' ilk" was the form that most delicately tickled his palate) still dwelt in the fortalice built by his ancestors at a time when to the average Scot the national tartan

suggested but an alien barbarian who stole his cattle; and the national bagpipe, the national heather, and the national whisky were merely the noise the brute made, the cover that preserved him from the gallows, and the stuff that gave you your one chance of catching him asleep.

(A few reflections on the whirligig of time were here inserted, but have since been omitted, as they were found to occur in a modified form elsewhere.)

The castle stood in the lowland part of Perthshire, and was erected by the second of that ilk as a tribute to the dexterity with which his highland neighbors had removed the effects and cut the throat of the first. It was a sober and simple building, steep-roofed and battlemented at the top, turreted at the angles, and pierced with a few narrow windows so irregularly scattered about its gray harled walls as to suggest that no two rooms could possibly be on the same level. Naturally, the architectural genius who illumines the quiet annals of every landed family had knocked out a number of French windows into the lawn and constructed the first story of a Chinese pagoda, in which he proposed to store Etruscan curios with an aviary above; but his descendants had fortunately lacked the funds to complete these improvements. In fact, the stump of the pagoda was now so entirely overgrown with ivy that it had become the traditional fortress of Agricola.

This ancient habitation of a hard-fighting race was framed on two sides by a garden that looked as old as the walls which towered above it, and was well-nigh as simple and sober. Dark clipped yews, and smooth green grass, and graceful old-world flowers were its chief and sufficient ingredients. The genius

who designed the pagoda had not yet turned his attention to the garden when Providence checked his career.

A wood of black Scotch firs stretched for a long way beyond this pleasant garden, and struck a stern northern note befitting the gnarled battlements; while, nearer the house, gray beech stems towered out of the brown dead leaves below up to the brown live buds a hundred feet nearer the clouds.

On the remaining two sides of the castle you were not supposed to bestow attention, since after the old custom the home farm approached more closely than is fashionable nowadays; though to the curious they were the sides best worth attention, owing to the cultured pagoda-builder having deemed it beneath his dignity to molest them.

One afternoon in early spring Ellen Berstoun walked slowly down a sheltered garden path. She had been singularly moody of late—so distressed, indeed, and so little like a lucky girl whose wedding might be fixed for any day she chose to name, that her five unmarried sisters held many private debates on the causes of her conduct. The three next to her in years expressed grave apprehensions lest the very fairly creditable marriage arranged for her should after all fall through. Ellen was not treating Andrew well, they complained; while on the other hand, the two youngest, being as yet irresponsibly romantic, declared vigorously that they had sooner dear Ellen remained single to the end of her days than introduced such a long-lipped, fat-cheeked brother-in-law into the family.

It was a part of poor Ellen's burden that she was acutely conscious of the duty which her parents and

all her aunts assured her she owed these sisters. But, on the other hand, to share the remainder of her existence with Andrew Walkingshaw—There rose vividly a picture of that most respectable of partners, and the emotion attendant on this vision drew from her a sigh that ought to have convinced the most skeptical she was very hard hit indeed.

It was at this moment that she spied a lad approaching from the house.

"Well, Jimmy?" she inquired.

With an appearance of some caution, he handed her a note.

"It was to be gi'en to yoursel' privately, miss," he said mysteriously, and turned to go.

"Is there no answer?" she asked.

"He said I wasna to bide for an answer."

He hurried off as though his directions had been peremptory, and Ellen opened the letter. It was written upon the notepaper of a local inn, and if she was surprised to discover the writer, she was still more astonished by the contents.

"MY DEAR ELLEN," it ran, "I should take it as a very great favor indeed if you would come immediately on receiving this and meet me at the farther end of the wood below your garden. Follow the path, and you will find me waiting for you. The matter is of such importance that I make no apologies for suggesting this romantic proceeding!—With love, yours affectionately,

"J. HERIOT WALKINGSHAW.

"P.S.—Don't say a word to one of your family. Secrecy is absolutely essential."

Ellen stood lost in perplexity. Rumors had reached her of Mr. Walkingshaw's recent eccentricity. The request was entirely out of keeping with all her previous acquaintance with him; that point of exclamation after "romantic proceeding" struck her as uncomfortably dissimilar to his usual methods of composition. Ought she not to consult one of her parents, or at least a sister? And yet the postscript was too explicit to be neglected.

For a few minutes she hesitated. Then she made up her mind; her warm heart could not bear to disappoint anybody; and besides, Mr. Heriot Walkingshaw, however odd his conduct might have been lately was such a pompously respectable—indeed venerable—old gentleman that a maiden might surely trust herself with him alone, even in a grove of trees. And so, in a furtive and backward-glancing manner, she stole into the wood. It was an unusual way of approaching one's father's man of business and one's financé's parent, but Ellen consoled herself by the reflection that an experienced

Writer to the Signet should best know how these things were done.

She hurried down a narrow, winding glade, lined by countless slender columns supporting far overhead a roof of millions of dark green needles swaying and murmuring in the breeze. Suddenly sunshine and green fields filled the opening of the glade, and as suddenly a tall gentleman stepped from behind a tree and politely raised a fashionable felt hat. In all essential features he was the image of Mr. Heriot Walkingshaw, only that he was so very much younger.

"Well, my dear Ellen!" he exclaimed heartily.

She stared at him, too amazed for speech.

"Am I really so changed already?" he inquired with a smile. "That shows the beneficial effect of seeing you."

Even though his manner had altered as much as his appearance, she found the change so agreeable that she overlooked its strangeness. She smiled back at him.

"I am glad to see you looking so well," she said.

He beamed upon her in what he sincerely meant for a paternal manner.

"You, my dear child, look ripping! My hat, you are pretty! Ellen dear, my only wish is to make you as happy as you are bonny."

She looked at him searchingly, and her voice had a note of guarded alarm.

"What do you mean?"

His air became sympathy itself.

"My dear girl, I have been greatly distressed to hear that all has not been going smoothly with you and Andrew."

She gave him a quick glance and then looked away.

"Indeed!" she answered a little coldly. "Who told you that?"

"I can read it in my son's altered health."

She looked at him in surprise, but without anxiety.

"I didn't know there was anything the matter with him."

"He had to hasten up to London for a change of air."

"I hope it did him good," she said indifferently.

"My dear girl, have you no wish to hurry to his bedside?"

"I'm afraid I shouldn't be any good if I did."

"And you wouldn't find him in bed, either," smiled Mr. Walkingshaw, with a change of manner. "No, no, Ellen; you needn't pretend you're in love with Andrew if that's all the concern you feel. And I may tell you at once that he's as tough as ever, and as great a fool. The fellow is totally unworthy of you, so don't you worry your head about him any longer."

He bent over her confidentially.

"Supposing some one were to cut him out, eh?"

"Some one—" she stammered. "Who?"

"Guess!" he smiled.

She did guess; and it was a shocking surmise.

"I—I have no idea," she fibbed.

"Oh, come now, hang it, look me in the eye and repeat that!"

For an instant, she looked into that roguish eye, and her worst suspicions were confirmed.

"Mr. Walkingshaw," she answered, with trembling candor, "I feel very much honored, but really I must ask you not to—not to say anything more. Our ages —oh, everything—I couldn't! I had better go back now."

The philanthropic father gasped.

"Ellen! stop! My dear child, I don't mean myself! Good heavens, I am far too old for a young girl like you!"

Yet it was at that moment that he suddenly realized he wasn't.

"Then—then what—" she began, and stopped, overwhelmed with confusion.

Hurriedly he endeavored to put things once more upon a paternal footing.

"My fault, my dear Ellen, my fault entirely. Naturally you thought—er—yes, yes, it was quite natural. I—I put it badly. I didn't think what I was saying. The fact is, I've been"—a brilliant inspiration suddenly illumined the chaos of his mind—"I've been so troubled about poor Frank!"

Her expression altogether changed.

"What's the matter?" she exclaimed.

His mind calmed down. Composing his countenance, he shook his head sadly.

"I don't think he'll get over it."

She laid her hand upon his arm with a quick, involuntary gesture.

"But what has happened? Tell me!"

The wisdom of age and the shrewdness of youth twinkled together in Mr. Walkingshaw's eye, but he managed to retain a decorously solemn air.

"You are really concerned this time?"

"Of course! I—I mean, naturally."

He drew her hand through his arm and led her along the fringe of the pine woods.

"Come and see," he said gently. "Poor boy he's had a bad fall."

"What! Is he here—with you?"

"Yes—yes," he answered, with an absent and melancholy air.

He led her a few paces into the trees, and there, seated on a fallen trunk, they saw the victim of fate smoking a cigarette with a meditative air. He sprang to his feet with a light in his eye that might have been the result of some acute disaster, but scarcely looked like it.

"Frank, my boy," said his father, "I have just been

explaining to Ellen that you have fallen"—he turned to the girl with a merry air—"in love!" he chuckled, and the next moment they were listening to his flying footsteps and looking at one another.

CHAPTER II

High overhead the pines murmured gently, and Mr. Walkingshaw, strolling through the quiet colonnades below in solitude and shade, heard the strangest messages whispered down by those riotous tree-tops. He was no longer even middle-aged! Or at least his heart certainly was not. It seemed to keep a decade or so younger than his body, and Heaven knew that was growing younger fast enough! At this rate how much longer could he play the beneficent parent? Good Lord, he had jolly nearly fallen head over ears in love with sweet Ellen Berstoun in the course of five minutes' conversation! She wasn't a day too old for Heriot W. That's to say, he could do with a lassie of that age fine, and, by Gad, he shouldn't wonder but Ellen mightn't have rather cottoned to him if her heart had been free. She looked deuced coy when she thought he was proposing. Yes, a girl like Ellen was the ticket for him. But in that case, what about Madge?

For several minutes Mr. Walkingshaw stood very solemnly studying the bark on an entirely ordinary pine, concluding his scrutiny by hitting it a sharp smack with his walking-stick and turning away from the sight of it with apparent distaste. However, a minute or two later he seemed to find one he liked

better, for he placed his back against it, removed his hat, and gazed upwards at the softly murmuring branches. Once more their whispers made him smile. Sufficient for the day were the difficulties thereof! That was the way to look at it. Meanwhile, the spring was young, and the little flowers in the wood were young, and the blue sky that showed in peeps through the swinging tree-tops looked as young as any of them, and certainly it was a young and lusty breeze that swayed them. By Jingo, what excellent company they all were for him!

And then he heard another murmuring sound, coming this time from behind him. He held his breath and caught the words—

"Ellen! I love you—I love you!"

He peeped round the tree, and for an instant saw them. A most gratifying tribute to his diplomacy—but devilish disturbing to a young fellow without a girl! Hurriedly he snapped a twig; he snapped another; he broke a branch; he whistled, he coughed, he shouted. And then they looked up, vaguely surprised to find there was another person in the world.

"Well, Frank," said his father, as they walked back together towards their inn, "are you not feeling happy now, my boy, eh?"

"Happy!" exclaimed Frank. "I'm stupefied with happiness!"

As Heriot Walkingshaw strode between the spring breeze and the murmuring pines, his son's arm through his, listening to his gratitude and Ellen's praises, he too felt happier than ever before in his

life. What a lot of pleasure he had learned how to give. And the way to give it was so simple once you found it out. Apparently you had merely to get in sympathy with people, and then do the things which naturally, under those circumstances, you would both like to be done. There was really nothing in it at all; still, it was jolly well worth doing.

Only as they neared the inn did a qualm begin to trouble Frank.

"It's deuced rough luck on Andrew, losing that girl," he said suddenly. "Hang it, it would kill *me*!"

"It's only losing his money that'll ever hurt Andrew," replied his father cheerfully. "Don't you worry about what he'll say."

Unfortunately, Mr. Walkingshaw forgot that the provision for this happy marriage was, in fact, coming indirectly from Andrew's pocket. Even the youngest of us cannot foresee everything, or Heriot would not have been humming "Gin a laddie kiss a lassie," quite so lightheartedly.

"I must say I funk having it out with him," remarked Frank.

"Just you leave it all to me. I'm a match for Andrew any day."

It would have been well if Mr. Walkingshaw had "touched wood" as he made this vaunt; but at that moment his confidence was so serene that he felt master of any emergency conceivable by man.

"Andrew's not the mate for Ellen," he said presently. "The young are for each other, Frank; that's the law of nature."

He smiled to himself.

"I learnt that this afternoon. By Jove, what a pretty girl Ellen is!"

And then again his young heart remembered the sympathetic widow, and he stopped smiling.

CHAPTER III

The backbone of our country is that band of civic heroes who, when turmoil rages and disaster threatens, are the last men to desert the desk. In this glorious company Andrew Walkingshaw was numbered. His father might tear up and down the country like a disreputable whirlwind, his widowed relative fume and plot, his sister disgrace the family by an unsuitable engagement, his betrothed leave his affectionate letters unanswered, his own soul writhe in decorous anguish at these calamities, but Casabianca himself was not more faithful to his post than he. It is true, indeed, that he had once tried the alternative policy and chased that cyclone, but he had taken to heart the lesson, and thenceforth closed his ears to disquieting rumors, his eyes to distressing symptoms, and went about his work, if possible, more conscientiously than ever. That was the proper way to get through business—conscientiously. He was sickened with the people (clients of some eminence, but evidently with a screw loose) who kept deferring their more important concerns till the senior partner returned with his infernal headlong methods. Let them wait if they liked! Let them take

their business elsewhere if they were such fools! Deliberately and calmly *he* had washed his hands of his senior partner. That was the end of him so far as he was concerned, said Andrew to himself. But alas! you may wash your hands of a tornado, but supposing it retorts by blowing down your house?

It was about nine in the evening, and he sat by himself, severely scrutinizing the pleadings drawn up by his clerk for a forthcoming case, connected with so large a sum of money that it was a pleasure merely to read the imposing figures. The ladies were upstairs in the drawing-room. So long as Mrs. Dunbar was among them, he was not likely to show his face *there*.

The door opened, and he turned, frowning at the interruption, and then sprang up with a troubled eye. It was his father certainly; but what a remarkable change since he had seen him last! For the first time Andrew realized the full enormity of his conduct in growing younger. His very appearance had become a crying scandal.

"Sweating away at your old papers?" inquired Heriot pleasantly.

Andrew stiffly resumed his seat.

"Yes, I am busy," he replied, and took up the pleadings again.

But his father ignored the hint. Straddling comfortably before the fire, he remarked—

"Frank and I have been up to Perthshire."

Andrew looked up quickly, but merely answered—

"Oh, indeed?"

"We've been seeing Ellen."

"What about?"

Mr. Walkingshaw threw himself into a chair.

"My boy," said he, with the air of friendly commiseration which he felt that the occasion undoubtedly demanded, "I find I was right about your rival."

Andrew remained calm, though not quite so calm as before.

"Do you mean there's some one else after her?"

"He's got her."

The calm departed.

"Got! What the deuce d'ye mean?"

"She has chosen another, Andrew."

"Chosen! But she's no choice left her. She's engaged to me."

"She was engaged to you. She's now engaged to him."

"To *him*? Who the dev—er—what are you driving at? Who's the man?"

"Frank."

"Frank!"

Andrew stared at his father incredulously.

"I don't believe a word of it."

"Well, you may ask Frank if you like; but I assure you you can take my word for it."

It was characteristic of Andrew's robust mind that, instead of wasting time in noisy vaporings and sentimental sorrow, it seized at once the weak point in the case.

"But he can't afford to marry."

"Oh, I'll see to that."

"*You'll* see!" shouted Andrew. "Do you mean to say *you've* had a finger in the pie?"

"Four fingers and a thumb," smiled his parent.

Once more Andrew, without waste of words in expostulation or commentary, summarized the situation in a sentence—

"This is fair damnable!"

"Come, come, my dear fellow," said Mr. Walkingshaw soothingly. "I owe you an explanation, of course, but when you've heard it, I know you'll agree I've done the right thing."

"An explanation!" exclaimed Andrew sardonically. "Go on, let's hear it."

"I can give you the gist of it in a sentence: she loves Frank, and she doesn't love you. Now, in that case, which of you ought she to marry?"

"That's nothing to do with it—"

"What! love's nothing to do with marriage?"

"When a woman's once engaged, she's got to

implement her promise."

"Whether it makes her happy or miserable?"

"Who was miserable, I'd like to know?"

"Ellen."

"It's the first I've heard of it."

"Do you mean to say you couldn't see it for yourself?"

"No, I could not; and even if she was, there's not the shadow of an excuse for your conduct. You're just making a mess of everything you meddle with. Getting me jilted like this! What do you suppose people will say? What'll they be thinking of me? Oh, good Lord!"

The unhappy young man brooded somberly. Mr. Walkingshaw lit a cigar, and then settled himself down to remove by gentle argument the cloud that temporarily obscured his son's serenity.

"Just look at the thing for a moment in a quiet and reasonable light, Andrew. Happiness, as you are well aware, is the chief aim of humanity. Damn it, our religion teaches us that—or practically that. A kind of warm and amiable gleefulness—that's the ideal. Now, how can a young girl like Ellen be happy or gleeful married to a sober old codger like you, eh? Man, the thing's clean impossible. She's no more suited to you than a lace cover to a coal-scuttle. Well, then what's the obvious thing to do? Hand her over to a brisk young fellow who can do her justice, of course. Besides, just think of your own brother pining away in the—what do they call it?—torrid zone, all for love of a girl who's pining away for love of him. The thing's totally illogical. A society of

hedgehogs would have more sense than to allow an arrangement like that. You see my point now, don't you?"

"I've heard you say with your own lips," retorted Andrew, "that all a girl required was a comfortable home and a husband who knew his own mind."

"But you must remember," explained his father, "I was an old fool then."

Andrew sprang to his feet with a wry and bitter face.

"You certainly haven't the qualities of age now. I never heard such daft-like rubbish in my life. For Heaven's sake, just try to use any common sense you've got left. Frank will never have enough money to keep her properly."

"Ah, but naturally I mean to alter my arrangements."

Gradually the full possibilities of the situation were revealing themselves to the well-regulated mind of the junior partner.

"You mean to change your will?"

"I do."

Yet another horrid possibility showed its head.

"And are you going to alter Jean's share too, so that this precious Vernon fellow may have something to squander?"

"Something respectable to live on," corrected his parent. "You mustn't starve art, you know."

Andrew stared at him in silence, and when he spoke, it was with the air of a much-wronged worm which

has deliberately resolved to turn at last.

"I'm not wanting any of your Ellen Berstouns. If she's played this trick on me, that's enough of her. But I tell you plainly I'm not going to let you rob me to keep a pack of worthless painters and people out of the gutter, without taking some steps. I warn you of that."

"My dear Andrew," said his father reproachfully, "that's hardly the attitude of a professing Christian. Just think, now; is it? You'll easily find a decent, quiet woman with a bit of money and no objection to hearing every day for an hour or two how you've been worried by your clients and swindled by your father, and I do honestly believe you'll get as near happiness as you're capable of. That's common sense, now; isn't it?"

The slamming of the door answered him.

"What a sulky fellow he is!" said Heriot to himself.

Yet so conscious was he of the rectitude of his intentions, and so confiding had his disposition grown, that it never crossed his mind to beware of an infuriated lawyer. Besides, when Andrew had slept over it, he would surely realize how unanswerable were his father's arguments.

"We'll see the old stick-in-the-mud dancing at Frank's wedding!" thought he. "There's no vice in Andrew; only a bit of obstinacy. It's all bark and no bite with him."

With these amiable reflections he speedily consoled himself for the discomfort of any little temporary friction. And then the door opened gently.

CHAPTER IV

"I heard you had come back again," said Mrs. Dunbar.

She closed the door as gently as she had opened it. The action pathetically expressed the quiet sorrow of a much-wronged woman's heart.

"Yes," said Heriot gallantly, "I'm back again to Scotland, home and beauty. Ha, ha! Now that was quite pretty, wasn't it?"

But her black eyes declined to sparkle, as she glided silently to a chair. Out of the corner of his own eye her lover looked at her critically.

"I'm delighted to see you again, Madge," he went on; but his words had a hollow ring, and his eye continued to express more doubt than passion.

"Have you no apology to offer me?" she inquired, with the same ominous calm.

"For what, my dear lady?"

She started a little and glanced at him apprehensively. "My dear lady" hardly indicated love's divinest frenzy.

"For treating me shamefully!"

"This is strong language," he smiled indulgently. "Tell me now, I say, just tell me what I've done."

Thus invited, the lady described his conduct in

leaving her alone and unprotected in a London hotel, to the neglect of his affectionate assurances and the shame and confusion of herself, in language which did no more than justice to the theme.

"But I left Jean to look after you," he protested.

"When I want your daughter to look after me I shall ask you for her assistance," she replied tartly. "You broke your word to me, and you can't deny it."

"I do deny it," he replied, with dignity. "I told you I should travel north—"

"Oh!" she interrupted, with scathing contempt, "you were very straightforward and gentlemanly, I know!"

He looked at her ever more critically. A recollection of Ellen and the pine-wood returned forcibly.

"Put it as you will," he replied philosophically, and turned towards the fire.

She watched him jealously.

"But why did you run away?" she persisted. "Where have you been since? Heriot, I insist upon knowing that—I insist!"

She rose and came towards him. He took her hand and pressed it gently.

"I shall tell you all," he said, as he led her back to her chair and drew another towards it. When they were about three feet apart he sat down himself and bent confidentially towards her. Yet he did not attempt to bridge entirely the intervening space.

"I have been up to Perthshire," he began, "assisting dear Ellen Berstoun to break off her engagement

with Andrew."

Mrs. Dunbar sat up with a much more alert expression.

"I am glad to hear it," she said, with decision.

"I discovered that Frank and she loved one another. I am very glad to say he is now engaged to her instead."

She smiled at last.

"Do tell me what Andrew said!"

He shook his head.

"I'm afraid he is somewhat unreasonably annoyed."

She smiled more brightly still.

"How very good for him! Really, Heriot, you have done a very sensible thing indeed."

Heriot smiled back.

"It seemed to me," said he, "that there was really too much disparity in years. The young should marry the young, Madge."

"I agree with you entirely."

It was his smile that now seemed to indicate an increasing satisfaction.

"You agree also that under those circumstances it is no longer the duty of two people to marry, even if they have unfortunately become engaged?"

"I think it would only lead to wretchedness if they did. Honestly, I don't feel in the least sorry for

Andrew. In fact, I thoroughly agree that people ought to have their engagements broken off for them if they haven't the sense to see they are unsuitable for themselves."

Heriot received this assurance with evident pleasure. His manner grew more confidential still.

"Madge," he said, "I think it is time I made you a very serious confession."

Her smile departed.

"You may have noticed," he continued, "a certain bloom, so to speak, upon me, a sort of freshness, and so on. Madge, it is the bloom of youth."

She grew uneasy.

"Oh, really?"

"It is a literal, physical fact. I am rapidly approaching thirty."

She moved into the farthest corner of her chair, but made no other comment.

"You will thus see that it is merely a question of time before there will be an even greater disparity of years between you and me than between Ellen and Andrew."

Her expression changed entirely.

"Heriot!" she exclaimed indignantly.

"Yes, Madge, I grieve deeply to resign the hopes of happiness I had formed on a life spent in your society, but alas! I must. Your adult charms cannot be thrown away upon an unappreciative youth; it

would be a tragedy."

"You are many years older than I!"

"I was a short time ago, but to-day we are roughly speaking, twins—though with this difference, that as I am looking forward to a strenuous youth, and you to a handsome old age, naturally I feel a chicken compared with you. But then think of the next year or two, when I shall perhaps be playing football, and you will find it no longer possible to keep your gray hairs so artistically brushed beneath your black tresses: think of that, Madge!"

"Are you out of your mind?" she gasped.

"On the contrary, I have never been clearer-headed in my life."

"Then," she exclaimed wrathfully, "you are merely inventing a ridiculous fable to excuse your shuffling out of your engagement!"

"My dear lady," he replied pacifically, "shall I jump over this chair to convince you?"

"*Nothing* would convince me."

"Ah," he said, with a friendly smile, "I see that you want to have me whether I'm a suitable mate or not, whether my feelings have changed—"

"I certainly do not!" she interrupted.

"Then in that case shall we call it off?"

He rose and picked up an evening paper.

She tried the resource of tears. The spectacle of a handsome woman weeping had brought him temporarily to his senses once before. But this time,

though his manner was as kind as any widow could desire, his words brought the unfortunate lady no more consolation than his conduct.

"My dear Madge, just look at the thing sensibly. Surely you are old enough by this time to take a practical view of what after all is a very simple situation. You laid down the law yourself not five minutes ago, and laid it down very justly. If two people are unsuitably mated, the engagement should be broken off. Very well; just try to realize for a moment what it means to marry a man who is getting fuller and fuller of beans all the time—at your age, mark you. The fact is, we are just like two trains rushing in opposite directions. For a moment we may be side by side, and then—whit!—we have passed each other and are getting a couple of miles farther apart every minute."

Even this graphic allegory failed to dry her tears.

"You are deserting me—you are breaking my heart!" she wailed.

"Hush, hush," he answered soothingly; "on the contrary, I am sparing you—sparing you no end of anxiety."

She looked at him like a tragedy queen.

"Have you no thought of how my reputation will suffer, Heriot?"

"How can it suffer? Nobody knows we've been engaged."

"Do you suppose they haven't guessed?"

"Not from anything I've said or done, I can assure you."

She sprang up indignantly.

"Have you no sense of honor?"

"Look here," he answered, with his most ingratiating manner, "I'll be a son to you, Madge—an affectionate, dutiful—"

"You coward!" she cried.

Heriot found himself alone in his library with his engagement satisfactorily ended.

CHAPTER V

Andrew had retired to the dining-room. Once the day's eating was over, this apartment, with its vast space of dignified gloom, its black marble mantelpiece, and the cloth of indigo plushette which now covered the table, made the most congenial refuge conceivable. His thoughts were in exact harmony with everything there, from the Venetian blinds to the portrait of his great-grandmother. The only discordant element was the presence of a few errant bread-crumbs, and happily they were under the table.

It was to this lair that he was tracked by Madge Dunbar. She never paused to ask if she disturbed him, or gave him any chance of protest, but advancing straight up to him, exclaimed—

"Your father is off his head!"

The junior partner eyed her warily, divided between

suspicion and a glow of sympathy with her opinion.

"What has he done now?" he inquired gloomily.

"He has treated me exactly as he has treated you!"

The sympathy deepened; the suspicion began to ooze away; but all he remarked was, "Oh?"

He was indeed a magnificently cautious man.

"What can we do?" she cried.

Andrew scrutinized her carefully. She might be fibbing; she might be up to some of her tricks again; this might even be a move arranged with his father. One could not be too prudent.

"What do you propose to do?" he asked.

"Bring him to his senses if it's possible: if not—Oh, Andrew, his conduct is infamous! I don't care what we do to punish—I mean to restrain him."

At last, after many days' abstinence, the junior partner smiled. It was not a very wide, nor in the least a merry smile; his cheeks bulged only slightly under its gentle pressure, and the satisfaction which smiles traditionally notify seemed savored with a squeeze or two of lemon. But it marked the beginning of a new coalition, an ominous disturbance of the balance of power.

"That is exactly the point I have under consideration myself," he said. "The difficulty is, how is it to be managed?"

She seated herself within twelve feet of him, and yet he did not shrink from her now with modest

mistrust.

"It seems to me perfectly obvious what we should do. Just offer him an alternative."

"What alternative?" asked Andrew.

Meanwhile, Mr. Walkingshaw was spending one of the happiest evenings he remembered. There was indeed some slight constraint in the drawing-room so long as his sister remained there, but when, after a series of sighs which punctuated some twenty minutes' pointed silence, she at last bade them a depressed good-night, the three happy lovers gave rein to their hearts. Heriot gave the loosest rein of all. It almost seemed as if a lover set at liberty was even happier than a lover just engaged. He had that air of animated relief noticeable in the escaped victims of a conscientious dentist. As for his children, they adored him little less than they adored two other people who were not there.

Yet once or twice Jean fell thoughtful. At last she said—

"I wonder whether we ought to go out to the Comyns' to-morrow after all?"

"My dear girl, why not? You'll have a very pleasant time there; and anyhow, it's too late to write and tell them you aren't coming."

"We could wire in the morning," she said. "Frank, do you think we ought to go?"

He looked a little surprised, but answered readily,

"Not if you don't want to."

"But why not go?" their father repeated.

She hesitated. "Are you quite sure Andrew and Madge won't—won't try to be unpleasant?"

"Let them try if they like!" laughed Heriot. "But I assure you, my dear girl, I was so reasonable—so unanswerable, in fact—that they simply can't feel annoyed for more than a few hours. Hang it, they are very nice good people at heart. Just give 'em time to let the proper point of view sink in, and they'll be chirpy as sparrows again. Besides, what good could you do by staying at home? The Comyns have a nice place; you'll have a capital time. I insist on your going."

"Very well, then," said Jean.

Yet she could hardly picture Andrew and her cousin quite as chirpy as sparrows.

And all this time, beneath the very floor of the room where they laughed, the plans of the coalition ripened.

CHAPTER VI

In the course of breakfast upon the following morning, Heriot startled his junior partner by announcing his intention of putting in a strenuous day's work at the office. Andrew exchanged a curious glance with Mrs. Dunbar, and then merely inquired —

"When will you be back?"

"Four o'clock," said Heriot cheerfully. "Quite long enough hours for a man of my age" (he smiled humorously at his son). "Of course there's sure to be a lot of things to put right, and so on" (Andrew raised a startled eye), "but I'll polish 'em off by four."

He ate a remarkably hearty breakfast and strode off blithely, this time a few minutes ahead of his partner. It was an even more singular thing that Andrew should linger to confer once more with the lady he had so lately regarded as the impersonation of everything suspicious.

Another curious incident happened later in the day. At lunch-time the junior partner left the office, and, without giving an explanation, remained absent through the afternoon. Not that Heriot missed him. He smoked and wrote and rallied Mr. Thomieson, and dictated letters which left his confidential clerk divided between the extremes of admiration for their shrewdness and horror at the terse and lively style in which they were couched; in short, he got through a day's work that sent him home at four o'clock in the best of spirits.

Andrew met him in the hall.

"Hullo," said Heriot, "where have you been all this time?"

"I want to speak to you for a minute," his son replied, and then, as his father turned naturally towards the library door, stayed him. "There's some one in there. Just come into the dining-room for a moment."

"Who's in there?"

Andrew waited till he had got him behind the closed door, and then said very gravely—

"It's Mrs. Dunbar and a friend of hers."

"What friend?—Not old Charlie Munro?"

"A Mr. Brown. Possibly you've not heard of him before, but I understand he's a connection of her late husband's family. She's asked him to come and meet you."

The exceeding solemnity of his manner obviously affected Heriot's high spirits.

"What's up?" he inquired.

"I should hardly think you would need to ask that, considering what has passed between you. In fact, I gather that they want to be satisfied there's some reasonable explanation of your conduct."

Mr. Walkingshaw gently whistled.

"Oh, that's the game, is it? Well, I suppose I'll just have to tell him the simple truth, in justice to myself."

His son heartily agreed.

"It's the only thing to be done," said he, "the only honest course left, so far as I can see. Just make a clean breast of everything, and you may trust me to confirm all you say."

"My dear boy, you're devilish good. I'm afraid I really haven't been as appreciative lately as I ought. You're talking like a sportsman now. Come on, we'll go in and tackle 'em together."

He took his son's arm and gave him a friendly smile as they crossed the hall; but the seriousness of the situation seemed to prevent Andrew from returning these evidences of comradeship.

The injured lady met her betrayer with marked constraint. She seemed to anticipate little pleasure from the interview, but had evidently made up her mind to go through with it as a duty she owed her reputation and her friend Mr. Brown. This gentleman was grave, elderly, and of an unmistakably professional aspect. In a vague way Heriot fancied he had seen his face before, though he could not recollect where.

"Well," said Mr. Walkingshaw genially, "here we all are; and now what's the business before the meeting?"

"I understand," replied Mr. Brown, in a calm and gentle voice, "that you have broken off your engagement with this lady. Now, as a—well, I may say, as an interested friend of Mrs. Dunbar, I should very much like to have your reasons."

Heriot smiled.

"Will you undertake to believe them?"

"I undertake to give them my closest professional consideration, whatever they are."

"May I ask if you are a lawyer?"

Mr. Brown coughed once or twice before replying.

"He is," said Andrew decisively, and Mr. Brown seemed content to let this reply pass as his own.

"You can talk to me with the utmost frankness," he

said; "in fact, I infinitely prefer it."

"Well," began Heriot, "the simple fact of the matter is that I am growing rapidly younger."

"Ah?" commented Mr. Brown.

It was curious that he should exchange a quick glance, not with the lady whose interests he was representing, but with her errant lover's faithful son.

"Yes," said Mr. Walkingshaw, warming to his narrative, "I am literally racing backwards. It is like a drive over a road one has passed along before, only in the opposite direction and much faster. I simply whizz past the old milestones. Now, a man who is behaving like that has no business to marry an already mature lady, who is growing older at the rate of, say one, while he is growing younger at the rate of, say ten; has he, Mr. Brown?"

"No," replied Mr. Brown emphatically, "I honestly don't think he has."

Heriot was delighted with this confirmation of his judgment. He threw a glance at the widow to see how she took it, but her eyes were cast down, and she displayed no emotion whatever.

"That's the long and the short of the matter, Mr. Brown. I make the profoundest apologies to my charming relative; but if you agree that I acted for the best, I suppose we might as well adjourn and have a cup of tea."

"Just one moment," said Mr. Brown gently. "I should like to have a few more particulars regarding this very interesting phenomenon, if you don't mind."

"Not a bit, my dear sir. It's a very natural curiosity."

"You feel, of course, a considerable exhilaration of spirits in consequence of this change?"

"I'm simply bursting with them."

"Naturally, naturally. And you propose, no doubt, to exercise your activities in some beneficial way?"

"In a dozen ways. I've already been the means of securing two happy engagements for my youngest children."

"And breaking off two," said Andrew.

His father turned to him with a frown. This was hardly the support he expected. To his great pleasure, the sympathetic Mr. Brown also disapproved of the interruption.

"One thing at a time, please," said he, and resumed his intelligent inquiries. "These young persons to whom your children have become engaged—they are hardly the matches you would have made at one time, are they?"

"I'm afraid I was a bit of an ass at one time," Mr. Walkingshaw confessed.

"I see, I see. And now, as to the engagements you have broken off—you felt yourself inspired, prompted from within, as it were, to bring them to an end, I take it?"

"You've put it deuced well," said Heriot.

"Did you feel in any way inspired from without—any visions or voices, so to speak, any manifestations or appearances—anything of that kind?"

Mr. Walkingshaw looked a little puzzled.

"The voices of romance and love, and that sort of thing, I certainly heard."

"Quite so, quite so, Mr. Walkingshaw. You heard them, did you? Well, it's not every one who hears these things."

He smiled pleasantly, and Mr. Walkingshaw became confirmed in his opinion that this was quite one of the most agreeable men he had met for a long time.

"May I ask whether you propose to take any more steps to put this poor world of ours to rights?" inquired Mr. Brown.

"He is taking control of the business again," said Andrew.

"Again?" retorted Heriot. "When did I ever lose control of the business, I'd like to know? I've had my holiday, and now I'm going to make things hum in the office."

"You are going to make them hum?" asked Mr. Brown. "Do you mean you are going to override your partner's decisions, and so on?"

"My dear Mr. Brown, if I waited for his decisions, I'd be kicking up my heels in the office half the day. Metaphorically speaking, my son is somewhat like a man who fills his bath from a teacup instead of turning on the tap. I don't override his decisions, I simply anticipate them."

"That is his account of it," said Andrew darkly.

"Well, well," smiled Mr. Brown, "I think I understand. And now, Mr. Walkingshaw, may I ask if there is

anything else you propose to do?"

This time he glanced at Andrew, as if courting information.

"He is altering his will," said the junior partner.

"Ah!" remarked his visitor again.

Mr. Walkingshaw drew himself up.

"That is my own affair," he said, with dignity.

"Quite so—quite so," replied Mr. Brown in that peculiarly soothing voice he had at his command. "We would wish to make no inquiries into that. Only, there's just one thing I'd like to know—you don't mean to let the grass grow under your feet, I take it?"

"No fears," said Heriot. "What I mean to do, I'm going to do at once. By Jingo, I'll be under age in a few years! I've got to do things promptly."

"Thank you," replied Mr. Brown suavely, "I think that is all I want to know. We needn't detain you any longer, Mr. Walkingshaw."

It struck Heriot that this was a funny way for the agreeable Mr. Brown to treat him in his own house. He assumed the air of a host at once.

"Then we'll go up and have some tea. Come along, Mr. Brown."

"I think," said his visitor politely, "that possibly your son and I had better have just a word or two with this lady first, if you'll permit us."

"Certainly, my dear sir; just come up when you're ready."

As he went upstairs, it suddenly struck him as rather odd that her connection by marriage and legal adviser should refer to Madge as "this lady"; and also that she should have sat so silently through a conversation which primarily concerned herself. But then such rum things did happen in this amusing world that it was never worth while worrying.

CHAPTER VII

Stroking the cat and sipping his tea, Mr. Walkingshaw conversed pleasantly with his sister. Jean and Frank had gone into the country, and the two sat alone together in the drawing-room.

"Brown?" said Miss Walkingshaw. "I never knew the Dunbars had a relative of that name. Who will he be?"

"I seem to mind seeing his face somewhere," replied her brother, "but more about him I can't tell you, except that he's a very pleasant fellow. Hullo, Andrew, where's Brown?"

The junior partner had entered alone.

"He had to go," said he.

"Dash it, he might have said good-by."

Andrew made no answer. He was looking at his aunt in a way that he had borrowed from his father's bygone manner. Though he had only quite recently begun to practise it seriously, he was sufficiently

expert to convey unmistakably the fact that he desired her to withdraw. She rose obediently.

"Hullo, where are you off to?" asked her brother.

"I have things to do, Heriot," she answered nervously, "just a few things to do."

As she passed Andrew she paused, and her lips framed a question. There was something in his manner that frightened her; strange things were happening, she felt sure. But his glowering eye silenced her, and she faded noiselessly out of the room. Then Andrew advanced upon his father.

"Just run your eye through that," he said quietly.

He handed his father a large double sheet of blue foolscap containing a great deal of printed matter. The particular portion of it to which Mr. Walkingshaw's attention was directed ran thus—

"CERTIFICATE OF EMERGENCY

"(This certificate authorizes the detention of a Patient in an Asylum for a period not exceeding three days, without any order by the Sheriff.)

"I, the undersigned George William Downie, being M.D., Glasgow, hereby certify on soul and conscience, that I have this day at 15, Roray Place, in the County of Edinburgh, seen and personally examined James Heriot Walkingshaw, and that the said person is of unsound mind, and a proper Patient to be placed in an Asylum, and is in a sufficiently good state of bodily health at this date to be removed to the Asylum.

> "And I hereby certify that the case of the said Person is one of emergency."

It was then dated, and signed, "George W. Downie."

"Asylum—Dr. Downie!" gasped Heriot. "But—what *is* this?"

"It says on the paper. Just look—can't you read?"

Heriot gave a convulsive start.

"Was—was *that* Dr. Downie?"

His son nodded.

Again Heriot's startled eyes ran over the certificate, and then they turned upon his son. It is regrettable that his next words were not more worthy of his reputation.

"You d——d young skunk!"

"It's no use swearing," his son replied coldly.

Mr. Walkingshaw fell back in his chair and seemed to meditate.

"You wired to Glasgow for him?" he inquired in a moment.

"I did."

"So that I shouldn't recognize him, I suppose?"

"Naturally."

"What a sell if I'd spotted him and talked what the silly fool would have thought sense!"

"You didn't," said Andrew.

Mr. Walkingshaw shook his head.

"Man, I'd never have given you credit for the brains to do the like of this."

Then he started.

"I see it all now! It was Madge put you up to the idea! Eh? Oh, you needn't trouble to deny it; I know you haven't the imagination yourself."

With a calmer air he studied the paper afresh.

"It's only for three days," he observed in a cheerier tone.

"Do you actually imagine you're likely to get out at the end of three days?"

Mr. Walkingshaw looked at his son steadily.

"You know perfectly well that every word I said was true."

Andrew remained coldly immovable.

"I am no judge myself. I'd sooner depend on Dr. Downie's opinion."

"Hypocrite to the last!" scoffed Heriot. "Can you look me in the face, Andrew, and tell me that you honestly thought it was insanity to make friends of my children and help them to marry the people they loved, and divide my money fairly among you all? Can you?"

"Permit me to remind you that it was not I who signed the certificate."

There was a moment's very dead silence, and then Heriot asked—

"Then do you actually mean to shut me up in a lunatic asylum for the rest of my days?"

Andrew had some of the finer points of the legal mind. He noted the trace of emotion in his father's voice, and knew he was fairly on top at last. To let this fact sink still further into Heriot's mind, he eyed him in austere silence for a few moments before he answered—

"If I have to, I shall."

"If you *have* to? What d'ye mean?"

"I mean that I am not going to have my business ruined—"

"Ruined! Can you not stick to the truth on a single point? I am putting new life into it!"

"I don't care for your kind of life, thanks," said Andrew primly, "and I repeat that I am not going to have my business—enlivened, if that's how you choose to put it, and my family disgraced, and my reputation lost; and if I let you go on another day as you've been going, it'll be too late to save any of them. But I don't want to be harder than I can help." He paused for a moment, and his lip grew longer and straighter. "So I'll offer you an alternative."

"Well?"

"If you'll guarantee to clear out of the country and not come back again, I'll take no further proceedings on the strength of this certificate. I don't want to put you in an asylum any more than you want to go, but I've got to protect myself."

Mr. Walkingshaw mused.

"When do you want me to start?"

"At once."

"At once!"

"Yes, at once, before you see anybody else."

"I'm not even to say good-by?"

"No."

"You've got some game on," said Heriot.

"I've got to protect myself and my family."

His father looked at him searchingly; but his face remained a solemn medallion of virtue. Then Mr. Walkingshaw again fell back in his chair and mused. Gradually the flicker of a smile appeared in his eye. It spread to his lips, and he sprang up cheerfully.

"It's not half a bad idea!" he exclaimed. "I'm just getting to the age when a young man ought to go about a bit and see something of the world. New Zealand now—that's a fine country—or Japan—or Texas. By Gad, you know I've several times wanted to do a bit of roughing it and big game shooting lately."

His son looked at him suspiciously. This cheerfulness was unusual in people he had worsted, and the unusual was always to be distrusted. But to the less vigilant, ordinary mind Mr. Walkingshaw merely presented the spectacle of a man of young middle-age with a heart some ten years younger still.

"Of course it will be a wrench," he added, with a sobered air. "I'll miss 'em all: Frank—Ellen—Jean. By Gad, I shall miss Jean. However, it need only be for a

year or two. Meanwhile—by Jingo, there's no doubt about it!—this is the chance of my life. Let's see now, what does one need? A revolver with six thingamajigs—top-boots and riding breeches—a good compass—"

The chill voice of Andrew interrupted this catalogue.

"Once you go away, you've got to stay away."

"Stay away!"

"Your allowance will depend on that."

"My allowance!" gasped Heriot.

"Your estate has got to be administered by me just as though you were" (instinctively this pious young man's face grew solemn) "taken away from us."

"I wish I were not your father," sighed Heriot. "In happier circumstances, the pleasure of kicking you would just be immense."

Andrew disliked physical brutality. His cheeks grew flabbier at the very idea of such an outrage—even in theory.

"If you were to try anything of that kind, I warn you I'd withdraw my alternative."

His father laughed reassuringly.

"Oh, you needn't keep your back against the bookcase: I'll leave the job for some luckier devil."

A thought struck him.

"By the way, I've promised to give Jean and Frank enough to keep them going. You'll see to that?"

"I'll carry out the provisions made when you were in your right mind."

"What provisions?"

"The terms of your will."

Mr. Walkingshaw looked at his son steadily and in silence. After a full minute under this stare Andrew began to grow uneasy.

"There's to be no more nonsense, I warn you," he said.

"You mean either to rob your brother and sister of their money, or revenge yourself by stopping their marriages? By Heaven, Andrew—"

He broke off and plunged into meditation. Then his eyes began to smile, though his lips were now compressed.

"Very well," he murmured.

His son still felt a vague sense of apprehension.

"Mind, you've got to stay abroad."

"For ever?"

"You must give me your word you won't come back for two years certain, and after that you lose your allowance if you land in Great Britain or Ireland."

"Including the Channel Islands?"

"Including them."

"I see your game," smiled Heriot. "But I give you my word. Poor Jean, poor Frank—"

"You're not even to write to them," interrupted

Andrew.

Mr. Walkingshaw stroked his chin meditatively.

"I agree to that," he said. "Any more conditions?"

The smile that prevailed in his discomfited parent's eye perturbed the junior partner. He warily scanned all possible loopholes.

"You're not to communicate with Madge Dunbar."

"God forbid!" said Heriot fervently.

"Nor my aunt."

"Bless her, poor soul; no fears of that."

"I think that's all," said Andrew reluctantly.

So long as those eyes continued to look at him like that, he desired to pile condition on condition. But the overwhelming advantages of being encumbered with no imagination occasionally—very occasionally —have compensating drawbacks. He could imagine nothing else to be guarded against.

"Then I'd better pack and be off."

"You had," said Andrew.

Just as he was leaving the room, Heriot turned and asked—

"You've heard of changelings?"

Andrew stared.

"Do you not mind hearing of goblins that get put into cradles instead of the real babies? That accounts for you. Thank the Lord, I need never again claim the

discredit of begetting you!"

CHAPTER VIII

A luggage-laden cab clattered over the granite cubes and passed out of the ring of tall mansions and the shadow of the stately trees within the garden. The career of Heriot Walkingshaw, W.S., was ended, and shocked respectability could lower again her up-rolled eyes and see nothing more outrageous than a prowling cat. May her troubles always end as happily! Undoubtedly, had the full facts been there and then made public, a statue of the junior partner (completely clad) would have adorned that decorous garden.

But his modest reticence was remarkable. He stood in the somber hall listening intently to make sure that the cab really did ascend the steep street towards the station, when his ally, after peering over the banisters, ran downstairs to meet him. He was just heaving a deep sigh of relief.

"Did some one go away in a cab?" she asked.

He looked at her sharply.

"Quite possibly."

In her eyes gleamed a sudden hint of suspicion.

"Was it Heriot?"

He took his time before answering very deliberately —

"It was."

"Where is he going?"

Again he paused. As every moment took his father farther from them, so every moment was precious.

"Can you not guess?"

"What!" she cried. "You're actually putting him into an asylum?"

"It's the best place for him."

She seized his arm.

"Did you give him the alternative?"

With a chaste movement he withdrew the arm.

"I gave him an alternative, certainly."

Her black eyes seemed to pierce into his brain. He disliked being looked at like that exceedingly.

"*Our* alternative?"

"Our?" he questioned.

"The alternative we discussed last night?"

"We discussed a good many things."

She kept following him up till his back was nearly against the front door.

"Did you offer him the alternative of keeping his promise to me?"

"Look out," he muttered. "Some of the servants may be coming."

"Did you?"

"Would you marry a man that's off his head?"

"He isn't; he was only pretending!"

"That's not what Dr. Downie thought."

"Dr. Downie! What did he know!"

"He certified him."

He was backed against the front door now.

"Did you offer Heriot that alternative?"

He paused for a moment. Heriot must be at the station by now, and he had not many spare minutes before the train started.

"No, I did not," he answered.

The sympathetic widow's hand shot out; there was a smack and then a thud. The smack was caused by a momentary encounter between the hand and his spherical cheek, the thud by a meeting of his head and the door.

"You miserable creature!" she hissed.

With a look such as only the righteous can ever hope to wear, and that in the moment of martyrdom, he watched her rush upstairs sobbing.

And thus the coalition, having served its beneficent purpose, came abruptly to an end. A great deal might be written in this connection, adducing this instance to illustrate the wider fields of statecraft, but unfortunately the present narrative is a simple record of facts, and not a philosophical treatise. The immediate consequence of the episode was that on

the following morning Mrs. Dunbar set out for the west of Ross-shire to pay a long-promised visit to a third cousin who possessed several thousand acres of moorland in that vicinity.

CHAPTER IX

It was on the following morning that Jean and Frank returned, their faces glowing with country sunshine and spring wind, their hearts quickened with anticipation. In the train coming home they had exchanged many confidences. Could he possibly manage to get married before he went out to India? Frank wondered. Would Lucas have to wait till he had sold a few more pictures? wondered Jean. He ran whistling up the steps and rang the bell. She burst radiantly into the somber hall. And then, at twelve o'clock in the morning of an ordinary working week-day, they found the junior partner at home to receive them. Such a portent had never before been seen.

"Where's father?" asked Jean.

Andrew's cheeks twitched nervously; yet on the whole he maintained a compassionate expression highly honorable to his fraternal instincts. In a hushed voice he addressed his sister.

"I want to have a word with you," said he.

He took her apart from her brother and shut the library door securely. Frank was such a hot-tempered young fellow; and he had suffered one physical

outrage already. In a voice as appropriate as his face he gently broke the news—

"Our father has been removed to an asylum."

"Removed—to an asylum!" gasped Jean.

She did not strike him, but on the whole he was even more glad when that interview came to an end than when he saw the widow's muscular back at last turn from the front door.

A few days afterwards a tall man in a sportsmanlike ulster walked up the gangway of a steamship bound for a port in South America. He was followed on board by a friend with very blue eyes and a cavalier mustache. They talked for a few minutes and then shook hands affectionately.

"Well, Lucas, good-by, old fellow," said the passenger. "And remember now what you're to tell them. They're not to drop a hint—not a whisper of what they know. Just keep your tails up all of you, as best you can. Handy thing, this revolver we chose. I must practise shooting from the hip pocket. I say, take special care of Jean. Tell her I know how plucky she is—she'll be staunch—she'll wait. Tell her I'll often be thinking—Hullo, last bell; you'd better get on shore."

A little later the steamer was in the middle of the gray Thames, bearing Heriot, his fortunes, and his six-shooter far, far from the office of Walkingshaw & Gilliflower. The protagonist of virtuous respectability sat there triumphantly enshrined. He had done everything a good man could reasonably be expected

to do; only he had not imagined Lucas Vernon waving a farewell to his late partner.

PART V

CHAPTER I

Even in the heyday of Mr. Walkingshaw's career, when he was most conspicuously an example to his fellow-citizens, revered by the young and applauded by the old, there were to be found certain austere critics who held that, for themselves, the character of Andrew presented the more chaste ideal. Exemplary though his father's life had been (up to that fatal illness), there was always a latent vein of geniality in his character, a reminiscence of good living in his ruddy countenance, a brightness in his eye, that suggested possibilities; and even a possibility might conceivably, under certain circumstances, given this and that—well, it might be safer away. Whereas Andrew's pale round cheeks and solemn aspect were as reassuring as a plate of porridge.

These pioneers of criticism were thought extremists six months ago; now, they had all respectable society at their back. Of course it was never a point in a man's favor that his father (or indeed any relative) could run amuck as Andrew's had done. On the other hand, he had so promptly and fearlessly plucked out the parent who offended him, and behaved,

moreover, through all this tribulation with such becoming solemnity, that he very soon began rather to gain than to lose by his martyrdom. Each step he took was discretion itself. His father, people learnt, had been quietly removed to a retreat for the mentally infirm, situated, some said in Devonshire, and others in North Wales. The very ambiguity on this point was highly approved. It argued the perfection of prudence. As for the ungrateful girl who had jilted him, he had talked at considerable length to his friends on that subject, and they reported that, though naturally grieved, and even offended, by her conduct, he was nevertheless able to express in a calm voice many Christian sentiments; frequently, for instance, assuring his audience that he forgave her, and that if she preferred to stew in her own juice he was too much of a gentleman to interfere with her pleasure. At this rate, it was recognized that very soon nothing the Goddess of Mediocrity could offer would be beyond his reach. She had many worshipers, but unquestionably Andrew Walkingshaw looked like her favorite.

He himself was modestly disposed to agree with this opinion. Really, the success of his prompt procedure had been remarkable. From his two sensible married sisters he had never anticipated trouble, and they had loyally fulfilled his expectations. With both he held private consultations, and each accepted his version of the facts without a single unnecessary or disquieting question. They knew they could trust Andrew. But what did surprise him was the calmness into which the impotent indignation of Frank and Jean subsided. Within three days they were converted from volcanoes to icebergs. It was a condition too frigid to give him unalloyed delight, yet all things considered he could not but think it

exceedingly encouraging.

"I presume you don't intend to give either of us a marrying allowance?" said Frank, interrupting with this practical inquiry the guarded narrative of his elder brother.

"If I could feel it in any way to be my duty—"

Frank interrupted him again.

"But you don't; what?"

"No, Frank, I may tell you candidly—"

For the third time the soldier cut in—

"And I may tell *you* candidly that of all contemptible hounds I've ever had the misfortune to meet, you're the most despicable."

That concluded the conference; and judging from Jean's pointed neglect of any opportunities for consultation with which Andrew provided her, he gathered that Frank had sufficiently expressed her opinion also. It was, no doubt, painful to see oneself thus misjudged, but at the same time he could not feel too thankful for their abstinence from any further inquiry regarding their father's fate. At first this lack of curiosity struck him as almost suspicious, but he was reassured by his conviction of their depravity. While their father was favoring them, they made a fuss about him: now that he could favor them no more, their feigned affection for him disappeared, and all they thought of was reviling the one member of the family who knew what was best for them. Each time he recalled those monstrous epithets of Frank's, this conviction deepened, till he became positively ashamed of them for their indifference.

They might at least have gone through the form of asking for some news of their father now and then, even if they had not the hearts to sympathize with his malady. But they had no sense of decency, those two.

Fortunately, he was soon relieved of Frank's society. Some weeks before his furlough was up he returned to India, and the house was well rid of him. A meandering and indignant letter from Archibald Berstoun of that ilk, informing Mr. Andrew Walkingshaw (in the third person) that he would be obliged if he would kindly keep his brother from trespassing in his garden, indicated that the despairing lover had paid a farewell, and surreptitious, visit to his mistress; but that was the last inconvenience he inflicted.

To add to Andrew's relief, Jean came to him a few days after Frank's departure and announced her intention of repairing to London and adopting the profession of nursing. In retailing this incident to his friends, her brother laid particular emphasis on the generosity he had displayed and the scanty thanks she had tendered him. The financial assistance he offered her was ample—perfectly ample for all that a girl wanted; while in the matter of good advice he had been positively extravagant.

"You'll think well over this, Jean," said he.

"I have thought," she answered briefly.

"It's an arduous profession you're embarking on, and a responsible profession, and an honorable profession. It requires—"

"Oh, I know what it requires," she interrupted. "It

will be much better if you simply tell your friends what you intended to tell me. They may be impressed: I am not."

And, like the obliging brother he was, Andrew obeyed her wishes literally. He had his reward, for such of his friends as were able to wait till he had finished his narrative told him candidly that they thought he had left nothing unsaid, and that certainly his sister ought to consider herself fortunate. In fact, he only relinquished his grasp of their buttonholes when they had acquiesced in these conclusions.

The spectacle was now presented to the world of poor Andrew Walkingshaw, bereft of his father and deserted by his sister, living in that great house in company only with his sense of duty and his aunt. People were very sorry for him indeed; they said he should marry; in fact, such as enjoyed the privilege of his acquaintance even began to select suitable young women for his approval. Andrew inspected these candidates gravely, but at the same time let it be clearly understood that he was in no hurry; he might decide to marry, or he might not—anyhow, if he did, the lady would be conferring no favor. It was left to your common sense to decide by whom, in that case, the favor would be conferred.

All this sympathy was very consoling, but in a world partially compounded of people less sensible than Andrew Walkingshaw, a few disappointments are inevitable. He found his in the annoying attitude of two or three valuable but wrong-headed clients, who would persist in making frequent inquiries as to the probable duration of the senior partner's indisposition. There was an unpleasant sense of

comparison implied in these questions, a hint of preference for the slap-dash, hang-technicalities method with which, in his latter days, Heriot had scandalized aggrieved spinsters in quest of consolation and hesitating suitors desirous of having their minds made up. The trouble was that these latter classes, though delightful company to one of Andrew's sympathetic disposition, were considerably less remunerative than the irritating inquirers; and so long as there seemed any possibility of his father's return to sanity and his office, he felt that he could never regard his position as wholly satisfactory; on the other hand, though a sick lion may possibly be compared with a live dog, a defunct lion is proverbially out of the running.

Andrew thought over this aspect of the case long and conscientiously. He was exceedingly truthful, he disliked superfluous butchery, but what choice had he?

It is said by the more inspired species of social reformer that what good men deem theoretically advisable is sure to happen sooner or later. In some cases, if the man be talented as well as good, it happens quickly. Within a few months of Jean's desertion came the last touch that was needed to complete the pathos of her brother's position and disarm the most hostile critic. Among the deaths in the *Scotsman* appeared the name of James Heriot Walkingshaw. Nothing was said as to how or where he had died; and, in fact, the point was never satisfactorily settled whether the sad event took place in North Wales or Devonshire; but, of course, the cause was only too evident. Well, poor man, it was a mercy the end had come as swiftly as it had. His friends were sorry, of course, but not surprised

and quite resigned. They were very pleased with the way his son took it. He departed quietly for the funeral in a hatband six inches wide, and returned with a thoughtful and chastened air to resume his daily work. The interment took place, it was understood, in a churchyard adjacent to the retreat; and under the sad circumstances people thought Andrew had done well to attend it unaccompanied by other mourners. In short, every circumstance connected with the tragedy served to increase the respect in which he was held. Even Jean's unfortunate omission to use black-edged paper when writing a few brief and curiously stiff acknowledgments of the letters of condolence she received, reacted indirectly in Andrew's favor. People pitied the brother of this unfeeling girl. How wounded he must feel by her callousness!

But the most satisfactory consequence of all was the cessation of inquiries for any other Walkingshaw than Andrew. He considered himself justified in holding that this tacitly implied an admission that nobody could desire a better lawyer than he. And as there were none to contradict this assumption (since he had always made a point of avoiding the candid critic like the Devil, the impecunious school friend, and Sunday golf), he derived from it the full gratification to which he was entitled.

Never, surely, was there a more signal triumph for the meek. His brother had abused him, and he was now broiling in India, torn for ever from his betrothed; his sister had snubbed him, and there she was homeless in London slaving in a hospital; Mrs. Dunbar had smacked his face, and she was an exile in the moors of Ross-shire; and now here was his father, who had plagued and despised him,

numbered in the list of the deceased. Alas for Heriot Walkingshaw! He had despised the wrong man when he despised Andrew. "The Example is dead; long live the Example!" might well have been inscribed upon his tombstone, had their friends been able to learn precisely where that monument was situated.

CHAPTER II

It is pleasant to be able to turn (still adhering closely to the facts as they occurred) from tombstones to orange blossom. His friends unanimously felt that Andrew, having suffered so much and so heroically, should now obtain the consolation he deserved. Among his many virtues none was more remarkable than his instinct for doing exactly what was expected of him, and at precisely the right moment. Forthwith he announced his engagement to Miss Catherine Henderson, whose father's residence had been used as the test by which Heriot first realized his disastrous return to youth. Mr. Henderson was now defunct, but his possessions served a better purpose than being stared at by a reprobate neighbor. They passed, in fact, into Andrew's keeping.

The lady who accompanied them was, of course, an only child, and the income of two thousand pounds a year she enjoyed was derived from such extraordinarily safe investments that even the cautious Andrew, when he went into her affairs with a fellow-solicitor (on the week before he proposed), remarked at once that he saw an increase of three hundred and fifty pounds to be got without risking a

halfpenny. As she was only four years older than he, there was no disparity of years on this occasion; while her appearance effectually guaranteed her lover against the discomforts of rivalry. In short, she was generally admitted to be an ideal mate for Andrew Walkingshaw.

It was just eight months after Heriot's disappearance from public life that his son led Miss Henderson to the altar of St. Giles' Cathedral, and after a brief honeymoon in Switzerland established her in the stately mansion overlooking the circular garden. The fortunate couple had the further advantage of overlooking (when the leaves were off the trees) a substantial addition to their income in the shape of the bride's late residence, now let on very advantageous terms to a wealthy relative of Mr. Ramornie of Pettigrew. It seemed impossible for any step Andrew took to avoid being profitable. When he lost an umbrella at the club, it was always to find a better one in its place. And the most satisfactory thing of all was the consciousness that his prosperity was entirely the result of following the proper kind of principles.

One would fain avert one's eyes from the spectacle presented by the luckless Ellen Berstoun, were it not that her unhappy condition makes the contrast between lax and proper principles the more poignant. No mate with two thousand pounds a year for her! Instead, merely a hopeless passion for an impecunious subaltern sweltering in far-off India. That was poor company throughout the long series of monotonous months that were now her portion. The brown buds on the tall beeches broke into leaf, and the dark pines were tipped with vivid green; the

leaves withered and fell, and the dead needles littered the moss. Those were the most exciting changes that happened. Her father (a victim of gout) cursed her and Frank and Andrew and Heriot impartially. Her mother sighed and let her into secrets of their housekeeping and finances which clearly showed how selfish she had been. Her sisters were kind upon the whole, but dreadfully disposed to talk things over in a practical kind of way.

And then at intervals arrived those letters, very long and very loving, and very full of riding and marching under strange skies, and adventures of which strange dark peoples and stranger beasts were the sinister ingredients. They brightened her eyes for a little while, and then left her sadder than before.

In the course of the second year of her bereavement, the disappointment of her parents with her failure was converted into satisfaction at the success of her sister Mary. An astonishingly wealthy shooting tenant in the neighborhood danced seven times with her at the County Ball, and proposed next morning by letter. He would have been accepted by telegram had Archibald of that ilk had his way, but fortunately the gentleman's ardor had not cooled by the time the next post reached him. A week later his prospective best man wriggled out of his duties by coming to an arrangement with Mary's younger sister that the wedding should be a double-barreled affair, with two brides and two grooms. As this second suitor was very nearly as rich as the first, Ellen found her fate alleviated by the entire and permanent removal of her parents' displeasure. She became now a mere object of pity, mingled at times with contempt for her folly in dooming herself to a sterile spinsterhood; for it was clear that Frank and she could never hope

to marry, however much writing-paper they might waste.

Just as the world never plumbed the depths of dignity and purpose in Woman till it saw her chained to a railing, clasping the hated constable like a lover, a hoarse example to her sluggish sisters, so it can never realize her capacity for foolishness till it has seen her waiting through weary years, hoping against reason, the victim of illogical constancy to a mere young man. Sweet and gracious Ellen Berstoun, so slender and pretty and charming, wasting her fragrance in the old garden and the dark pine-woods for the sake of certain passionate memories and the most impractical of day-dreams, was a sight to make a philosopher despair.

Undoubtedly Andrew's were the proper principles.

CHAPTER III

With the drawing in of dusk a thin mist stole up from the river and stealthily crept through the streets and lanes of Chelsea. It was not yet five o'clock, but on an afternoon in the depth of winter the little touch of fog converted dusk to darkness. The mist was not thick, but very cold and clammy, and in the zigzag lane the lamps were blurred and the shadows deep. Two people left a bus in the King's Road and turned down it. He was broad-shouldered, and swung along with a fine decided stride: she was trim and erect, and very quietly clad; her face was fresh and bright, a smile haunted her eyes, and her straight little nose

seemed to breathe independence.

"The air is beastly damp," said he. "I wish you'd let me bring you in a cab."

"Nonsense, Lucas," she answered stoutly; "we neither of us can afford it. You must learn to be sensible."

"But, my dear girl, I tell you I'm beginning to make money now."

"Well, don't begin to spend it; and then perhaps you may have a little in the bank in a year or two."

"A year or two!" he exclaimed; "I'll have enough in six months to—"

She interrupted him briskly.

"Lucas! Don't you remember we agreed that whichever of us said 'marry' first should be fined?"

"I never agreed."

"Then I shall break off the engagement."

Yet she continued walking quickly by his side till they came to the studio. He took out his key, but she stopped short on the pavement with a fine air of decision.

"I won't come in unless you promise to be more or less rational," she said.

And then with the same air of decision she entered.

After a few minutes' apparently unnecessary delay he lit the gas and she settled herself in the deck-chair while he filled the teapot.

"Nursing is too heavy work for you," he said

suddenly.

"Don't be absurd," she smiled.

He put down the teapot, took her by the shoulders, and looked into her eyes, at once critic and adorer.

"Jean! You can't deceive me. It's my business to know how people sit when they are tired, and what signs in their faces show they are overworked. You are nearly dead beat."

"Only—only a very little, Lucas," she said less stoutly.

Her spirit was brave, but her feet were weary, and how her back ached!

"I'm going to take you away from that infernal hospital," he announced.

Her back stiffened again.

"Lucas! you promised to be sensible."

He smiled down at her.

"I have the sense to marry you—and do it at once, too!"

She jumped up.

"Lucas!"

"Jean!"

He held her fast.

"You may be strong enough to hold me," she panted, "but you aren't strong enough to marry me against my will!"

"But why shouldn't we? Why the mischief, why the

dickens, why the devil not?"

"Because you'd be bankrupt in a month. You've *no* sense, dear. Do get that into your head. By your own admission you have only just begun to sell your pictures. Wait and see whether it lasts—wait for a couple of years—"

"A couple of—! I won't, and that's flat!"

"One year, then."

"Twelve months? I can't, Jean."

"You must!"

"Daren't you risk it now?"

She drew herself back a little.

"Lucas, that isn't fair. I dare do *anything*—except come to you without a penny, and probably ruin you. If I had even twenty pounds a year to bring you, I'd risk it; but you know quite well that if I marry against Andrew's wishes any time within seven years I forfeit everything."

"If I killed Andrew," asked the painter grimly, "who would his money go to?"

"Wait!" she said, her spirit smiling through her eyes. "Don't you trust father to help us somehow—some time or other?"

He twisted his mustache desperately upwards.

"I want to help myself."

She smiled openly now.

"You can't be trusted yet; you're so greedy!"

He laughed, but a little wryly.

"It's because I'm starving."

"Then work, work!" said Jean.

"I can't work harder," he answered more philosophically. "I can only sell faster."

"And you're doing that too," she said encouragingly.

They needed all the encouragement they could snatch, these two perverse and desperate lovers. People who lack the sense to provide themselves with an income after falling in love generally do.

At the end of an hour, one of those galloping hours that fly swifter than ten ordinary minutes, they passed out into the lane again. The mist was now so thick that even when the way grew straight they could see no more than two lamps ahead, and it was very chill and damp.

"I'll hail a cab as soon as I see one."

"I won't drive in it, I warn you."

He implored, but she shook her fair head resolutely.

"One of us must be practical," she persisted.

"And the other in love?"

She pressed his hand, but remained the charming incarnation of obstinacy. He laughed at last, though a little anxiously as he saw a fringe of tiny drops gather on her hair; and he let her have her way. Together they entered a bus and slowly rumbled eastwards. The bus was full, and for a long time they sat in silence.

"It's quite fine here!" she exclaimed at last; "we've come out of the mist—look at the stars!"

They both cheered up amazingly. It actually seemed as if they were preposterous enough to take this ordinary meteorological incident as an omen.

CHAPTER IV

"We'll have to ask the Rivingtons," said Andrew.

"And not the Donaldsons?" inquired his wife.

Andrew reflected. This was to be a very special dinner party; quite the smartest function they had given yet. His sister would want to be there, especially when she heard the Ramornies were coming over for it. On the other hand, they knew a great many more distinguished people than Hector and his wife had yet become, and of these they could only invite a small selection to the dinner party. It was a case in which principle clashed with principle.

"We'll have Gertrude and Hector too," he announced.

He had just remembered that Walkingshaw & Gilliflower were briefing Hector in a forthcoming case, and that there had been some discussion in the office as to the precisely proper fee to which, at that moment in his upward career, he was entitled. He would set this dinner against the odd two guineas in dispute. That, anyhow was an equitable principle, if ever there was one.

"And of course Lord and Lady Kilconquar?"

"Of course," said Andrew.

"And Sir William Sinclair?"

Andrew nodded.

"Must we ask the Mackintoshes?"

Andrew frowned.

"They'll do for our next dinner."

That was not going to be quite so smart a function.

"That's twenty-two," said Mrs. Walkingshaw.

"Just the right number," replied her husband. "It was what the Kilconquars had when we dined there."

Everything that Andrew had done was right, and his circumstances reflected his rectitude. No dodging about devious lanes in the fog for him and Mrs. Walkingshaw; no slow progress in crowded omnibuses; no Bohemian teas in paint-smelling studios. The streets through which they passed were wide and stately, even if a trifle windy; a motor car whirled them to their destination (which was always the right place to be seen at); their meals were consumed in sedate Georgian apartments, and in every detail would have satisfied a peer. They moved through life on oiled and noiseless wheels, wrapped in comfort and attended by respect. Let no carping critic say that the good things in this life are not distributed according to the most laudable principle. The guinea-fowl lays where she sees a nest-egg, and the larger it is the more does she deposit. And the prosperous nest-owner is he who stays always beside his treasure, gently coaxing the fowl, and vigilantly guarding against the least suspicion of disturbance, theft, or injury. Let anything happen that may in the

world outside; here is his post of duty, and he sticks to it.

It is true that for a short while an uncomfortable shadow seemed to cloud the serenity of Andrew's soul. This happened about the second anniversary of his late father's removal from his native city to that retreat where he ended his days, and was believed by his aunt to result from the painful memories evoked by his recollection of the date. It is certain that his serenity returned with each succeeding week, till by this time, when several months had passed, he had thrown off his anxiety altogether. He remained perhaps a little more constantly vigilant than before —even, for instance, when coming home from church; but it seemed now he had rather the alertness of the coastguardsman than the tension of the sailor when the decks are cleared for action.

It is impossible to imagine a more ideal scene of domestic felicity than that presented by Andrew and his spouse this evening. The room had been redecorated and partially refurnished by its new mistress. As she never expressed any opinion without quoting a competent authority, her husband at once took into respectful consideration her suggestion that fashionable people no longer dangled a cut-glass chandelier from their ceiling, and always had colored tiles in their hearths. When she further suggested that it should be her privilege to effect these and other improvements out of the dowry she was bringing him, he passed from consideration to consent. So that the fortunate couple were now mounted in a setting worthy of their price.

Sitting at a Sheraton table in a semi-evening toilet that had cost her forty guineas, writing the names of

some twenty of their most eminent fellow citizens in the spaces on the invitation cards, Catherine impressed her husband favorably—entirely favorably. A very satisfactory mate indeed he considered her. One could not imagine her pale eyes winking, or a saucy smile on her thin lips, or anything but the plainest common sense coming out of them. Yes, she was very satisfactory. It is true that he had once, in a burst of confidence, confided to one of his friends that she was "Awful skinny," but it is wonderful how far forty guineas will go towards modifying that defect. In short, she was—well, satisfactory. When one has secured the right adjective, why change it?

Andrew's complacency was completed by the presence of his aunt. He still kept her with him as a kind of perpetual testimonial to his solid worth. Her mere presence proved he was a kind and hospitable nephew; and on the least provocation she would enlarge upon his virtues in a way that was most pleasant for a visitor to hear. At other times she kept discreetly in the background, just as she had all her life. There was also this further advantage: that her legacy was much more satisfactorily employed in defraying (at her own desire, of course) some portion of her nephew's increasing expenses, than going into the pocket of a worthless landlord or hydropathic company.

Andrew was glancing through an evening paper, and his aunt conscientiously studying that morning's *Scotsman*. Suddenly she exclaimed:

"The Cromarty Highlanders have come to Glasgow!"

Andrew stared at her.

"Not the second battalion?"

"Yes, Frank's regiment."

"But they weren't to leave India for three years yet."

Mrs. Andrew looked over her shoulder.

"Oh, I saw they'd been ordered home some time ago."

"You didn't mention it to me," said Andrew.

She looked a little surprised, for she knew that Frank's was not a name mentioned in that house.

"I didn't think you'd be interested."

"I am not in the least," replied her husband.

His eye reproved her coldly. She exchanged with his aunt one of those sympathetic glances that pass between indulgent but comprehending women. "He is a noble creature, but at moments a little inconsistent," they mutually confided. And then she wrote the names of Lord and Lady Kilconquar on their card.

And that is how Jean might have been spending her evenings too, had she had proper principles.

CHAPTER V

The gentlemen entered the drawing-room, bringing a faint aroma of Andrew's excellent cigars. The ladies' conversation died away to the whispered ends of one or two stories too interesting to be left unfinished,

and then with a deeper note and on manlier topics the flood of talk poured on again.

It had been a most successful dinner—soup excellent, fish first-rate, everything good. Of course the wines were unexceptionable, while the company recognized itself as a homogeneous specimen of all that was best in the city—with the Ramornies of Pettigrew thrown in. Here they were now, the whole twenty-two of them from old Lord Kilconquar, most eminent of judges, down to that rising young Hector Donaldson, bearing implicit testimony to the status of Andrew Walkingshaw. He stood there beside Lady Kilconquar's chair gravely discoursing on a well-chosen topic of local interest and bending solemnly at intervals to hear her comments. You could see at once from the attitude of all who addressed him that he was recognized as far from the least distinguished member of the company. He had touched the very apex of his career.

"Hush, Andrew," murmured his wife. "Mrs. Rivington is going to sing."

Hector opened the piano, and Mrs. Rivington sat down and touched the keyboard. Then she looked around for silence, and it fell completely. All the eye-witnesses present are agreed that it was in the moment of this pause that the drawing-room door opened, and they heard the butler announce the name of Mr. Walkingshaw.

The company turned with one accord and beheld a tall youth, attired in tweeds, march confidently into the room. In fact, he seemed so much at home, that, though naturally surprised (especially at his unorthodox costume), they never dreamt of any but the most obvious and simple explanation. They

scrutinized him as he advanced, merely wondering what cousin—or could it be brother?—he was.

"Surely that's not Frank?" murmured Lord Kilconquar.

It certainly was not Frank; and yet it was some one who looked strangely familiar to one or two of the older people present. He made straight for Andrew, his hand outstretched.

"Don't you know me?" he asked; and the voice recalled strange memories too.

Andrew was not altogether unprepared for some such apparition appearing some day, though scarcely on such a horribly ill-timed occasion. Somehow, he had always imagined the dread possibility as happening in his office. But he remembered exactly how he had decided to confront it. He pulled his lip hard down, his eyes contracted dangerously, and then he merely shook his head.

"What!" cried the young man, with a touching note of rebuffed affection. "Don't you recognize your own son?"

Andrew's brain reeled. His mouth fell open, and his stare lost all traces of formidableness.

"Father!" said the stranger in a moving voice.

Incoherently Andrew burst out.

"You—you—you're not my son!"

His disclaimer seemed so evidently sincere that the sense of the company was already in sympathy with the victim of this outrageous intrusion, when—alas for him!—his aunt chose that fatal moment, of all

others, to rush out of her chronic background.

"Andrew!" she cried, her cheeks suddenly very pink, her eyes strangely excited, her voice trembling with the fervor of her appeal. "He must be—oh, he must be! Look—look at the likeness to your father! Oh, Andrew, what if it is irregular; surely you wouldn't deny the living image of poor Heriot!"

"By Gad! So he is," exclaimed Lord Kilconquar.

A general murmur instinctively confirmed this verdict. They wished to be charitable—but what a family resemblance!

"I—I—I tell you it's a put-up job!" stammered their host.

"Who put it up, father?" asked the strange youth plaintively.

Lord Kilconquar shook his head, and again the startled company followed his lead.

"Look, Andrew!" cried his aunt, pointing to a tinted photograph of James Heriot Walkingshaw at the age of twenty, which hung above the mantelpiece. "Oh, just look at the resemblance!"

The young man regarded this work of art with evident emotion.

"My sainted grandfather!" he murmured, though quite loud enough for the company to hear.

The poor lady stretched her thin clasped hands beseechingly under Andrew's very nose.

"He says it himself—he says it himself!" she pleaded. "For Heriot's sake, don't disown him!"

There was a rustle of silk, decisive and ominous. It was caused by the skirt of the chaste lady of Pettigrew.

"Good-night," she said.

She only touched her brother's hand with the tips of her fingers, and her stony glance gave him his first clear vision of the appalling chasm that yawned beneath his feet.

"Maggie!" he besought her, "you don't believe it?"

"Can you not disgrace yourself *quietly*?" she hissed, and a moment later was gone.

Andrew realized that he was already in the chasm, hurtling downwards with fearful velocity. One after another, his guests followed the example of his scandalized sister; and their host was too unmanned to hold up his head and carry off the partings with the air of injured innocence that alone might have given his reputation another (though a feeble) chance.

As they left the hang-dog figure that so lately was a respected Writer to the Signet, they said to one another that all was over socially with Andrew Walkingshaw. And it had been so public, so dramatic, that they feared—of course they hoped against hope, but still they feared that the fine old business could not but suffer too. In London one might disgrace oneself and yet retain one's clients; but could one here? Well, anyhow, that and many other interesting aspects of the case would be debated by all Edinburgh to-morrow morning.

Meanwhile, the unhappy victim of fate was left alone

with his wife, his aunt, and his long-lost offspring. A desperate gesture dismissed Miss Walkingshaw; yet, though she trembled beneath his wrathful eye, she could not refrain from beseeching him again—

"He must be, Andrew—he must be! Just compare him with the picture."

And then she shrank out of the drawing-room.

"Leave us," he commanded his wife.

Her pale eyes gazed on him defiantly.

"I certainly shall not. I demand a full explanation, Andrew!"

"Go away, will you!"

For answer she sat down firmly upon the sofa.

"Papa, papa, don't be rough with her," expostulated the youth.

Andrew confronted him indignantly.

"That's enough of this nonsense!" he thundered. "What d'ye mean? Who are you?"

"Doesn't the voice of nature tell you?" the youth inquired sadly.

"The voice of nature be damned!"

The young man turned to the cold lady on the sofa.

"Stepmother," he asked, "will you protect me?"

She looked at him at first stonily, and then suddenly more kindly. He was remarkably good-looking, with such nice bright eyes, and a manner difficult to

resist.

"I shall certainly see that justice is done you," she replied.

The young man seated himself beside her and took her hand.

"Thank you," he murmured affectionately.

Andrew swore aloud and vigorously, but the pale eyes never flinched.

"Do you mean deliberately to tell me you don't know who this young man is?" she demanded.

Put in that form, the question made him hesitate for an instant. The hesitation did honor to his sense of veracity, but it finally cost him the remains of his character.

"You needn't trouble to answer!" she cried. "You *do* know who he is. Come, you had better tell me all about it at once. I presume you have not been *married* previously?"

The youth spoke quickly.

"You don't think father was so scandalous as not to marry her?"

"Did you?" she demanded.

The luckless Writer fell into the trap. It seemed to him a gleam of hope—a chance of saving his precious reputation.

"Er—ye—es," he stammered.

"You were married?" she cried.

There was a dreadful pause, and then abruptly she demanded, "What became of her?"

A dark frown answered this pertinent inquiry. She turned to the young man.

"Do you know?"

He seemed to have some difficulty in controlling his voice as he answered—

"She lives in London."

"Lives!" shrieked the lady. "Andrew—you are a bigamist! And I—I am not lawfully—"

She leapt up and gave him one terrible look; and before he could speak she had swept wrathfully from the room.

And then the most surprising thing occurred. Instead of continuing his filial overtures, the young man sank into the corner of the sofa and burst into peal upon peal of boyish laughter.

"Oh, my dear Andrew!" he gasped. "Oh, I can't help it —you a bigamist! Poor respectable old blighter! I say, what a joke! Oh, Andrew, Andrew, my bonny, bonny boy!"

In silence through it all, Andrew gazed darkly down at the late Heriot Walkingshaw.

CHAPTER VI

"When you have finished," said Andrew grimly.

He looked a nasty customer to tackle now, but the laugher on the sofa merely subsided into a friendly smile.

"Shake hands, Andrew," he cried, jumping up.

Andrew placed his hands behind his back, and his glowering eyes answered this overture.

"What!" said Heriot, "won't you even shake hands?"

Andrew still stared darkly.

"You'd rather have it war than peace?"

"I had rather conclude this conversation as soon as possible."

Heriot looked at him for a moment, and then shook his head with a smile compounded of sorrow and humor.

"You're a hopeless case," said he. "Well, your blood be on your own head!"

Andrew's lip grew longer and longer.

"I admit you've made a fool of me," he said, "if that's any satisfaction. But you'll make nothing out of me; not a shilling, not a halfpenny. Do you hear?"

"Is that all?"

"Practically; but I may just as well point out, to let you see where you stand, that as you have now done your worst, there's no use trying on blackmail or anything of that kind. You have been so very clever, you've thrown away any hold you might fancy you had. Do you quite understand that?"

Heriot began to smile again, and Andrew's face grew

grimmer.

"You can prove *nothing*. You may say you're my father if you like—"

"God forbid!" Heriot interrupted devoutly. "I've had enough of fathering a bogle. Claim any sire you like from Lucifer downwards, but don't put the blame on me. I won't be disgraced with you again; not at any price."

For a few moments Andrew seemed to be in travail of a fitting repartee. When it appeared it possessed all the practical characteristics of its parent.

"In that case," he retorted, "you had better clear out of my house as quick as you can."

Heriot regarded him with extreme composure.

"Do you actually imagine you are going to get off as easy as this?" he inquired, "Man Andrew, I haven't been senior partner in Walkingshaw & Gilliflower for nothing. You're just a rat in a trap. That's precisely your position at this moment."

"I'd be glad to hear you explain how you make that out," said Andrew.

Heriot smiled humorously as he produced a bulky pocket-book. Out of this he selected one of many letters it contained.

"Do you know the writing?" he asked.

Andrew turned a thought more solemn, but his only answer was a wary sidelong glance.

"Don't be afraid to say. A hundred people can swear to it. There's no secret to be kept."

"It is my late father's hand," said Andrew gravely.

His guest burst into a shout of laughter, and then with an effort pulled himself together again.

"Read it," he said, "and by the way, I may just as well tell you I've plenty more like it, so there's no point in putting it in the fire."

Andrew took it with gingerly suspicion, which changed into a different emotion as he read:

> "DEAR HARRIS,—I write to let you know that I have reached this city in safety and am slowly recovering from the mental anguish I have undergone. As regards my wretched and ungrateful son Andrew, I still disagree with you. No, Harris, I cannot bring myself to expose the infamy of my eldest boy to a thunder-struck world; I simply cannot do it. His immorality and dishonesty temporarily unhinged my mind. I am exiled through his perfidy, but I forgive him, Harris; I forgive him. Hoping to see you again someday,—
>
> "J. HERIOT WALKINGSHAW."

The address was an hotel in Monte Video, and the date about two years before.

"What—what's all this rigmarole?" gasped Andrew. "It's sheer nonsense from beginning to end."

His unwelcome guest was again shaken with boyish laughter.

"Prove it!" he cried. "Prove it's nonsense! Eh? How'll you manage that?"

Andrew's face grew darker and darker.

"Who does 'Harris' profess to be, I'd like to know?"

"Grandson of Mrs. Harris!" laughed Heriot.

"What Mrs. Harris?"

"Sarah Gamp's pal."

"You are drunk," said Andrew.

Heriot regarded him with portentous solemnity.

"Mr. Harris was the kind gentleman who befriended my grandfather on his voyage to South America. He received afterwards many letters from your papa, Andrew; and very, very thoughtfully handed them to me. They prove, my boy, that you treated your parent outrageously. They prove that you must have been a shocking bad hat yourself. Some of them prove that your kind and forgiving parent is still alive at this moment; others prove that he expired under heart-rending circumstances six months ago; and I propose to use whichever alternative seems best—that's to say, whichever will flatten you out most effectively. And that's who Harris is."

For some minutes Andrew studied the letter in silence. He felt like a heavy-weight boxer in the grip of a professor of Ju-Jitsu. What use was a lifelong apprenticeship to common sense, respectability, and the law of Scotland, when it came to wrestling with a juggler of this kind? he asked himself bitterly. One ought to have led a life of crime! The longer he looked at the preposterous epistle, the more

diabolical did it appear. At last he spoke—

"This is an impudent forgery."

"There are some hundreds of specimens of your father's hand to compare it with," said Heriot calmly; "I am perfectly willing to let any expert judge whether it's genuine or not."

The heavy-weight tried another wriggle.

"This is the letter of a lunatic. I have a certificate to prove it. I can call Dr. Downie to prove it."

"You needn't go to so much trouble. You'll find that plot against my grandfather's liberty fully described in some of the letters. The point that will be put to you by the cross-examining Counsel is, if you thought him off his chump, why did you only pretend to put him in an asylum?"

"I did put him," snapped Andrew.

Heriot rose and rang the bell.

"What's that for?" asked Andrew; but he was only answered by a smile.

"Show up the other two gentlemen," said Heriot.

The discreet butler glanced at his master, but he was too dumbfounded to give any indication of his pleasure one way or the other.

A minute later, Frank and Lucas entered. They nodded coolly, but Andrew only stared.

"Now, Lucas, dear boy," said Heriot genially, "tell this old cockalorum who you saw off on a steamer for South America."

Lucas smiled grimly at his brother-in-law to be.

"Heriot Walkingshaw," he replied.

"Swear to it?" smiled Heriot.

Lucas nodded, his blue eyes glittering on Andrew all the time; and there followed a pause in the conversation.

"What do you propose to do?" asked Andrew.

"Make you disgorge, old cock," said Heriot.

"Disgorge what?"

"Every single penny you inherited!"

Andrew made a last convulsive struggle.

"I'll not do it!"

"In that case, the following interesting facts will immediately be made public: that you lied when you said your father was in an asylum, and lied again when you said he was dead; that he suffered indescribable agonies in consequence of your ill-treatment; that he is either alive at this moment or died a death that will bring tears to the eyes of all Edinburgh; and that, in any case, you helped yourself to his fortune with precisely as much justification as a burglar who opens a safe. The matter will then be placed in the hands of Thompson, Gilray, & Young."

This choice of a vindictive rival firm struck Andrew as the most diabolical artifice of all. His eyes blinked and his cheeks twitched; and when he spoke his voice reminded them painfully of the professional mendicant of the pavement.

"Would you ruin me?"

"Ruin be hanged! Your wife has two thousand pounds a year, and you've got the lion's share of the business. But you've got to shell out every brass farthing you bagged from your poor dear father, and settle it in equal shares on Frank and Jean."

Frank made a quick movement of gratitude and protest.

"Shut up," said Heriot jovially. "You mind your own business, Frank. This is my shout."

"My dear Frank—" his brother began solemnly.

"Andrew!" thundered Heriot, "if you make any miserable whining appeal to your brother, I'll tell Lucas to kick you. Are you ready, Lucas?"

"Quite," said the artist.

A few minutes later the present head of Walkingshaw & Gilliflower had appended his signature to the following document (the unaided composition of the late senior partner in the aforesaid firm):

> "I, Andrew Walkingshaw, having the fear of this world and the next before my eyes, do hereby promise and swear that upon the morning following the above date of the month and year, at the hour of 10 a.m., I shall formally, legally, and irrevocably settle in equal shares upon my brother and sister, Frank and Jean Walkingshaw, the whole estate, real and personal, of my revered father, except such portion of it inherited and enjoyed by my sisters Margaret Walkingshaw or Ramornie and Gertrude Walkingshaw or Donaldson, and my aunt Mary Walkingshaw. This I do for the

> following consideration: that through their kindness and charity my despicable, unsportsmanlike, and criminal conduct may never be revealed. I humbly and sorrowfully confess that I had my estimable father aforesaid certified as insane when I knew his brain to be considerably sounder than my own; that I did this in order to diddle him and my younger brother and sister out of their money; that instead of putting him under restraint, I exiled him furth of Great Britain and Ireland, so that he thereby suffered discomforts and torments for whose virulence I take his word; that I announced his death knowing him to be alive; and that I then in a criminal and shameful manner appropriated his estate to my own use. May all wicked and foolish men be laid by the heels as I have been, and may their relatives be as forgiving as mine! This paper I sign cheerfully and penitently."

It was a pale and flabby-cheeked Writer to the Signet who laid down his pen after reading and signing this lucid document. He stalked solemnly to the door, and then with a chastened air addressed them—

"May Heaven forgive you."

Thus in a blaze of appropriate piety the star of Andrew Walkingshaw set. There is small probability of his ever becoming an Example again. At present it is his arduous task to live down, by the austerity of his demeanor and the judicious expenditure of his wife's income, the suspicions connected with the apparition at his dinner party, and his subsequent act of inexplicable magnanimity in divesting himself of

his fortune and handing it to his brother and sister. It is with the greatest regret that the editor of these few simple facts finds himself unable to cap with a suitable reward the career of well-principled respectability so unfortunately interrupted; but his obligations to the illogical truth are peremptory.

"My dear old boys and jolly good sportsmen, and all the rest of it," said Heriot jovially, "don't mention it—don't mention it. What can you do to show your dashed gratitude? There's only one thing; one blooming favor I ask of you: send me to a good public school!"

CHAPTER VII

The devious lane was filled with sunshine; the studio being lighted only from the north was filled instead with happiness. The same two sat there; but to-day she was no longer so demurely clad and all the aches and weariness were gone, and he no longer fumed.

"Is this better than scrubbing the floor of a ward?" he smiled.

"Buying a trousseau is harder work than you realize, Lucas," she answered, with that touch of reproof by which all good women remind man gently but daily that it is her part to suffer, his to misunderstand.

There followed a space of happy silence, and then

she said—

"Didn't I tell you that everything would come right if we waited?"

"Yes," he admitted, "that was one of your good guesses."

She raised her delicate brows.

"Aren't you happy *now*?"

"Good heavens! I should think so."

"Then be more grateful, dear," she smiled.

Rapturously he confessed he had erred, and was even sufficiently in love to think he perceived how.

"I positively must go now," she said in a little, and, despite his protestations, rose.

"Shall we walk?" he asked.

"Haven't you a cab call?"

"But you haven't been out of a hansom all day, and it's only ten minutes—"

"Oh, bother the expense!" she cried. "I believe in being sensibly economical, but not in being *close*."

Again he cheerfully accepted the gentle rebuke as the reproof his inconsistency deserved.

And so off they whirled in a hansom.

At that very same hour, far, far to the northward, the winter sun was struggling in gleams through the pine-tops and falling in patches on the moss. For an instant one patch lit the hat of straw and gentle face

of Ellen Berstoun; and though it was but a small patch, it also lit a large tweed cap a few inches higher up. Beneath the cap a voice murmured—

"Ellen!"

No more letters came to her now from India; and no longer she walked alone.

These incidents occurred nearly three years ago. Since then Mr. and Mrs. Frank Walkingshaw and Mr. and Mrs. Lucas Vernon have grown into comparatively old married couples.

As for the genial and sagacious author of their happiness, the latest report to hand informs the present editor that the name of James Heriot Walkingshaw stands first in the batting averages of a select preparatory school.

THE END

Transcriber's Note's:

1. Minor changes have been made to correct typesetters' errors; otherwise, every effort has been made to remain true to the author's intent.

2. A Table of Contents has been added to this etext version for the reader's convenience.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK
THE PRODIGAL FATHER ***

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