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MOST OF THE GAME

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MOST OF THE GAME

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LEAVES FROM A LIFE," "FRESH LEAVES AND GREEN
PASTURES," "LEAVES FROM A GARDEN," "MORE
LEAVES FROM A LIFE," "FROM KITCHEN
TO GARRET," &c., &c.

"There is in man a higher than love of Happiness: he can do without
Happiness—and instead thereof find Blessedness."

CARLYLE.

"Tout comprendre—c'est tout pardonner."



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TO PHŒBE
IN AUSTRALIA
A FRIEND, THOUGH WE HAVE NOT MET
FOR MORE THAN FORTY YEARS

“ —The years between
Have taught me some sweet, some bitter lessons, none
Wiser than this,—to spend in all things else,
But of old friends to be most miserly.”

—LOWELL.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I	
LOOKERS BACK SEE MOST OF THE GAME	I
CHAPTER II	
"THEM DUTCH BEGGARS"	25
CHAPTER III	
MISSING !	46
CHAPTER IV	
FRAU VON MÁCOCZY "AT HOME"	68
CHAPTER V	
THE DOCTORS INTERVENE	91
CHAPTER VI	
SO DOES MADAME DE FORTUNA	114
CHAPTER VII	
AT LITTLE HEATHER	138
CHAPTER VIII	
ALL FOR LOVE	162
CHAPTER IX	
"THE WORLD WELL LOST?"	186
CHAPTER X	
AT LONG RIDGE	212
CHAPTER XI	
HAGAR AND ISHMAEL	236
CHAPTER XII	
PHŒBE'S SON	262
CHAPTER XIII	
"THE SINS OF THE FATHERS"	285
CHAPTER XIV	
NEMESIS	311
CHAPTER XV	
"LOVE IS THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW"	336

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

OUR GARDEN, AUGUST 1881	<i>Frontispiece</i>
THE RIVER, WINTERSLOWE	<i>To face p. 25</i>
HAMWORTH HEATH	„ 50
PRESTEIGN BAY, WEST	„ 57
PRESTEIGN BAY, EAST	„ 187
RONCEVALLES-LES-BAINS	„ 218
BRANSCOMBE VILLAGE	„ 236
HIGH STREET, GORSECOMBE	„ 314
HOLME LANE BRIDGE	„ 328
SAILING OF JOCK'S SHIP	„ 348
THE LYCH GATE	„

MOST OF THE GAME

CHAPTER I

LOOKERS BACK SEE MOST OF THE GAME

I THINK the old proverb, "Lookers on see most of the game," should be altered to "lookers back." Those who look on may see the game as it is played; those who live a long time can look back, get the events they saw into focus, and so understand better than anyone else what it all really meant, and who was the conqueror or conquered in the special struggle at which they were allowed to gaze. It is always curious to me to think that the years of my life I disliked most at the time have been those that have given me most pleasure to look back upon, and have also been the fullest of all that make life real. One square in the fabric has met the next one; and though at the time the events seemed—nay, were—painful, all the many different homes I have had and parted from have all had their special interests: and it is only now that I have sufficient experience to recognise the fact.

We as a family were, I think, very singular in the manner in which we one and all lived our separate lives and made and kept our own separate sets of

friends and intimates. True, we were not over long in the home nest, at least, we elder ones were not; all the same, I never recollect playing games together to any great extent, while I always preferred my dolls and books in my own company to sharing them with any other member of our motley host; and in consequence, we were seldom together. Fortunately I had girl friends, to whom I wrote screeds I devoutly wish I possessed at the present time, for they would be most valuable to refer to as to our doings and sayings among the Victorian giants of the past. Both those friends are gone, both had most unhappy and disappointing lives; and when I look back on the one I saw most of after I was married, I still feel puzzled why she made such a terrible mess of her life.

I was about fourteen and Phoebe Summers was nearly twenty when we met first at what would now be thought a most extraordinary entertainment, a local fancy dress ball at a small set of public rooms in Bayswater, made very grand and beautiful to my eyes because I was only fourteen, and had no earthly business to be anywhere save in my bed. But I had made up my mind to go, and in consequence I went: it was always simpler for my easy-going parents to let me have my way than to veto sternly anything on which I had set my heart, and in consequence of this I used to do pretty much as I liked. Fortunately I never wanted to do anything unconventional or improper. I wonder if I had whether they would have merely shrugged their shoulders, remarked it was just what they had always expected, and so allowed me to pass out of their lives as soon as may be?

That special evening I was quite satisfied with my rôle as spectator, for though my boy friends were faithful and begged me to dance, I never cared for that laborious amusement, and always preferred to talk and be talked to and to criticise favourably or otherwise the many people who passed by and through my life. I was, however, becoming rather sleepy, albeit I would not have confessed this for the world, when Phœbe Summers, dressed in shimmering green and white gauze as "Undine," swam gracefully into my view. I have always from my very earliest days been an absolute slave to beauty, and I shall never forget how that tall and lovely girl struck me, and how I envied her and wished I could ever think I should grow up and be half as charming and exquisite as she was!

In those days women must, we are told now, have been perfect frights: all I can say, who saw them, is that we never nowadays see the quantities of pretty girls one used to meet at every turn, or in the Park, or in a ball-room, or merely passing by in the street. One does see lovely and charming faces, but they are so infrequent nowadays that the sight of one makes one almost gasp; and, alas! how soon they become spoiled either by the rush and hurry of the day, or by the imbecile manner in which even young girls are allowed to paint, powder, dye and torture their hair, alter their figures to every passing mode, and spend pounds and pounds on what the professors of the art are pleased to call "Beauty culture." There was no beauty culture about Phœbe Summers, but hers was the most perfect beauty I have ever seen in all my

long life. She had a square forehead, sparkling deep blue eyes, and, above all, quantities of real wavy hair, hair that had never known tongs, and that as "Undine" hung down much below her waist, and sparkled with dewdrops and was crowned by water-plants, and that was, I must confess, freely abused by the men with whom she danced, because it caught in every button they possessed, and by the girls because it put them in the shade and allowed itself to show that, after all, it was Phœbe's, and not the bought tresses with which she had been fully credited by her many acquaintances of her own age.

The gulf between fourteen and twenty is very deep and wide, but I think Phœbe must have noticed my admiring gaze, for at the end of her dance, instead of returning in due form to her chaperon—and chaperons were very real in those days—she came and sat down by me, pulled my curls, and begged to be informed why I was not safely tucked up in my bed. Notwithstanding this deadly insult, I snuggled up to her, put my hand through her warm and lovely arm, and immediately began the friendship that lasted the whole of our lives, with only one hiatus, that about which I am about to write, for it came quite at the beginning of the time after I was old enough to be really her friend.

Sometimes I am impelled to believe that I have lived before, for more than once I have met people and at once, as it has appeared to me, taken up a friendship or an acquaintance that had been made elsewhere. Certainly both Phœbe Summers and I must have done this, else why did she, a radiant grown-

up beauty, take me at once as a friend despite my fourteen years, my short frocks, and my very strong individuality? A strong individuality is always a barrier; it alarms, it bores maybe, I can't say; but I do know that the few real friends I have ever made I have made on the spot, and that if it be an effort to me or to them to become acquainted, the acquaintances have soon drooped and finished, and we have seen no more of each other than we could possibly help.

For a wonder, cold water was not thrown on my enthusiasm for Phœbe Summers. In the first place she was beautiful, and my father adored beauty; in the second, her people were rich, and, above all, had a splendid house where everyone went who was in the least degree amusing or talented, and in that Palace-gardens house one met every singer or actor or painter of whom one had ever heard, and, indeed, many of whom one was to hear much later on in life.

Mr. Summers was a most extraordinary man, and had a perfect *flair* for discovering unknown talent, and, moreover, for making money out of every single thing he ever touched or had to do with. His success was proverbial; a hint from Summers often meant the road to fortune; to be seen at his house meant much, and to be intimate there meant everything among a certain set. Naturally lords and ladies were not plentiful, for in those days the City and the Peerage were indeed distinct, and Mr. Summers was "something in the City," though I cannot say to this day exactly what that something was. Moreover, he was very good-looking; his wife, unlike the wives of most

City men, was in many ways his superior; his children were all charming to look at and well educated, and all appeared devoted to him. Already the two boys were out in the world, one a soldier, the other a sailor; there were only Phoebe and her sister May in the great house, but it was always filled to overflowing with their friends; and even now I do not know why Phoebe singled me out, and let me go long walks with her, and talked to me about the thousand and one ideas she had in her brain, for bettering the condition of the poor folk round about Kensington, or for helping on the wives and daughters of their many clerks and servants who one and all assisted to build up the colossal fortune that must be partly hers one day or the other.

Mrs. Summers openly owned she had not the least patience with what she was pleased to call Phoebe's fads, and informed her, in the callous manner of the Victorian parent, that the sooner she married the sooner her family would be pleased. A cold, hard woman was Mrs. Summers, her quite charming manner hid an icy heart, her one god was success, her one idea was to climb. No wonder when the crash came, as come it did, she was found wanting, and went on her own way secure in her settlements, and caring nothing at all for the husband who made the money, cut herself adrift from the wreckage, and started out to live, what she was heard to speak of in after years, as her own life, and the best part of her life too. The crash came, too, so suddenly, so curiously, four years after I had become Phoebe's dearest and best friend. In those early days I, too,

was fired with immense devotion for the whole human race, as a child I always longed to enact the Pilgrim's Progress, and thought how easy a literal translation of that would be in our everyday life. To me "Vanity Fair" resembled a country fair I had once seen in Dorsetshire. I could pass through that, I was sure, unscathed, a mere passage through all those valleys, and past all the lions would be easy enough for me. How could I understand that all this was figurative, and that Christian had an easy time indeed compared with the real life the least one of us has to live in this world of ours? Phoebe understood and explained, dear Phoebe! It was long before the days when "slumming" was fashionable, and before everyone, from the Queen downwards, thought it their duty to touch and handle the question of the poor with kid gloves and under the skilled guidance that ensured nothing real and true should be seen.

Yet Phoebe repeated the old story about keeping one's own doorstep clean and leaving the world's doorsteps to those who owned them, and her one idea was to obtain leave from her father to know every man and boy he employed, and through them to reach the womenfolk in their own homes, and see for herself just how they could be helped, taught, or even supervised should she discover that they were in want of anything of the kind.

When she first mooted this question Mrs. Summers raised her eyebrows and suggested a new ball-frock and a dance in the big drawing-room for the near future. Mr. Summers looked grave and

said nothing. Afterwards he beckoned Phœbe into the study, or library as he called it, and told her that she had proposed a thing he had wanted to do ever since he was married and had a house big enough to entertain in, but that it had never been allowed. First the children were small, and "those sort of people" always teemed with infectious diseases; secondly, there was not time. Society engulfed them—at least, engulfed her mother, and business engulfed him. He often said what he meant to do when he gave up business, but every year it seemed to him more money was required, living grew more expensive; well, we should see. If ever the happy day came that he could put up his shutters, as he termed it, he and Phœbe would work together; till then, better say no more; peace at any price must be the *mot d'ordre* until such time came as they could all be free; then they would see what they should see.

Fraudulent, unscrupulous, wicked robber as the world came to call Mr. Summers, I for one shall never believe he was, or ever meant to be wicked. It is absurd to even think it. The catastrophe that brought his house falling about his ears brought down many another with him; all the same, how often have I heard him, when begged for a "tip," reply simply that he had no knowledge that would be the smallest use to an "outsider," that "the market" required daily, hourly watching to make money out of anything; while, if pressed beyond endurance to undertake some investment, he always—if he gave way—stated openly that he would not consider himself responsible for any gain or loss. He

would act as if for himself; more he could not say, more he could not do. That was all his tormentors required, they declared at once. Later, when the losses came (his as well as theirs), no words were too bitter, no names too hard to call this once beloved and hospitable friend.

It was about a year before the smash came that both Phœbe and I exchanged confidences about her father's rapidly altering appearance; then we were both engaged to be married, though I vow we both of us would much rather have shared a house together and lived, as the Ladies of Llangollen did, in spinster friendship and amity for our whole lives. Phœbe at last had yielded to her mother's constant hints, which were rapidly becoming orders, the more readily perhaps at the last, as her father appeared relieved at the idea of her being settled in life, and because Lord Winterslowe was on the point of going out for a year or so to some then unknown part of Africa on a sort of half unofficial mission for the Foreign Office, where his knowledge of queer languages and customs was appreciated; while, as for myself, it was my turn to get married. I was about nineteen; Phœbe would later on be in the same county as I should be, and I had not then grasped the idea of the ineffable gulf that existed between the wife of a local peer and the denizen of a small and ultra-foolish country town. We were both to work together—she for the folk at Winterslowe, I for the men in the Brewery. Our plans were dreamed over and over again, and indeed took up far more of our thoughts than did our *fiancés* or our *trousseaux* or any of the thousand and one things girls on the eve

of marriage are supposed to talk of to the exclusion of every other subject under the sun.

But Mr. Summers' appearance, and indeed his ways, worried us both, and as no one else seemed to notice either, we had only ourselves to take into confidence. Mrs. Summers told Phœbe she was mistaken, and me that I was impertinent, as no doubt I was. I loved Mr. Summers, Mrs. Summers and I were always more or less on what we called in the school-room "scratching terms"; all the same, once I had said what I thought, I withdrew into my shell, and both Phœbe and I sat up in the old nursery, now her sitting-room, and talked over the nervous manner in which her father could never sit still for one moment; how every time a bell was heard he jumped; and how at night he prowled about the house, even coming now and then into Phœbe's room to look at her; and once, when he thought her asleep, he leant over her, a tear fell on her face, and she heard him say, "My poor, poor dear little girl." I suggested money worries; had not Overend, Gurney & Co. once gone smash and Black Friday reduced half the city to ruin? But Phœbe was sure that had not harmed her father. Indeed, he had talked quite calmly about it all, and moreover said how thankful he was that he had seen the storm brewing and had taken in all sail before it burst.

That summer money was spent like water. May had married brilliantly, a lord of finance if not one in the peerage. She had gone off to Egypt with a *trousseau* that was the talk of Kensington, and after a wedding that was something to remember. Her *dot* had been secured to her; no, money, at any rate, was

not the reason of her father's trouble, if indeed trouble it were.

How well I recollect the last time I saw Mr. Summers and that splendid house, which on the evening in question truly looked its very, very best! Floral decorations, as understood now, were not known then, but to our unsophisticated eyes the house was full of flowers and great palms and plants, camellias most of them; the table was one mass of gold plate, flowers, and most expensive fruit, and the dinner was longer, more elaborate, and more elegant than any I have ever seen in a private house. Some City magnate had to be impressed, I suppose, or else Mrs. Summers knew all and meant to go out with a flourish of trumpets. I cannot say, but in the middle of dinner the butler—with whom at fourteen I had exchanged riddles and jokes on the stairs, and who had been in the family as long as a butler had been wanted—gave Mr. Summers a message. He went out, apologising to all for his few minutes' absence; and from that moment to this was never seen again by any one of his erstwhile most intimate friends. The dinner went on; Mrs. Summers begged the men to look after themselves, but they soon joined the ladies; carriages were called, cabs fetched; before eleven all of the guests had gone and the lights were out, never to be lit again, for the Summers at any rate.

Papa made a shrewd guess at what had happened. He had a son-in-law in the City, who had invariably been rather hasty on the subject of my friendship with Phoebe, but I always told him he was jealous because the Summers did not care for him. All the

same, he had told Papa there were rumours about, and sure enough the next day the papers—few enough then compared with nowadays—had hints and remarks in their money articles; and later on we heard that Mr. Summers was wanted, a warrant was out for his arrest, and he had done the most unscrupulous and wicked deeds possible, and robbed people right and left to feather his own nest.

I rushed off at once to Palace Gardens to find Phœbe, but instead of my dearest friend there were horrid men “in possession,” and old Walters, the butler, wept on my shoulder and besought me to tell him the moment I heard from his dear, dear master and dear Miss Phœbe. Walters had lost a good place; true, he had saved enough to live on, and need not starve, but all his thought was for the people he had served, and he gave me his address; he was married, as most butlers are, and his wife let rooms “to single gents,” but they should one and all go if his master or Miss Phœbe wanted a roof over them. Mrs. Summers was not mentioned; she was always just to her servants and she never changed them, but she lacked the human touch that means so much, and in consequence she was not loved as Mr. Summers and Phœbe most undoubtedly were; and though no doubt Walters would have taken her in if he could, he would not have turned out the “single gents” for her as he was prepared to do the moment Mr. Summers or Phœbe required shelter or care.

It was a very bad case; I do not know even now just what Mr. Summers had done, but it was something that meant penal servitude if ever he were found. All the

same, his nest was not feathered; he owed no personal bills, and if those who had forced their money on him lost it, he had lost every sixpence too, and went out into the world as poor as ever any man could be.

Long years afterwards—quite thirty—I heard the whole story: how he slipped out of the back door and made his way unwatched to the house of his old governess; how she hid him in the dressing-room inside her room, and how, after the pursuit slackened somewhat and he had grown a beard, he went off from Chelsea in a friend's yacht and got to Spain. In those days he was safe there, and he worked as a labourer in the vineyards with his hands, in the employ of a man who had sold him thousands of pounds worth of wine, and who never knew who he was until he lay dying, and bade him give his love to Phœbe and even to me.

From thence he wrote guardedly to Mrs. Summers and begged her to join him, begged her to give up all her settlements except a bare hundred or so a year to keep her and Phœbe from starvation, and saying that anything could be borne if they were together, and that he had only been unlucky, not criminal in any way. But the woman wrote back to say she had changed her name, and she would never see anyone again who had disgraced her as he had; that her settlements would only keep her in moderate comfort and allow her to continue the allowance her boys must have, and that Phœbe had deserted her altogether, and at the moment she did not know her address, and even if she did she should not give it to him. She then enclosed all the newspaper cuttings she could find about the "Summers Case." How

could any woman be so cruel? I am glad to say her sons would have none of her money; they both lived on their pay as well as they could, and the soldier in later years left the army, made money, and where he saw that it was his father's fault (either through carelessness or his good nature) that caused the loss, he made it good. There is no slur on the name of Summers now: everyone interested learned long before his death that he had clean hands, even if he had been foolish and reckless. The only one who came badly out of the business was Mrs. Summers: for even May and her husband returned her marriage portion. Mr. Eschylus could afford to do so truly; all the same, it was a noble act, and one that has always made me think better of the Greek nation than at one time of our lives we used to.

Mrs. Summers migrated to Dringhouses, a little village on the outside of York, and there she lived in great luxury and style. I saw her more than once on some of my numerous visits to my aunt in York, but she called herself Madame de Fortuna, knew nothing of Phœbe, declared I was mistaken in her identity, and altogether was so emphatically sure she had never seen me before that I began to wonder if I were right, albeit I was quite certain that she was Mrs. Summers, and could be no one else at all.

I was made doubly sure one day, when I was coming out of the Minster, for I met Bob Summers, and he promptly hailed me across the road in his old way, and we were immediately "going it," as he expressed it, "hammer and tongs." He could not get his father's whereabouts out of his mother.

Did I know? Poor old Governor, it was a "beastly chouse" things turning out as they did. He wasn't to blame; Bob felt sure that that beast the head accountant knew more than he let out. Anyhow, he was swelling it about in town, while heaven only knew where the Governor was. He had advertised, and got foreign papers to copy his advertisements, but no doubt even if the Governor had seen them he would think they were a trap, and dare not reply. What did I think?

I suggested that Bob's pet expression "beastly chouse" and "Palace Gardens" should head the next advertisement, but nothing came of it, albeit Bob's pocket-money all went in advertising. No doubt poor Mr. Summers had no money to spend on the English papers. Anyhow, it was not until he died and "Madame de Fortuna" told us, we knew where he was or heard anything of the manner in which he ended his days. I cannot understand why neither May nor Phœbe communicated with me; they did write to and hear from their father, but they never mentioned his name outside their immediate circle, and Phœbe was so shattered by the blow and by her mother's callous disregard of her father's requests that she had left home suddenly and, through some of the Eschylus circle, had obtained a situation as governess with a family of delightful people in Hungary, where she was content, if she could never be happy any more.

I once wrote to her through May; indeed, I think I wrote more than once, just before I was married, but she never replied to my letters. Even May Eschylus discouraged all her old friends; to

keep up a friendship in London one must be very insistent, very faithful, but when one of the friends goes to the country to live, and the other hates writing letters, a friendship soon dies, and is very, very difficult to reanimate even if the friends meet once or twice during the year. While if one writes letters to foreign parts and receives no answer, what can one do? Only, I fancy, what I did, send my address, beg Phœbe to remember that I, at any rate, never changed, and that if at any time she wanted me, there I should be, always the same, always ready to welcome and love my best and dearest of friends.

I have often been told that the most difficult part of a woman's life is her first year of marriage, and that a honeymoon is merely a series of horrid shocks and disillusionments; all I can say is that I most thoroughly enjoyed my honeymoon, and that the one perfect year of my life was the first year I was married. I think I did not expect too much for one thing, and for another I took care to have plenty to see and do when we first started off in life together; and, moreover, I took plenty of books with me to read, while setting up house I found most fascinating. I had always loved a doll's house; the only needlework I ever did was for that; a real house was indeed a perfect joy to me, and I revelled in the thousand and one arrangements that had to be made to turn what had been a somewhat stodgy out-of-the-world family house into a real home. Then, too, the people with whom I was thrown in contact were one and all of the most extraordinary style, and some were really exceedingly funny. I had hoped to discover

another Cranford, full of kindly folk and generous-hearted simple people. Well, a nest of scorpions was nearer the mark! They did not understand me, nor I them. How should we have comprehended each other? We spoke different languages, had different ideas, different interests, different thoughts. They thought me mad; I was quite certain they were too stupid for words; and I was therefore content to leave them alone, though honestly I often wished I could write and tell Phœbe all about their numerous idiosyncrasies.

In one of our long drives I looked down from the top of the hills over the house that might have been Phœbe's had she married the man to whom she was engaged when the smash came, and I most devoutly grieved that she was not settled there. It was not really a lovely old place, such as we had hoped it might be, but was rather a square, uncompromising-looking abode, straight, long, and three-storied, with just a gravel sweep in the front, which looked straight up at the fir-crowned heather-clad hills, but it appeared homely and comfortable, and here Lord Winterslowe still lived with his hard old mother, the mother who had vetoed the marriage emphatically the moment she heard of the Summers' "disgrace," and had written Phœbe a letter she fortunately never received, but that, coming into her son's hands by some blunder of the Post Office, caused a breach that was never filled as long as the fierce old dame lived. Though Lord Winterslowe could not have married without money, and neither would Phœbe have married him in those

first days of misery and disappointment, even had he attempted to carry out the arrangement.

Once during the next five or six years I heard about Phoebe, and that was from a distant acquaintance of mine, who had met her abroad, and, seeing her photograph in my drawing-room, told me much about her, and how exquisitely beautiful she was, and how much admired wherever she went. Unfortunately, he could not tell me where she was living, for he had met her at a patriarchal residence where an enormous family spent the summer, and where there were so many different members of the clan that he never discovered to which set she specially belonged, while, owing to the fact that the villas of which the settlements were composed were all swept away in a stupendous flood, it would be no use to write there. In fact, the settlement had ceased to be, for the head of it, the old grandfather, had died of grief at seeing the work of a lifetime destroyed, and, therefore, there were no known means of communicating with my own dearly loved friend.

Gradually round about us the county families were either dying out altogether or else becoming so poor that they were forced to let their houses, and I was not surprised to find that when old Lady Winterslowe died, her son let his venerable abode, and set off abroad in search of an American heiress, of sport, of anything that would end the painful monotony of his poverty-stricken days. Naturally, we were all excited as to the name and personality of the folk who were to take over Winterslowe, and I for one wondered greatly why anyone should come to such an out of the

way and deserted spot. The railway was six miles off; motor-cars were in the womb of the future, where I, for one, devoutly wish they had stayed; the house was too big for a mere married couple, and yet there were no means of educating a family, and, therefore, we one and all supposed a family was quite out of the question. I only wish the von Mácozys had had the least idea how they were canvassed before they came; they would one and all have been most highly amused at all that was said and prophesied.

The lucky dwellers in houses that faced the "long, unhappy street" of Hamworth sat at their windows to watch every carriage or omnibus that passed by, while still bolder folk walked up to the station when our sparse trains were due, hoping to see the arrival, but neither party was gratified. Suddenly we heard the von Mácozys were settled in at Winterslowe, and that they had had the inconceivable meanness to arrive in their steam yacht, the launch from which had landed them at the bottom of the garden at Winterslowe; which, said Miss Sampson (our town crier and oracle), proved without doubt that they were fugitives from justice and most undesirable neighbours in every sense of the word.

How the very smallest deviation from the ordinary routine of life stamped people as either criminals or impossible in Hamworth, or even as raving lunatics! Now it is amusing to look back at the poor dear little place, but it was rather trying at the time to live among such narrow-minded, one-eyed folk as inhabited it in those far-distant days. It is well for the good people that they are one and all fast asleep in the churchyard nowadays; they could never have borne the rapid way

in which things happen there at the present day, or the mysterious manner in which barriers have been broken down, and folks mix with the self-styled *élite*, who would never have been tolerated for one moment, by reason of their parents being shopkeepers, or, worse even than that, farmers of the over-rented, much-cultivated lands outside the town walls!

But in the days when the von Mácozys went to Winterslowe, the barriers still existed, and we of the town had not the smallest idea of calling on the new people until we received some intimation that our visit would be welcomed. Indeed, it was some little time before we really ascertained of whom the family consisted, and proud, indeed, was our gossip-monger, the doctor's wife, to be able, while making a series of her dismal calls, to inform us that Dewdney, as she always called her spouse, had been sent for to Winterslowe, and had come home raving about the beauty of the governess, the magnificence of the household arrangements, and the mysterious manner in which Frau von Mácozy had not appeared, though the patient he was sent for to see was extremely ill and a nurse would have to be procured from Bournemouth unless the child improved far more rapidly than he, for one, expected him to do.

Moreover, his suggestion of a nurse was vetoed so instantly and sharply by the governess that Dewdney thought she hardly recognised her place or his authority, especially as when he said he had better see the child's parents, she had remarked that matters were entirely in her hands, and that she acted for them. Of course, Dewdney didn't like such treatment, and spoke out, which was unfortunate, as it proved, for the foolish

little man, as, after all the visits had been paid in Hamworth, Mrs. Dewdney Paul had to make a second round to inform us that Dewdney had had a cheque for £5 5s. and a very curt note from the governess saying that Herr and Frau von Mácozy wanted a doctor for their child merely, and not a species of inquisitor into their family affairs.

If Mrs. Paul had had the smallest sense, she would naturally have kept this to herself; but then her head, poor creature, and her long tongue, as well as her husband's foolish conduct, ruined his practice, and sent them both away from Hamworth, to die in some obscure village, hating each other cordially, and blaming each other for what was, indeed, a most mutual fault. All the same, it was entirely due to this letter that I discovered to my joy that the governess was no other than my dearly loved Phoebe Summers, for she signed her name in full, and wrote in the same clear and delightful-looking writing that I knew so very well. Naturally, I did not tell Mrs. Dewdney Paul this; neither did I say anything when she spoke angrily of the manner in which her husband had been treated. But the moment she left me I sat down and wrote to Phoebe, albeit I was wise enough to ride over to Winterslowe and give the little note into the hands of the butler. If I had posted it at Hamworth the fact would have been all over the town in a couple of hours; had I driven, the coachman, no doubt, would have acted equally well as town-crier; but I could and did ride about alone a good deal; otherwise I should never have had an instant's peace.

I could post my MSS. where I was not known, and

receive letters and parcels at equally distant spots. I do not think my life would have been worth much had the good folk of Hamworth known I wrote in those days, albeit my articles were confined to country sketches, and would not have amused or interested them in the very least. But the very next day Phœbe arrived at our house with a couple of the strangest children I had ever seen, and in one moment, as it seemed to me, we took up our old friendship and love for each other as if we had not been parted for so many years, and in such a sudden fashion. We sat out in the garden, and talked and talked, whilst the long-legged, scrawny Hungarian girls made friends with the children and the many dogs and cats by which we were always more or less surrounded.

Phœbe had quite forgotten that Winterslowe and Hamworth were close together, and, indeed, had been so worried by the removal and the arrival at what she once thought would be her home, to say nothing of the sudden illness of the son and heir, that she had had her hands full. Now she was only too thankful to find me close by. She was over-worked, she was not sure what lay before her, she could talk to me, and she hoped I should soon come over to Winterslowe and see for myself exactly how the land lay. The von Mácozys most emphatically did not want to have a single visitor, and though the people who always called on the big houses in the neighbourhood, no matter who was in them, had all arrived in state, they had not been admitted; and a civil note had been written to each, and sent with cards to say that Frau von Mácozy was an invalid, and had come to England for the perfect

rest and change she could not get at home, and, therefore, she neither paid nor received visits.

If the mother were like the daughters, I felt Phœbe's position must be anything but a sinecure. Those girls were never quiet for one instant; now they were climbing the mound to see where the old castle used to stand, now they were up the mulberry tree, chattering like a brace of monkeys, their long, lean legs and feet waving in the air. Finally, they made for the river and the boat, but, as the gardener was on the spot, and Phœbe assured me they swam as well as the fishes, I saw no reason to trouble. Albeit, they both got into the water somehow, and had to be dried and fussed over before they could be driven back home to Winterslowe once more. Even then Phœbe was unruffled, and assured me the years she had spent in Hungary, and among the Hungarians, made her "equal to any fortune." They were a bundle of nerves, here, there, always on the move, always dashing from pillar to post, always eager to see, to know, to feel. Her only chance had been to cultivate British phlegm to the utmost, and, in consequence, she was trusted, loved, and, above all, highly paid as she never would be in any other household in any other country under the sun.

We might, and did, resume our old friendship at that first meeting, but neither of us referred for one minute either to the past or future. Still, I took the opportunity of telling Phœbe the nature of the folk by whom she was surrounded, and gave her a few hints on the difficult, but most desirable talent of discouraging anything resembling gossip in such places as Hamworth and Winterslowe both were.

The fact that there might be nothing to gossip about was no reason why gossip should not flourish amain. I was really glad to hear that all the domestic staff spoke no language but their own, and that even the gardeners had been brought over from the washed-out settlement of Lasayka, where their services would be no longer required. I thought Phœbe was going to tell me the reason for these extensive precautions, but at that moment the front door bell rang, and, knowing how useless it would be to say I was out, I hastily collected the von Máccoczy girls and Phœbe, fled down the steps through the lower garden, and, packing them into their gorgeous carriage and pair, waved farewell, and returned to the garden to see Mrs. Dewdney Paul standing at attention, and regarding the causeway through my field glasses, which were always standing on the drawing-room table, in case any rare bird came within view and I wanted to see, for myself just what it was.

I let her gaze, ordered tea on the lawn, flatly refused to give the smallest description of my guests, and finally allowed her to flounce away—after a most excellent meal—more convinced than ever that I was quite the most peculiar and detestable person she had ever met, and that she really could not understand me in the very least.



THE RIVER WINTERSTOWN.

CHAPTER II

"THEM DUTCH BEGGARS"

It is almost impossible to make present-day people understand the extraordinary manner in which other folks' business was the main topic of interest and conversation in an English county town about thirty-five years ago, but I must try to do so.

The wild excitement that the arrival of the von Mácoczys caused in Hamworth was shared equally by the county folk, more especially as one of the sons of the leader of that special set had made the acquaintance of Herr von Mácoçzy at Buda Pesth, and had written to his people to beg them to do what they could for them socially, for they had been "jolly good" to him. Naturally, this made the Beevors wonder more than ever why their call had not been returned, and why only a civil note represented all the friendship that there was likely to be between them and the von Mácoczys. Of course, the von Mácoczys' carriage had been seen turning up the most disreputable lane that served as an approach to our house, and I was not surprised when Mr. Beevor, the kindest gossip in the world, arrived to see me on the next market day, when he began, as usual, by apologising for the non-appearance of his wife, and then plunged into gossip

about the curious individuals who were apparently settled down in Winterslowe for the next seven years. Mr. Beevor, who only died the other day, possessed the most extraordinary confidence that he and his like were the real foundations of society, and that we simply existed as a body about whose doings he could, and did, take the most lively interest. That townspeople could object to his microscopical examinations never entered his head, any more than he would have had the smallest idea that we resented his perpetual runnings in and out, though his wife, Lady Mary Beevor, never attempted to call. Nor did they ever ask us to anything save a gathering we always refused to grace, and that was known to us—that is to say, to me and my husband and my relations in London—as a “beast-party” or the annual meeting of the local Zoo. No one could ever understand why I did not join the “beasts,” but I never would, and I think, before the day of his death, Mr. Beevor had some small glimmering of the truth that I thought myself quite as good as he and his were, and that I was not going to be patronised by anyone no matter what his walk in life was, or was imagined by himself to be. Yet what an excellent and charming man he was to be sure, and though he was over seventy when he died, he looked as a young man does, and walked and drove about as if he were still the strong and busy man he had always been.

Fortunately market-day came a day or two after Phoebe's visit to me, and I could not tell Mr. Beevor anything at all about the family, and would only say that the English governess had been one of my old friends, and that the two girls who came with her were

quite enough to occupy her, and that I did not suppose I should see very much of her.

But it was really astonishing what Mr. Beevor had picked up in the way of gossip, and how much the affairs of the von Mácozys had been canvassed by even the villagers, farmers, and farm labourers, who one and all of them spoke of the new inhabitants of Winterslowe as "them Dutch beggars," and had quite blood-curdling anecdotes to relate of the "long-haired objects" who pervaded the place—hunted the game and harried the farmyards, and apparently had not the least idea that ducks, chickens, butter, and eggs were not part and parcel of Winterslowe, and were not among the free amenities of the place.

Mr. Beevor could not himself understand how it was that Winterslowe could have let his place to a tribe of foreigners. Frenchmen would have been bad enough, but Hungarians!—I really do think Mr. Beevor, who had never left his own native shores, and never did leave them all the years he lived, believed that Hungary was peopled by savages, and that the inhabitants, one and all, lived in mud huts, furnished, as he expressed it, "anyhow," and went about armed to the teeth, ready either to defend their lives from each other, and from the many savage beasts which roved their towns and villages, and did exactly what they liked with the inhabitants thereof.

Will Beevor had told his father that the von Mácozys were distinctly noble, and rather above than below the Beevors in social status. But that a foreigner could be equal to a Beevor was so impossible that poor Mr. Beevor feared Willie

must be in love with one of the girls. I calmed his anxieties at once by mentioning their ages, and I really had a faint idea of asking Phoebe and the girls to meet him. At the same time, I knew Mr. Beevor's extraordinary memory, and his mania for discovering all about the family and antecedents of everyone he came in contact with. So I was afraid "Summers" might set free a train of reminiscences that would not be to Phoebe's benefit, more especially as she was too proud to deny her parentage, and would inevitably give herself away if Mr. Beevor began his usual cross-examination on the subject of Phoebe's birth-place, manner of education, and how and why she found herself so far away from England and English ways as to be resident governess among a family of foreign folk.

I am quite sorry that Mr. Beevor is dead, and doubly sorry that before he died he did not condescend to put on paper some of the remarkable life-histories with which he was acquainted, for I am certain a mine of information was closed when he was laid to rest in his grave. He knew the ins and outs of all the relationships, not only in his particular county, but among his particular set in England, and one could realise, as he talked, how small a set, and how select it had been in the old days before financiers and American heiresses had entered the social world, and before railways and motor-cars and telegrams had shortened distances, and made every portion of the globe appear to be next door to each other. Motor-cars had not come into birth, neither had the railway passed beyond Hamworth when the von Máczys came to Winterslowe, but, all the same, the barriers were beginning to

expand, even if they were not broken down, and Mr. Beevor, much as he hated the fact, had to know several people his parents never would even look at, to the respective days of their deaths.

They never approved in the least of the way in which he was in and out of Hamworth, and sniffed audibly if he met me when in their enormous carriage, for, of course, he had to take off his hat, a salute I always acknowledged by a wave of the hand of the lightest and most airy description. I know old Mrs. Beevor thought this an enormous liberty, and I always chuckled to myself when she raised her eyebrows and gave a perceptible sneer at what I am convinced she deemed my impertinent familiarity. I feel certain, too, she expected the respectful curtsy that at the present time no village child gives, even to the parson. Perhaps she was right. I even nowadays feel sorry that no hats are touched and no curtsies dropped as they invariably used to be in those far distant days to anyone the villagers or townfolk thought worthy to be honoured. However, long before Mr. Beevor died, he, too, saw the decline and fall of village politeness, and, though he never lost his hatred of foreigners, he came to like the von Máczys' household, and to watch, as I did, with the deepest sorrow the development of one of the saddest stories I think I have ever watched over from afar. I had assured Mr. Beevor that "them Dutch beggars" neither stole nor murdered, but I do not think he believed me until he came in one afternoon and took up a watch that was by my desk, in his somewhat vague yet curious manner, and exclaimed aloud at the crest

on the back thereof, or rather, should I say, at the coat of arms.

There was nothing respecting heraldry that Mr. Beevor did not know. He could name the owners of any carriage if he saw their crest, and the sight of a coat of arms sent him off at once on a series of disquisitions as to the different families into which the owners had married, and one of the strongest friendships of his later days was made with a lady he took in to dinner, and who recognised at a glance, from a coat of arms on the centre-piece, that the host's family must at some time have married into hers, as her father's arms were quartered on the shield. I honestly did not expect Mr. Beevor to recognise either Hungarian or Austrian coats of arms, but he read the von Máccoczys' as if it were a printed book.

At the same time, he appeared troubled at the latest addition, and openly cross-questioned me about Frau von Máccoczy, and was evidently very disappointed that I could only tell him her manners and looks were alike charming, and that she dressed as no one I had ever seen dressed, and that her clothes apparently grew on her, so unconscious did she seem of their beauty and absolute perfection of detail in every point.

Mr. Beevor cross-questioned *me*, but flatly declined to be drawn, though I tried my best to find out what he knew about Frau von Máccoczy's family. I did not even know her maiden name, albeit I believe it was set out in full on her cards, which was perhaps one reason why the county was so angry with her. Yet here was Mr. Beevor plainly reading from the watch all about her family, and recollecting things

about them he did not mean to let out. He could gossip, dear man! most pleasantly and apparently openly, but no one was closer if the fair fame or honour of his order was in question, and then he would even prevaricate; albeit, he could, and he would, have prevented many an evil deed, or even loss, had he had the courage to support the right against the wrong. But if the wrong were county and the right town, then the wrong had his support. Well, time brings about its own revenges, and he lived long enough to see and recognise the death of his order, and the triumph of the one beneath his, though honestly I prefer his, and if he and his like had only been just a trifle more honest, more observant, they need never have been forced from a throne they very often filled in a most excellent and kindly manner.

That day fate played into his hands, and he was still examining the watch, when Phœbe and the von Mácozy girls came into my room, and asked for it back, if it were returned, as they hoped it might be, from our eccentric watchmaker, who then lived in a queer little shop up three deep steps, and whose idea of watch-mending or of repairs in general was of the most original kind. I have often met my watch in the hands of some other lady, who had been lent it by Poveromi while hers was being attended to; while I may have been wearing hers on the same excuse. Then, too, if we any of us sent him a trinket to repair, and forgot to call for it, when we did so at the expiration of a few weeks, he would hand us out a tray heaped up with jewels of all kinds and sorts, some even of very great value, and bid us select from the

lot the particular object we recognised as our own. As Mr. Poveromi continually went to his native Italy, as well as to many a local sale, he picked up some really wonderful treasures, and my honesty has often been severely tried by the sight of some of these things I might have claimed as my own without the slightest demur on his part.

I am sure Poveromi had no memory, but he had a perfect talent for the discovery of a good thing; so much so that when he was apparently on the verge of bankruptcy, owing to his unbusiness-like manners, his brother came to the rescue, looked through his accumulations, and not only paid everyone everything, but sold enough to keep Poveromi for the rest of his life, and with the remainder opened a shop in Bournemouth, where he died full of years and riches not so very long ago.

But the von Máczys' watch had not been left to the Hamworth jeweller's tender mercies, for I had stood over him while he restored the little handle, and had brought it away at once. Otherwise I feel sure it would have gone the round of Hamworth first as a curiosity, or "lent" to someone else, whose valueless property was in its turn making the rounds, and little as I knew of the value of such a watch, I felt sure the von Máczys would have resented this curious manner of procedure about their property.

Mr. Beevor was far too much of a gentleman to question the children about their mother, but I saw he was in a fidget to approach Phœbe herself, and begin his usual series of delicate investigations, and, as her name had not been mentioned, I let him talk to her while the children dashed out into the garden and

made for the river and our old gardener in their ordinary way. I could hear her describe the family place and the extraordinary series of storms which had swept it from the face of the earth, while she assured him that Frau von Mácczy's nerves were so shattered by what she had gone through, that she had been sent out of the country at once into entirely different surroundings, and that it was hoped a long sojourn in England would allow her to recover, while the children learned English and became less neurotic than the average Hungarian girl was apt to be.

Now nerves were absolutely taboo in the Beevor family, and, indeed, in the days I write of, were scarcely recognised anywhere at all. I was, therefore, rather astonished to find that Mr. Beevor did not hold forth on the subject of nervous affections and demonstrate, as he usually did, that "nerves" was only another term for temper and that hysteria and nerves were things that no well-regulated mind could recognise for one moment as being really existent. Instead, he drew Phœbe out, and made her describe the extraordinary tempest that was the end of the von Mácczy's delightful summer home : how, as they were at luncheon one day, a storm suddenly burst over the settlement of toy villas, the thunder crashed, the lightning flashed, and the rain came down in three separate curtains of water, one straight down, one to the left, and one to the right of the villas, in such dense streams that they could not see a hand's breadth in front of them. The clear tiny brook that trickled through the garden became a roaring torrent, trees came crashing down, bridges and roads were swept away, and at every instant they felt that

their little house—built merely for the summer—would go too, and they would, one and all, be swept down to destruction by the flood. Phœbe's "English phlegm" was much admired afterwards, and she humorously described how she had first picked up one member of the family, and then another from the floor, where they were squirming in frantic heaps, and then having tucked them up on the sofas, begged them to lie still, hoping every minute the noise and rain would cease. But for three days and two nights the storm went on, the villas being completely isolated from each other, the different families really not knowing who was alive or who was not, until at last the thunder and wind stopped, and the torrents subsided into a soft grey mist, through which they could sally out and see what had really happened.

Frau von Mácoczy was nearly out of her mind, for Herr von Mácoczy had gone to Buda Pesth, and she was in terror that he might try to get to them without knowing that the whole of the road was gone. Nothing but a roaring torrent full of broken trees and pieces of bridges and bodies of animals represented what was once the high road, while the girls were almost as terrified, and needed all Phœbe's authority to be exercised to keep them anything like within bounds.

The worst of all was the fact that for at least a month there was absolutely no communication between them and the outer world. Telegraph poles were down, and it was not until quite a month after the storm that horsemen could reach them bringing letters and provisions, though fortunately the latter were not

as badly required as they might have been. Storms were always possible there; in consequence, every housewife had a very fully filled store cupboard, and there were eggs, and chicks, and milk, the animals being kept in barns raised on piles high above any known watermark, which they reached by a series of inclined planes, in a most amusing manner, every evening when bedtime came, and they had to be shut in for the night. Of course, one felt much as a rat does in a trap.

All the same, Phœbe, having nerves of brass, was none the worse for her experience, and she had luckily had all she could do to keep Frau von Mácoczy from any mad attempt to leave the villa and find her way down to civilisation once more. Indeed, the moment the roads were practicable for men, she had been carried down in a hammock slung on the shoulders of a couple of stalwart peasants, and Phœbe and the three children had followed later on, and, until they could drive down in the orthodox way, they had been bombarded by letters and telegrams begging every hour or so for news. The moment it rained, Frau von Mácoczy at Buda Pesth declared the storm was beginning again, and the doctor, summoned from Vienna, had declared that she must at once get into an entirely different atmosphere, and preferably one of perfect calm. Judging from Phœbe, he said England was the place. Therefore, to England they came, and, as Lord Winterslowe was an old acquaintance of the von Mácoczys, Winterslowe was offered them. How simple, after all, was the explanation of the mystery which had kept Hamworth and Winterslowe agog ever

since "them Dutch beggars" had arrived on the scene. Mr. Beevor appeared curious to know more about Frau von Mácoczy than about the storm, but Phoebe allowed his "fishing" to be quite unsuccessful as far as she was concerned, and at last the Beevor carriage was announced as being at the bottom of the lane and waiting for Mr. Beevor. Her Ladyship would have felt compromised had she driven to our door and waited for him there, and he left evidently possessed of some clue to a mystery, but what it was I most certainly had not the least idea. However, Phoebe very soon put it into his hands, and I felt extremely sorry that the von Mácoczys had come to a small country place in England if they hoped to keep matters as quiet as Herr von Mácoczy evidently wished them to be, though, no doubt, after all, England was safer than Hungary was, as far as secrecy was concerned. Not that Phoebe told me anything much; but I could see she was seriously uneasy about Frau von Mácoczy; her nerves were still in a desperate state, and though sometimes she was quite herself and quiet, she was never gay, never amusing; and at other times would roam about the house and garden, or else sit for hours, her hands in her lap, and her eyes fixed on the river, as if she expected that to rise and in its turn become a raging torrent, sweeping everything resolutely before it, as the one in Hungary had so recently done. To my astonishment, too, Phoebe had been commissioned to ask me over to spend the day at Winterslowe. I compromised on a species of four o'clock tea arrangement. Spending the day was a thing I never could do, and to spend it with an unknown Hungarian family,

even tempered with Phoebe, was more than I felt equal to.

All the same, I must own I had a great curiosity not only to see Mari and Roszi at home, but actually to have the joy of seeing more of Frau von Mácozy, for she never left the grounds. Herr von Mácozy had very soon come to see us, and found great interest in the Brewery, where he held forth on the different systems of brewing, and speedily became a very welcome guest in that noisy and odoriferous spot, and as he and the children were immediately free of the place, he at once found the green door through which he could escape into our garden should anyone enter the Brewery on business, and he never felt he was likely to be pounced upon and questioned in the good old Hamworth style; so I was always glad to see him, though his conversation with me was limited, and he very much preferred the more congenial atmosphere of the Brewery and office.

I think had there been a wire between Winterslowe and Hamworth in those days my visit would have been put off, for when I arrived I found Phoebe distinctly perturbed in manner, and the children even rather subdued for them, and, moreover, it was some time after the tea-gong had sounded that the von Mácozys appeared. Had they been Hamworth folk, and capable of such vulgarity, I should have thought they had been having what is ordinarily termed "a row." Herr von Mácozy was quite quiet, but his wife talked without stopping and on a curious high note I had never heard before, but as she spoke Hungarian I was no wiser, and Phoebe and I did our best to keep

the children occupied, and talked as if the extraordinary monologue was not proceeding and everything was as ordinary as undoubtedly it looked. If these were Hungarian nerves, they were most uncomfortable possessions, I thought; however, Phœbe did not appear disturbed, so I did not see why I should be uneasy. I knew I would not have spent a night alone in the house with Frau von Mácczy to save my life, yet when she became quiet and, almost in less time than it takes to tell it, quite normal, and she begged me to come indoors and look at some of her possessions, I went without a qualm, and she became as charming and interesting as I had always found her on the very few brief occasions we had met when I had ridden over to see Phœbe or give Herr von Mácczy a message about some particularly interesting experiment that was about to take place in the Brewery at home. Indeed, so very charming was she that I had almost forgotten the way she had behaved at first, when one day Phœbe came in as usual, and, sending the children down to the river, began to take me into her confidence.

Indeed, it was by Herr von Mácczy's wish that she did so; for, ignorant as he was of English law and English powers, he was afraid of what might occur, had he not some idea of what he might be forced to do, unless Frau von Mácczy recovered her nerve and became rather more normal than she appeared to be at present. Phœbe told me quite plainly that the horror had been growing ever since the birth of the one boy. Until then she had been just the same as everyone else. Wild, excitable, yes; but then all

Hungarian women were so more or less; but twice or three times she had risen in the night, insisted on her maid dressing her and the carriage being got ready and brought round, when she would drive on for hours until the horses were exhausted and the coachman had been forced either to return home or put up somewhere until they were able to proceed. Imagine what such conduct would mean at Winterslowe! Everyone there was in bed by ten, and often before; the sound of a passing carriage brought everyone to the windows, and already folk were talking wildly about these nocturnal excursions. Herr von Mácoczy was exhausted, the coachman was on the point of returning to Hungary, and had indeed declared he would not stay another week. Frau von Mácoczy had then threatened to shoot the man, and had whipped out her little revolver, and had not Herr von Mácoczy thrown up her arm at the moment she fired, she would have undoubtedly done some mischief. What would an English servant have done?

Probably, I answered, he would have gone into the town and taken out a summons, unless heavily bribed not to do so; at any rate, undoubtedly things were very, very wrong at Winterslowe, and I strongly advised Phœbe to get Herr von Mácoczy to see some specialist and obtain his advice on the matter. The most painful part of it all was that Frau von Mácoczy had taken a violent dislike to her husband, and, moreover, she had more than once lost her temper violently with the little boy.

Michael, as his utterly unpronounceable name had been Anglicised by Phœbe, was devoted to his mother

too, and trotted after her as some little dog follows its master. If she got up to leave the room or garden, Michael ran after her; he would creep into her room at night and be found cuddled down by her pillow in the morning; if she went down to the river he went too, and, in fact, had even climbed out of a most dangerous window when his nurse had locked the nursery door in the hope of making him remain with her. She had only gone to the cupboard for something or other when Michael seized the opportunity to escape. Fortunately the gardener was close by with his long ladder, and had caught and saved the child, but nurse and nursemaid alike were worn out. Michael appeared to have the cunning of a fiend. Nothing would keep him away from his mother; even now, when she began to scold him and tell him she was extremely angry, and inclined to hate the sight of his poor, pinched, white little face! Even then his sweet little brown eyes would only fill with tears; he would hold a fold of her dress and say nothing, only look at her. Then she would wrench her garments away from his slender hold and rush madly away into the woods that surrounded Winterslowe, while Michael ran after her, sobbing under his breath. Then her mood would change suddenly, and she would catch him up and carry him home, calling him all the endearing names she knew while the little fellow nestled into her arms, smiled, and forgot his fatigue and her cruel treatment at one and the same time.

The uncertainty of Frau von Mácozy's conduct was what nearly drove Phœbe wild. One day she would spend lavishly; she would send to Paris—that

Mecca of the Hungarian—or even to London for great boxes of clothes, and choose out things she would never wear and that were not of the least use to her. Then she would declare they had lost every sixpence when the villas were swept away and the estate ruined; she would give every servant notice, order meals of bread, vegetables, and potatoes merely, and water was to be drunk instead of coffee or wine, or even milk. The bewildered servants did not know what to do from one day to the other, while Phœbe and Herr von Mácozy had to obtain surreptitious meals for the children and themselves, or undoubtedly they would all have been nearly starved. Almost the worst sign of all was that, from being an absolute slave to fashion, she was becoming slovenly in her dress, even refused her daily scented bath, and had nearly ceased to wash herself at all. Accustomed in Hungary to dress as a princess rather than a private person, she now threw on an old *robe de chambre*, made truly of satin and lace, but so soiled it was absolutely disgraceful. This she kept on all day, despite her maid's tears and entreaties, and, in fact, the only time there was peace was when she was asleep. Fortunately she now went to bed very, very early, and slept nearly all night long, while Phœbe and Herr von Mácozy took turns to sit on the stairs and watch her door lest she should get up and do something unspeakable in the middle of the night.

One night they had really thought this was unnecessary, she seemed so entirely exhausted, and the watch was relaxed. Frau von Mácozy had in some mysterious manner found this out, had risen, crept out

into the woods with Michael—undressed as they both were—and was found, nearly perished with cold, by one of the keepers, and Michael had been in his little bed, ill with what was perilously like pneumonia ever since, while his mother appeared not to have suffered at all, and laughed discordantly when she was told of the illness she had entailed on the little boy.

It was absolutely plain to me what was the matter, but Phœbe was inclined to be indignant when I first suggested drugs, and then, that being impossible, as she never went to a shop, and never had any letters or parcels at all which were not immediately public property, said I was sure she was mad. I had once had experience of a similar case, when very prompt action only just prevented murder. In that case all the symptoms were identical: the foolish laugh, the morose temper, the poverty scare, were all there, but to them were added an uncertainty of touch and gait, and these, at any rate, were absent at present in Frau von Mácoczy's case. At the same time—albeit Jack Harrison fell upstairs with a lighted candle in his hand, which I blew out just as the poor man stumbled into my arms, and instead of putting his wine-glass on the table, put it down *in* the air, and was surprised it smashed—he never declined his bath or forgot to wash.

Neither he nor Frau von Mácoczy were pleasant subjects to think about; but though Jack was dead and buried, I recollected all he did quite well, and hoped I could gather from those same recollections something that would now help Phœbe with her mistress. But, alas! I could not. To tell the truth,

Jack had gone swiftly from bad to worse. Money was plentiful, and he was taken abroad with a skilled attendant and a doctor, but he went suddenly raving mad in a French hotel. In those days the French had a short way with lunatics: he was handed over to an alienist, and it required much interest and, I think, a good deal of bribing before he was released and taken home, to die a paralysed imbecile: the work of four men to nurse, feed, and tend him, while he lay like a log, his eyes only moving. But I always thought I could see his soul in those unhappy eyes, that he realised what he was and what he had been, and I confess I heard with joy of his release and his death in his sleep after a long period of absolute unconsciousness.

Evidently Frau von Mácozy was on the same road as Jack Harrison had been, albeit they might not end in just the same manner, for Jack had never turned against his friends, and, except for the one violent outbreak, had never been a danger to himself or anyone else.

I could see that Phœbe was suffering much from the strain, and she told me that Herr von Mácozy was nearly out of his mind too. She never understood the marriage, which she fancied was one of love on her side only, and that on his there was nothing but a tepid affection, now becoming a curious mixture of hate and fear. He idolised little Michael, and was entertained by the vagaries of the girls, who certainly were a couple of amusing villains, original and comical in every relation of life; but Frau von Mácozy first bored him with her effusive affection, and now frankly

terrified him with her unexpected behaviour and her most uncanny ways.

I felt helpless all the time Phoebe talked with me, for doctors and nurses appeared alike taboo. Herr von Mácozy was desperately afraid his wife would be pronounced mad; if she were, she must go to some retreat where she could be watched and properly managed; then the slur of lunacy would be cast on the children; every silly trick of Roszi or Mari would be mentioned with bated breath—children of a mad mother, what could one expect? One almost heard the whispers and saw the shrugged shoulders; of course, the secret must be kept if possible. Winterslowe was immense; why not shut her up in one wing with relays of nurses?

That would certainly prove the last straw, said Phoebe; she must go and come as she liked, the least idea of constraint infuriated her; she was so strong, she would smash anything that opposed her, anyone even. No, her only chance was freedom. They must continue their watch, and hope her nerves would soon recover tone.

I pointed out as forcibly as I could the frightful risks they were running: that neither Phoebe nor Herr von Mácozy could go on for ever watching and waiting, and said I was certain that skilled medical help must be obtained. Why not allow some of the Hungarian servants to retire and at the same time engage nurses willing to take their places? Once they understood the situation, and were all well paid, they could watch and be ready at any moment should an outbreak of ungovernable mania occur. I was

surprised to find Phoebe still clinging to the idea of nerves, but at my most earnest request she promised to suggest the nurses to Herr von Mácozy, and I was more relieved than I can say when she told me that all arrangements had been made. A first-class London man called to see Michael, as a pretext, had also seen his mother; he had undertaken the case, and nurses as new housemaids, and as a trained nurse for Michael, who was now quite well, were to be despatched. Dr. Strawson quite took my view of the case, and pooh-poohed nerves to Phoebe, albeit he agreed with Herr von Mácozy that Hungarian women were very highly strung, and he thought it would be best to send down a young doctor who would like the sad but interesting charge, while at the same time he would take over the accumulated correspondence of both the von Mácozys and act as secretary until such time as he would be no longer required.

How did Frau von Mácozy discover these well-laid plans? No one said a word at Winterslowe; no one except ourselves knew what arrangements were made; but in some way or other she found out what we intended to do, and at once frustrated us in the most appalling manner that could possibly be conceived.

CHAPTER III

MISSING !

I THINK most likely everyone living nowadays has forgotten, or, perhaps, has even never even heard of a Mrs. Crowe, who wrote a grisly book called the "Night Side of Nature." We had it in the old library at home, but it was one of the very few books that was ruthlessly snatched from me just as my hair was beginning to stand on end, and I was thoroughly enjoying the terrifying sensation of ghostly dreads and fears this collection of nightmares began to engender in my youthful mind. I wonder if anyone has the "Night Side of Nature" to lend? If so, I should dearly like to see it, and find out if it were quite as awful as my recollections thereof make it out to be.

Perhaps I was more impressed by the fact that the authoress was discovered in an absolute state of Nature in some street near our house, and was taken home by a friendly policeman wrapped up in his coat. The poor woman believed that, deprived of her raiment, she was invisible, and was much annoyed to find that, at any rate, the guardian of the street thought it necessary to cover her up and convey her home, when she passed, to the best of my belief, to an asylum, where she ended her days.

Perhaps this idea of being invisible in undress is a common one among those whose minds are distraught? At any rate, Frau von Mácozy was firmly convinced that no one could see her when her garments were off, and, as she had in some mysterious, almost telepathic manner, discovered that nurses and doctors were on their way to Winterslowe, she determined first to become invisible *à la* Crowe, and then to wander at will among the woods and lanes about her country home.

We were aroused one night by the primitive method of throwing gravel at our windows, to find our one policeman in the garden looking anxiously up. Frau von Mácozy had walked into Hamworth, followed by Michael, trotting after her; she had not one single garment on, and poor little Michael, newly recovered, as he was, from pneumonia, had only on his ordinary night gear, a flimsy nightshirt—for pyjamas were not yet, and a cotton night garment was the only thing a child wore in those long dead days, when he or she went to bed. The police sergeant's wife had seized Michael and put him to bed in warm blankets, after a hot bath, and had hastily clothed his mother, and sent first for me, and then for the doctor. So I had to rise and go off to the little house that served us for a police station, to find that Frau von Mácozy had rushed away in Mrs. Salter's Sunday dress, and poor little Michael was crying his heart out because he was not allowed to get up and follow his adored mother in the usual manner.

Michael had to be soothed and consoled before he could tell us what had led up to this catastrophe, and

I gathered from him that his mother had determined to get back to Hungary somehow or other. She was not going to be watched and imprisoned. She must have her own way, she must go and come as she would, and if she were to be followed about, she would most undoubtedly return home. Michael could come if he liked; perhaps it was better that the child should be with her. How they had walked all those miles in the dark I do not know, but they had, and here was Michael ill—very ill—and his mother fled into the darkness, heaven alone knew where. I have had many a day and night of alarm in my life, but I really do think that night and the day that followed it were as unpleasant as any one of them.

In the first place, Dr. Dewdney Paul insisted that I must take Michael to our house, as he could not possibly be nursed at the Salters, for they had an enormous family in the good old style, and not a spare inch of room. He must fetch the town brougham, a truly stuffy conveyance, but covered at any rate, and then, wrapped up in the Salter blankets, and guarded by hot-water bottles, he must be removed at once to our house.

Mad people never come to any real harm, he said, contemptuously, when I suggested that Frau von Mácotzy must be looked for, and he added that "the next day would do for her." Indeed, the darkness was great; even in Hamworth itself getting about was not easy, for all the lamps there went out in the streets at ten sharp, and what it would be in the country, we could not think.

For once, Dr. Paul had his way. Indeed, as far as I

was concerned, I always should have liked him to have it, and I much preferred him to his partner, but his wife's tongue barred his way, and he could not help talking to her about his patients. He might as well have told the town crier; indeed, our special town crier would have been safer. He, at any rate, would have stuck to his work; Mrs. Dewdney Paul went the round of the town after any special happenings in the medical line, and the sick-room doings and sayings were public property in less time than it takes me to write them down.

Imagine her joy when her husband returned at day-break full of the most extraordinary events of the night, events which culminated in the frenzied appearance of Herr von Mácozy, who was nearly as mad as his unfortunate wife. First of all, because she had utterly and entirely disappeared, and, secondly, because Michael was now as ill as he had been before, and Dr. Paul was in attendance, and we could not get either the Bournemouth doctor or a trained nurse until the day was far spent.

It took two good hours to drive from Bournemouth to Hamworth. Telegrams might bring the doctor and nurse, but Herr von Mácozy proposed to drive over. If one doctor could not come another would. In the meantime, Dr. Paul knew what to do; so did our nurse, albeit, the children were furious at her looking after a strange child, and I had to keep the peace as best I could.

The most extraordinary thing was that no one had seen or heard of Frau von Mácozy since she flounced out of the policeman's house, defying Mrs. Salter to

dare to restrain her. I thought of the river, our beautiful, charming placid river, but fortunately it was frozen over, slightly, it was true, but enough to show if any hole had been made there. There were woods around the town, miles, too, of rough heath-land, in which she might easily be hiding; she had not taken the train at Hamworth; she would have been noticed at once at the little station, where even in the day-time a stranger's arrival caused immense commotion and surprise. She could not have walked very far. We did not allow for the strength of a mad creature; even in Mrs. Salter's Sunday boots, a mile too wide for her delicate feet, she had gone on and on somehow through the dark somewhere!

We could not find her, and while Michael's illness nearly distracted us all, Herr von Mácozy was torn between his terrors. First, he hated to leave the child for one moment, and, secondly, he did not know how to trace his wife without being constantly on the lookout for her himself. Some story had been made up to keep the Hungarian servants quiet, for whatever happened at Winterslowe must not be known at home; that is to say, if in any way it could be prevented. If it had not been so truly horrible, it would have been really funny to note how the whole town was in a state of agitation, which was well nigh frenzy, over the von Mácozys' disasters. It was quite impossible to oust Dr. Dewdney Paul from our house, and really the poor man was doing his utmost for Michael, and, after all, what could his egregious wife say that was not public property? The child was ill; his mother was missing. Hamworth gossip could not reach to Buda Pèsth,



HANWORTH HEATH



HANWORTH HEATH.

especially as none of the servants at Winterslowe spoke anything but Hungarian, and could not communicate with the town at all.

I had begun to think the poor woman must have fallen into one of the heath-set ponds, or over the cliffs, some eight miles away from us, when we heard rumours that a most eccentric person was to be seen at a tiny seaside village, within about twelve miles of our abode.

Now that special place was merely a handful of fishermen's huts, and in the winter was cut off from civilisation entirely. True, about three-quarters of a mile inland there were a church, a rectory, and a big house, but in those days, rectory and big house alike were inhabited by very old people. If the rector tottered the few yards between his house and his church once a Sunday, he was quite convinced that he had done his duty, while the four old sisters and brothers at the big house were driven in a closed landau to their pew in church, which had a separate private entrance, and resembled a room more than anything else. Indeed, that room exists to this date, and is entered in the same way, and is known to the irreverent as the "Presteign parlour." The stuffy landau truly is no more, and the inhabitants of the house walk to church, but, once there, the parlour is inhabited solely by the family, a survival of old times that I for one should be very sorry to see cease to exist, it is such a delicious reminder of old days when the county was county, and allowed nothing to come between the wind and its nobility!

But in the days of which I write, no one went down to the shore, where the fishermen lived, from about November until March, or even April. If the servants

at the "House" required a change, they were driven, did the roads permit, into Hamworth, but not only were the roads often well-nigh impassable, save to that "souffre douleur," the parish doctor, but the servants were all old, and much preferred the snug house-keeper's room and the servants' hall to the long weary drive up and down the stupendous hills, with the prospect of the opening and shutting of many gates, and the chances of a heavy gale coming up, as gales did, and do come up suddenly in those parts, before they could return home.

The situation of Presteign must be described as it was more than thirty years ago to account for the fact that nearly five weeks passed before we had the least hint of Frau von Mácoczy's whereabouts. By that time Michael was almost well, very thin, very white, very shaky on his legs, and with a cough that Dr. Paul said would probably carry him off, and would never allow him "to make old bones," but all the same, he was able to go home, and I must own that I, for one, was most devoutly thankful to see him depart.

The atmosphere of linseed poultices, bronchitis kettles, and other horrors in which we had lived was something terrible; the trained nurse had set us all by the ears; while Michael and his father alike were bundles of nerves. The little boy ceaselessly demanded his mother, and Herr von Mácoczy ran in and out "as a dog does at a fair," as the saying is, until I began to feel I should develop nerves too, and wondered more than ever how Phœbe was able to remain in such an atmosphere of hysteria and uncertainty as this Hungarian household appeared to be.

But just before Michael went home we heard of

Frau von Máoczy, or, at least, we heard of what must be that curious and most reckless female. Presteign lobsters were famous and much sought after between the local and the county towns, while in Hamworth itself they were immensely esteemed. We were fishless there in those days; unless lobsters came in from Presteign, or mackerel from the Chesil Bank, or salmon was caught by us in our river, we never saw a fish which was not sent straight from London or Southampton. But when an unexpected catch of lobsters arrived at Presteign early in February, Hamworth had the benefit. The Presteign men came in *en route* to the county town and took us on the way, when we bought their lobsters, and at the same time heard of the curious arrival of Frau von Máoczy one night in January, and how she had stayed in one of the fishermen's huts, always waiting for a letter—with money—that never came, until Job Wilford grew tired of feeding her and Mrs. Wilford of looking after her. Luckily she had the most wonderful rings on her fingers, and the Wilfords thought they might sell one at Poveromi's to recoup them for the expense she had been to them ever since she had arrived, very weak, very tired, in very poor clothes (poor Mrs. Salter's best raiment), but evidently a foreign lady of distinction; and being foreign was, of course, as mad as foreigners are always supposed to be by the British poor.

Fortunately, Job Wilford, being an old friend, had called in on us first, and then produced the ring he meant to take to the eccentric jeweller in West Street. I recognised it at once, told him not to say a word to a soul, and immediately took it to Herr von Máoczy, who was, as usual, with Michael upstairs,

and he and I together impressed on Job how very necessary it was that no one should hear about Frau von Mácozy and her long sojourn at their cottage. The same distrust that the ordinary peasant had for a "furrener" was existing then between Presteign and Hamworth, and, indeed, there was a most singular state of animosity between the inhabitants of each village and town in that corner of England. Presteign kept itself to itself, Hamworth did the same; all had opprobrious nicknames for the dweller inland or for all who lived on the coast. The Presteign folk were naturally "lobsters," the Hamworth ones "chucks." I could enumerate half a dozen other contemptuous cognomens, but these two are sufficient to show how little communication there was then between one place and another.

Secure against any loss, Job Wilford gave us the ring, and I promised to drive over to Presteign the next day with Herr von Mácozy and take away their most inconvenient lodger. But on reflection we both thought it best to go at once. Job might, on his return from Dorchester, drop something or other that would arouse her suspicions; so, despite the cold and the horrid drive before us, we started off at once. Horrible drive, I said; but surely never was such a perfect drive in the world had only the road been a trifle better! Even as it was, we could watch the delightful little brown streams set free by the coming of early spring and note the sparse primroses; while as I walked up the very steep hill, up or down which I, for one, never have and never will drive, I could see the faint mysterious flush of brown on the willows in the hollow that tells of spring, and note how the partridges were

already pairing and the pheasants making love, or, at least, talking about it, secure in the fact that the shooting was over, and that for some months at least they could safely enjoy their lives in the same manner as other birds appeared to do. In the dell under the beech-trees the squirrels were rushing about, and every bird seemed to have something to say.

I had been in the wretched little town so long, and occupied so much in Michael's sick-room, that I had scarcely realised how the spring had advanced. How clean, how sweet, how living was the earth now the "winter was over and gone and the time of singing birds" was near at hand. It is a frightful pull up that hill, but once on the top all is forgotten in the marvellous view that greets our eyes : even Herr von Mácozy, who had seen some of the most exquisite scenery in Europe, exclaimed with amazement at its beauty : but after a short breathing space we had to look well to the ways of my ponies ; the hill the other side was only less steep than the one we had come up, and was, moreover, punctuated at the most inconvenient spots with gates, all of which had to be first opened and then closed before we could proceed. Moreover, we were investigated by the most ferocious cows and bulls, and had to proceed warily lest we should exterminate any of the other creatures, such as ducks, pigs, geese, and chickens, all of which used the road as they liked, and refused to take the least notice of us at all.

The little village was quite asleep as we passed ; the church looked, as indeed it then was, as dead as the inhabitants of the many graves by which it was surrounded ; the very quiet, very good children were coming back from the tiny village school, and we were

greeted by respectful curtsies and bobs from boys and girls alike. The grandchildren of those young persons make the welkin ring when they rush and tear out of school nowadays, and would as soon think of touching their caps to a stranger, or even to the parson, for whom they may have a respectful grin, and not always that, as they would of opening one of the many horrible gates that they slam complacently under the nose of anyone who may be driving, or, alas! motoring past the place down to the sea.

It was thought best to leave the carriage by the village and walk to the cottages, and Herr von Mácozy and I made our way through the farmyard, down the lane, and on to where we thought the sea must be, for since we left the top of the hill we had not caught a glimpse of it. The fishermen's cottages looked buried beneath the ground, for we saw the chimneys first and then the huts; they were nothing more nor less, and I, for one, could not understand how such a fastidious individual as Frau von Mácozy had stayed there for a day, let alone for several weeks. Away to the left of the huts was a tall "tout," beyond that the coastguards' houses could be noted, and in front was the most charming bay I, for one, had ever seen! Presteign Bay! I had lived for at least eight years within a drive of the beloved place, and until that day I had never known of its existence. Now it is indeed well known to me; yet it always looks, when I go there, as it looked that first afternoon, when the sun was beginning to sink behind Portland, and all the little waves were blood-red at our feet, and came rioting in round the point as if anxious to hurry towards the rapidly fading land. It did not do to linger there



PRESLICK BAY, EAST



PRESLICK BAY, WEST

that afternoon; we had to find Frau von Macoczy, and get her to Winterslowe somehow or other before it was pitch dark. I cannot say I looked forward to our next step, but fortunately, when Mrs. Job Wilford came to the door, I perceived Frau von Macoczy sitting by the window, and knitting what appeared to be a fisherman's jersey.

She rose directly she saw me, and began to talk as if we had parted the day before. Of her husband she took no notice at all; she was eager to show me her work, very anxious to assure me she had never been so happy and comfortable in her life as she was then, and that she loved the dear sea that sang her to sleep every night, the sea-birds which came at her call, and the simple home, where she had no troubles and anxieties, and which she felt sure was her real home, and not any other; not the one I begged her to return to with me, where she had been wretched—wretched, and which she for one never wished to see again. I tried to remind her of the children; of Michael, who wanted her so badly, and of Roszi and Mari, and the house at Winterslowe; but she merely smiled and continued her work. Then she became impatient, declared she had never been married, never would marry; she had always said she never would, and she never had; that was a strange man. She hated men, all except the kind man at the cottage. He told her stories, and took her out in his boat; he never allowed her to be frightened, or told her she must do things she did not want to. She was making him a coat; she would not stir. Live that odious life again she would not; no one alive should make her; she would drown herself first.

As she denied being married or having had children, I was at a loss to know what she meant by that odious life, but I did not want to question her then. Later it came out that she meant her girlhood; she had been miserable at home, of that there was no doubt at all. There she had been continually pressed to marry; she had had to live by rule with a duenna, who never left her apparently night or day, and her wild longings for freedom had been sternly suppressed, her solitary walks forbidden, her rides and drives kept within decorous limits, beyond which she was pining to explore, and to make long excursions into the wonderful world outside her parents' house, or in the country, or in Buda Pesth itself. Certainly we were non-plussed; we could not seize her, bind her, and take her forcibly back to Winterslowe; but fortunately Mrs. Wilford came to our assistance. The lady wanted more clothes, she had really nothing to wear; she expected her married daughter and her husband, and would have no room when they came for strangers. Would not the lady go back with me, recover her wardrobe, and return to Presteign after Easter, when the Wilfords' cottage would be once more quite free for her accommodation? Fortunately, Frau von Mácoçzy listened, and was persuaded to drive with us to Winterslowe. I painted as vividly as I could the state of her garments, and how utterly unbecoming they were, and, moreover, I promised I would return with her and remain the night; and Mrs. Wilford, taking the knitting from her, placed it on a particular part of the mantelpiece, declaring no one should touch it until she came back and was able to finish it for Job, who really could not require it for some weeks at

least. I had never had to do with any unnormal person before, to coin a word; and I was honestly most fearfully alarmed by the notion of madness; but Mrs. Wilford appeared to take Frau von Máoczy's state of mind quite as a matter of course, and advised us most strongly to humour her as much as we could and not to cross her. We got her to walk to the carriage and get in, while I took the reins as usual, and her husband and the groom sat behind, ready, I felt sure, to seize her should she attempt to get out; and so we set out on our drive to Winterslowe.

Fortunately, we had fewer gates and only one hill to go up, as we had to drive through the valley, and not over Grange Hill as we had come, for as we got farther and farther away from the cottage and the sea Frau von Máoczy became more and more uneasy. She talked of returning, of getting out; then I suddenly recollected the sea was to be found once more the other side of Winterslowe; I would walk with her there to-morrow; she should not be bullied by anyone or anything; no one should restrain her if she would promise not to make us uneasy any more. She should not be watched,—Heaven forgive me! did I not know two excellent, suitable nurses were installed at Winterslowe, to say nothing of the doctor? Yet here was I making promises I knew I should not for one minute be able to keep. The moon had risen full and bright and most kindly before we came in sight of Winterslowe and turned into the lower drive, and then, and then only, did I breathe freely. I asked Herr von Máoczy hastily over my shoulder to leave matters to me. I got his wife almost unobserved to

her room; we were not expected, and no one was on the look-out, and then and there I persuaded her to have the hot bath she most emphatically needed; then I brushed and braided her hair, put her into her warm and comfortable bed, and on my own authority gave her the simple sleeping draught I had begged from Dr. Paul in case we had to use it at any time should she turn up at Hamworth and demand to be taken in.

I found her more like a child than a woman to manage, and she was soon sound asleep. Then I rang for her maid, ordered her to remain on guard in the dressing-room until I came back, and went down to see the doctor, who was supposed to take charge from that minute.

Fortunately he was very young, only just qualified, and had none of the usual ideas on the subject of mania; but, alas! the nurses were made of very different material, and I saw at once if they were put in authority matters would go very soon from bad to worse. I am quite convinced that, given a free hand and a person weak from a long illness, or even mentally disturbed after some great shock or suffering, any so-called "mental nurse" can drive even a sane patient out of his or her senses. A mad one can be made frantic by their impertinent assumption of authority, and the calm way in which the ordinary mental nurse talks to and of her patient before her, and takes possession of her and all her belongings, is a matter that requires more consideration than, so far as I know, it has ever received.

I have, naturally enough, never been out of my mind at all, but I once had a very serious illness, when for six or seven weeks I knew nothing

whatever of what was really happening round me, and when I gradually returned to consciousness I was astounded by the manner in which the nurse had taken possession of me, body and soul; answered for me to the doctor, and told endless lies about the manner in which I had slept and eaten; and likewise was I surprised to find the way the doctor believed all she said, and received my remarks as if I were really a lunatic, and not in the least capable of knowing what I had done, was doing, or meant to do.

If I had noticed all this, and had sufficient self-control to bide my time until I could rise up and order the nurse out of the room, despite her expostulations, the while I felt every minute as if I must strike her violently, what must be the effect of such conduct on a woman whose mind is unbalanced? I would not copy Polonius with his "very like a whale," but I would never assume a person could not look after herself. I would have her watched and guarded much as one watches and guards a child, and, above all, I would have all mental nurses real ladies—ladies who understand and can efface themselves, not the rough and vulgar women they all too often are, delighted to have a lady in their hands and under their control and to treat in any manner they choose, knowing, as they do, that their word will be taken and the poor lunatic unheeded, even can she show her bruises or signs of the maltreatment, or even the malnutrition, that is the portion of many unfortunate creatures who get into private asylums, which are all too often merely homes of horror.

I shall never forget a farmer's wife I once knew

who was for a very short time of her life in one of these places. She ought never to have gone there, but the doctor was impatient, trained nurses were expensive, and her husband was out all day, and merely employed a rough woman as housekeeper to see to things. The County Asylum was handy and comparatively cheap. Mrs. Green was not a lady in the accepted sense of the word, but she was a modest, well-bred woman, and had been her own mistress for thirty years; she coloured to her ears when she spoke of the treatment she had received, and I verily believe if the asylum doctor had not been a man in a thousand she would never have left those walls alive. He saw at once this was not a case for him, but even he could not control her nurses; and though Mrs. Green was saved, I have no doubt many another woman lived and died there, speechless because no one believed her, for Mrs. Green told me herself she was slowly being murdered, because she was treated by these women as one would not treat a mad dog. That would be mercifully destroyed: a human being is kept alive in conditions that would madden any sane creature, who would resent the confinement and the arbitrary treatment she receives at the hands of those who, as a rule, rank rather below than above the ordinary domestic servant.

I watched Frau von Mácoczy very carefully for some little time, and I am certain if I had been able to remain with her, and if her doctor had had his own way, she would never have become uncontrollable and unsafe. If we obtained her promise to return at a certain hour, she returned. Herr von Mácoczy never obtruded himself, her violent hatred for him still con-

tinued; Michael and the girls were kept out of her way; all she wanted was freedom. She could have it at Winterslowe; she could wander for miles by the river down to the beautiful harbour and the sea, or among the great woods that climbed up the hills in front of the house. She could harm no one; what madness possessed those women to follow her wherever she went, to peep at her when she sat in her boudoir, or to insist on superintending her toilette, even in washing her—did they consider she needed supervision in this most important matter?

Dr. Spenseley or I could always suggest a bath for sleeplessness, particularly successfully so when we mysteriously added herbs, and even violets and cowslips, to the water. She would, moreover, play with Michael's boats as a child plays, but once order the bath and let the nurse appear, then a screaming fight went on that exhausted nurses and patient alike, and made even Dr. Spenseley wonder if it would have to be the asylum, after all.

I could not be at Winterslowe much, naturally, and I discovered that Phœbe had at first one of the unreasoning dreads of anything like mental trouble that many people possess. She had, moreover, all she could do to keep the children well and happy and out of the way, and Herr von Mácoczy likewise required companionship and help.

Phœbe also was a first-rate housekeeper, and had all the shopping to do, for, naturally, the Hungarian servants were useless as far as that was concerned. Now Frau von Mácoczy was unable to take the smallest part of the routine of the house, and Phœbe, of course, had a very great deal to do; the girls' lessons

were not neglected, and Michael also wanted an immense amount of attention, for though his nurse was goodness itself, she did not understand what care the child required after his two very serious illnesses. I had long talks with Dr. Spenseley and Herr von Mácozy over the situation, but unfortunately both men rather believed in the nurses, more especially as they declared they had found the maid stealing her mistress's lace, and vowed they would not be responsible for the quantity of valuables in Frau von Mácozy's rooms unless the maid was discharged and they were given control over her many valuable possessions.

Frau von Mácozy had an almost childish delight in playing with her jewels, overhauling her wardrobe, and examining her furs and other belongings. I have seen her surrounded by literal mountains of clothes, doing absolutely no harm at all, but holding up the lovely things to catch the sunshine, while she patted and stroked the furs as if they were sentient beasts instead of mostly their cast off—or I should say wrenched off—garments. She was particularly fond of opals, and of shot silks, and of chinchilla and sable furs. The sunlight on the opals and silks changed the colours frequently, and made them look differently with every movement, and by stroking the furs this way or that they appeared to change in some way that pleased her poor distraught brain, and gave her endless amusement and occupation. If the maid had remained to look after the wardrobe all would have been well; she knew when to put away or bring out the stores of Frau von Mácozy's possessions, and she did not care if every chair in the place held its different costume, or if her mistress wore fifty rings

or a dozen necklaces and bracelets, or as many watches and toys of all sorts and kinds. But the nurses did. They were hard women used to having their own way, to treat mental cases as too absurd for words; they were not going to give way to such idiotic nonsense, they had enough to do without clearing up such endless messes, and, moreover, they would never, unless absolutely ordered by Dr. Spenseley, leave the poor creature alone for ten minutes at a time.

One sat in the room all day, one all night—one never knew what mad women would do: "They could not be answerable for their 'case' if she were left free. If there were an inquest—and they would never be surprised at the need for one—they would be blamed, and no one else; and then they would be ruined for life. Dr. Spenseley was too young; an older man would back them up, and would know as well as they did how cunning mad people were, and how absolutely imperative it was for someone always to be on guard."

There never had been the least attempt at self-destruction on the part of the poor unhappy woman, and I felt sure there never would be. Her leaving home without her clothes was a mad attempt to get free from all restraints; in her way she enjoyed her life most thoroughly; she would have enjoyed it even more were she allowed to be quite by herself, untrammelled by any ties or any duties she might be called upon to perform; but that she had ever entertained the smallest idea of suicide, I am perfectly certain she never had. I am equally certain that she would never have done as she did had she been managed with the smallest sense; but I could not get

Phoebe to agree with me, and she in her turn influenced Herr von Mácczy, and in time even Dr. Spenseley himself doubted if he and I were right when we attempted to give the patient more liberty.

I talked the matter over with Phoebe more than a dozen times. She could not see that the nurses did anything save what they were there for; she was equally sure that, given the least chance, neither Herr von Mácczy nor the children would be safe. She had already frightened Michael and the girls by waking them in the middle of the night and begging them to dress and come away with her to the cottage at Presteign, where they could do as they liked, and play on the shore all day. The children had called out and cried and screamed, and their attendants and Phoebe had come at once, and no harm was done. But the mental nurse, who ought to have been on duty, was asleep, and was thoroughly frightened at being found out, and had dragged Frau von Mácczy back with violence to her room, where apparently for the first time she did lose entire control over herself, and fought and scratched the two nurses, and even Dr. Spenseley had to help before she was overpowered and reduced to a state of panting, fettered, impotent rage.

Indeed, her screams alarmed the whole household, and the passages were filled by the Hungarian servants, who were quite sure the English nurses and doctor were killing their mistress, and had in their turn to be restrained from rushing to her rescue. For an hour or more the noise was simply appalling, and Dr. Spenseley had to resort to a quieting draught before Frau von Mácczy became quiet and the

servants and children were once more asleep in their beds. Unfortunately, the doctor and nurses alike felt secure in the fact that the poor lady was fast asleep, and, according to all precedent, she should have remained sleeping for at least six hours. But no one can really rely on a sleeping draught. Some people may take one and calmly rest the night through; others may sleep really for a couple of hours, and then waken in a moment alert and more awake than if they had never been given a narcotic; while others, again, may not sleep, but may drowse heavily for hours, and even for days. One has to know one's patient very thoroughly, it strikes me, before one can say for certain what will or will not be the result of a certain drug.

Naturally, all attempts at binding Frau von Mácozy were given up the moment she became quiet and drowsy; then she was placed comfortably in her bed, and Dr. Spenseley watched her himself for an hour. When her sleep seemed deep and settled, and while Nurse May made ready to "sit up," Nurse Jane went off to bed, and I went most thankfully home. But Nurse May's sitting up was, as usual, "rounded by a sleep," and when she awoke, stretched herself, and looked at her spirit-lamp for the usual tea-making that was her first thought, she glanced at the bed. It was again empty. Frau von Mácozy had gone once more, and no amount of searching the house and grounds produced her. Worst of all, Michael was gone too—delicate little Michael; and again the whole of Winterslowe was in a state of desperate and fearsome alarm.

CHAPTER IV

FRAU VON MÁCOCZY "AT HOME"

WE had scarcely heard the news in Hamworth when, with the greatest joy, we discovered that both mother and child had once more gone straight away to the Presteign cottage, where apparently they were both in the best of health and spirits. Dr. Paul had paid one of his rare visits to the village, and meeting them on the road, had driven them straight to Mrs. Wilford, and then had gone back to Winterslowe to relieve the anxiety there, and, moreover, strongly to advise Herr Mácozy to leave them at Presteign, at any rate, for some few days without either nurse or doctor on view. I had always admired Dr. Paul for the manner in which he behaved at that most critical time, and feel more strongly than ever when I reflect on him and all he did, that had his lines been cast in a larger place, and had he married a woman who could not only have held her tongue, but made him happy, and above all, comfortable, his record would have been very different from what it ultimately was. He has been dead more than twenty years, but in Hamworth, where he lies buried, his memory is held in the greatest honour, while the poor to whom he was doctor and friend too, declare no one was ever like him—no one can ever again be as

good, as kind, and as cheap as their own dear old Dr. Paul was. When one hears folk talk about things being mercifully arranged for us all, I cannot help wondering where Providence came in in this especial case. He had the nicest tastes possible, loved flowers, children, dogs, and was given over to scientific research, and adored his microscope, and cared not for gossip at all. He was married almost forcibly by a woman who had no children, detested flowers because they were messy, turned out all animals for a similar reason, and forbade the microscope on much the same account. It was dull, things were spilt on her cloths, on the carpet, she never read herself, why should her husband want to read? He was out all day. Surely he could talk when he came in! In consequence, he talked of his patients, and before he died he had not one left even among the upper ranks of the tradespeople. The poor stuck to him through thick and thin. What was the good of that? They were nearly all parish patients, and one knows full well how those are paid for, drugs and all!

I often drive through the streets of small country towns, and, looking at the houses, wonder if they contain as many tragedies and comedies as the Hamworth houses once held, for, in my time at least, all seemed to hold either one or the other, from the vicarage upwards or downwards, according as one places that abode of "unctuous rectitude."

There was an interregnum at the vicarage at the date when the von Mácoczys were at Winterslowe, and we were shepherded by a fascinating Irishman with a beautiful little consumptive wife and half a dozen delicate

pretty little girls. Before that man died I think he was turned out of at least half a dozen curacies, and was deserted by his second wife, who, naturally, could not stand him, for the man was a confirmed dipsomaniac, and he finally died in the ward of a workhouse where he had once held the not unimportant post of chaplain!

Dr. Paul's partner was a man of a very different stamp from himself, and was, above all, what may be termed emphatically a man of business, and his rage was extreme when he heard of Dr. Paul's chattering about his patients. He never could be made to speak to Mrs. Paul at any price, and they hated each other as only people can hate who are forced into a species of intimacy such as must be between partners in a small country place. Was it not Gladstone who never had any socially intimate relations with the Members of the Cabinet? Whoever it was was quite and absolutely right. Partners are in the same position, and those men are wise who keep their business relations entirely separate from the home atmosphere. Every man's wife thinks the special business is managed by her husband, that he has all the work and not half the pay, and she is, indeed, an extraordinary woman who cannot say all this to her many dearest friends! Then, too, the chances are that there is a real or fancied discrepancy in the social status between the two ladies, and then, indeed, does the blood flow! Why are folk so terribly thin-skinned, I wonder? I never pined myself to know dukes and such-like. Why when any partner's wife has come my way has my persistent dislike to knowing her intimately been a source of deadly injury?

But so it has been; and likewise have strained rela-

tionships existed in the case of every partnership of which I have ever heard, seen, or read. The Pauls' case was about the worst I have come across, but really Dr. Fillmore was not to blame in the matter as much as it seemed to the lookers on. Mrs. Fillmore had a nursery full of small children, and wisely looked after them, her husband, and her house herself, and had small opportunity for the banal routine of visiting, that thirty-five years ago was *de rigueur* in Hamworth. That she merely returned Mrs. Paul's card "when she must have seen her pass her windows" was one offence; that she civilly declined afternoon tea on the plea of the children, and Sunday night's supper—the Hamworth most popular meal—because it was the only night she saw her husband, was another crime. Naturally, when Mrs. Fillmore did not ask the Pauls back, Mrs. Paul passed gentle Mrs. Fillmore with her nose well in the air, and one of those silly quarrels began—one-sided quarrels are always the worst—that sometimes make life in a country town absolutely unendurable.

I have known Hamworth now for over fifty years, and never at any time were all the few families within its four green walls on speaking terms with each other. They might have had an excellent time had they chosen, but there was always some firebrand about. We all of us listened more than we should have done to talk. Had I my life to go over again, I would take great care to "whom I gave the key of the garden gate," which is advice I remember quoted to me by Mrs. Craik as a warning against sudden or, indeed, any very great intimacies. Mrs. Paul was to blame, of course, but so were we. I own her gossip used to amuse me. Now

I should only tell her to stop; but she and Dr. Paul have long been asleep and silent in Hamworth churchyard. One wonders how they can rest so quietly, or, if the nodding flowers on their grave are themselves listening to carry on the wind the latest news from the next world to which they so reluctantly went. It was entirely due to Mrs. Paul that furious gossip began to rush round Hamworth about the von Máccozys' household. I heard first that Frau von Máccoczy had cut her husband's throat, and was in durance vile in Dorchester gaol; then, when that proved absolutely untrue, that she had drowned Michael, and would not leave the sea-shore, always hoping and waiting for the return of his body.

Had not the whole business been so sad, it would have been entertaining, more especially as, owing to my intimacy with Phœbe Summers, I found myself in the very greatest request. Calls were paid, despite the fact that I was in social debt up to my neck, for calling was a waste of time I never indulged in, and, moreover, we were asked out continually, and might have lived riotously in the Hamworth houses had we not both had something better to do. Luckily, when we were at home, we could say we were out truthfully, as the garden was always my favourite "hid-y-hole," and no one could see into it from the road or, indeed, from any coign of vantage, and Phœbe, when she came, entered by the lower garden gate, gave a whistle-signal, and she and I, and often Mari and Roszi, sat for hours down by the river, the girls in the boat with the old gardener to look after them, while Phœbe and I discussed the situation from every possible point of view.

FRAU VON MÁCOCZY "AT HOME" 73

The early summer weather that special year was very fine and hot, but all the same Phœbe was extremely anxious about Michael, and his father was almost out of his mind about the little fellow.

The Presteign cottage was merely a cottage, and though the food was sent in and arranged for entirely from Winterslowe, it could not be what Michael was accustomed to, while his mother's attitude to the child had always been a most uncertain one. He adored her, but sometimes his mother really seemed to hate the boy. One day he might take any sort or kind of liberty, might even play with her jewels, or her long and beautiful hair could be undone and twisted about her head as the fancy took the child. Then on another occasion she would fly out at him if he even spoke. She had struck him more than once; his father really dreaded she might hurt him, or even allow him, through her negligence, to fall over the cliffs or into the sea, so little attention did she apparently pay to his comings and goings at Presteign. Already Job had rescued him from the incoming tide, when he had betaken himself to one of the little caves round the shore, and had not noticed what was happening; and, again, he had almost come to blows with the farmer's bull. The farmer had seen Michael chasing the great brute with one of the hedge stakes, and had just had time to throw him over the gate and escape himself before the bull turned. But these adventures could not go on without something dreadful happening. Herr von Máoczy felt sure he must get Michael away, even if he left his wife to do much as she liked; but Michael did not want to go home. He inherited all his mother's love

of freedom and lack of conventionality. It was lovely to go about in a jersey and knickerbockers, and without a hat or shoes and stockings, never to do any lessons, or have nurse wash him with a soapy sponge, putting the soap in just where it smarted most. Michael was with his mother alone, a treat in itself, for the times when she seemed to dislike him were few, and were soon forgotten. What child would not have been in Heaven, given full liberty, a wide, sandy sea-shore, delicious smuggler caves to play and hide in, Job's boat to sail about in, lobsters to catch, fish to catch too, sometimes; always something to do, and, above all, no one to say, "Don't do that"? Michael attained perfect happiness in a manner few children ever have attained it before. "Don't do that!" How well I recollect myself how I hated the expression, just as much as "People never behave in that manner in decent society" irked me in after years. What does it matter what other people do, what one does oneself, so long as one does not injure anyone else, or do anything that is not actually wrong?

After the episode of the bull had been reported to Michael's father by the faithful Job, in a letter it took hours for Phoebe to translate from the original spelling and phraseology sufficiently for Herr von Mácozy to understand what it meant, it was felt that something must be done.

Phoebe sat on that June afternoon in my dear old garden, under the mulberry tree, and we discussed the matter from all points of the compass, as it were. Michael, of course, could be taken away by his father at once, but the child seemed so well and happy Herr

von Máoczy was at his wits' end to know what to do for the best. The girls, too, missed Michael; he was their pet and treasure, and his nurse wept all day and all night in his empty nursery until the whole household was wrapped in a pall of gloomy despair. The nurses and Dr. Spenseley had been sent home, back to London, and except for her singular attachment to Presteign and her sudden dislike for her husband, Frau von Máoczy was as well, apparently, as ever she had been in all her life. The weather, too, was unfortunately all in favour of her curious attitude of mind. Had it been cold, wild, and rough, as it so often was on that coast, the cottage would have been uninhabitable, as it was only furnished for the summer visitors, who merely required a place to sleep in, not even sometimes to eat in, for often enough breakfast could be on the shore. A more complete paradise, either for a child or for anyone in a similar condition of mind to that of Frau von Máoczy, could not be imagined, and, indeed, it yet remains to this day the same quite secluded beautiful spot.

Phœbe was of opinion that it could never be safe to leave Michael at Presteign alone with his mother, and that both of them would become so unkempt and uncared for, it must have a most disastrous effect upon them. Frau von Máoczy had always had a maid at her beck and call; indeed, she possessed two. How could she manage Michael's toilet and her own? The whole thing was impossible. I suggested taking rooms near, in another cottage, at all events, for Michael's nurse. She could keep an eye on the child, and see that he was properly combed and brushed and washed. It

was not impossible that all sorts of noisome creatures might attach themselves to the small boy, while that odious complaint ringworm had been given to more than one child by the cows; a fact few people knew. These beasts have a similar complaint; they rub themselves against the gate posts, a child puts its head where the cows have been, and at once the disease is started, with the most disastrous effect.

Herr von Mácozy approached the old owner of the big House, to see if he could buy a piece of land and erect some sort of a house for his wife and child, but the old man would have sooner parted with his head than with an inch of his property. Neither would he for one moment contemplate the erection of anything larger than a fisherman's cot, and, indeed, not too many of them were allowed. The feudal system died hard in that corner of England. I often wonder what the old landlords would say if they could return and see the indifferent attitude assumed nowadays by the descendants of those who once dare not have any opinion apart from the squire and the parson, and who were crushed out of existence if they asserted their individuality in any way at all. I do deplore, deeply deplore, the decadence of country life, but the whole of it was caused by those who should have been the first to encourage it in every way, and to whose selfishness is due the fact that they have to suffer and the whole of the land has to suffer likewise in their wake.

To the fact that no house could be built for Frau von Mácozy may even be put down the ultimate result of her sojourn by the shore at Presteign, in Job Wilford's cottage.

FRAU VON MÁCOCZY "AT HOME" 77

One very hot day Phœbe and the girls came in as usual, and, while we had tea in the garden, Phœbe told me that she was desperately afraid that some steps would at once have to be taken to ensure Michael's safety and Frau von Máoczy's welfare. The old Beevors, from the big House, had seen Frau von Máoczy, with her hair floating in the breeze, and in very sketchy attire, dancing about the beach with Michael. They had even smoothed over, temporarily, the ancient Beavor feud with the head of the family, and begged him to come over and consult, with the result that Job had been told to get rid of his visitors or leave the cottage, a short way of obtaining what they required which was much in force with the landlords round and about Hamworth.

Job, of course, was at his wits' end, and had, in his turn, sent for Herr von Máoczy. He had only a week's grace given him; out Frau von Máoczy and Michael must go. Frau von Máoczy had, fortunately, at that moment one of her sanest intervals. She listened quietly to all that was said, and finally begged her husband to go and see old Mr. Thomas Beavor and ask him to reconsider his decision. When Herr von Máoczy arrived at the big House he found the whole Beavor clan in conclave assembled. He was received in state in the "Justice room" by the two old brothers, their squire cousin, and his eldest son; but he was soon given to understand that there would be no going back from their first decision. At last Mr. Julius Beavor, the husband of Lady Mary, told Herr von Máoczy about seeing the watch at our house, and recognising the quartering of the arms of one family where madness was hereditary, and that he knew the

doings and sayings of the members thereof had been world-wide talk, for they had often enough ended in the most appalling tragedies that one could imagine.

Herr von Mácoczy was quite aware of the history of his wife's family, but while few people believed in heredity in England years ago, no one in Hungary had apparently even heard of such a thing, and Herr von Mácoczy laughed the Beevors' ideas to scorn. The old people, however, were terrified at what Mr. Julius Beevor had told them; they now quite expected to be murdered in their beds; so absolute horror was added to their dislike to interlopers. Herr von Mácoczy must remove his family at once from Presteign, and Lord Winterslowe should hear at once the character of the people he had introduced amongst the prim inhabitants of that special corner of Dorsetshire.

Phœbe now begged me to be the unfortunate creature to bell the cat, and suggested that I should see Frau von Mácoczy and get her to return to Winterslowe. I reminded Phœbe that she would probably recollect that I had been forced to say what was not true when I fetched her before; and at last we both settled to ask Dr. Paul to take the matter into his hands, and the good, fussy little man eagerly undertook the task. Fortunately, he had made both Frau von Mácoczy and Michael like him very much, and they were both unfeignedly glad to see him, and he told me that he had had no trouble at all with his patient, as he rather pompously called the poor crazed creature. Indeed, he felt inclined to scoff at the idea that she was mad. A little unbalanced, nervous—eccentric, certainly; but what could one expect of a

foreigner? Yet, left alone, she was as tractable as a child, and he would unhesitatingly take care of her himself did his house afford sufficient accommodation and were he not too busy with other patients to give himself up entirely to the care of her.

Herr von Máoczy had apparently either forgotten or forgiven the gossip that had made him dismiss Dr. Paul at once when Michael had his first illness; at any rate, now he put himself quite in his hands, and one day Dr. Paul arrived at Winterslowe with his patients, all of them, Dr. Paul included, in the highest possible spirits.

One most excellent change had been made in the establishment; a new maid was engaged, with an excellent understudy, for Frau von Máoczy; there was nothing of the "nurse" look about either of them. Brown, the head maid, rustling in black silk, and with a frilled fussy white muslin apron, looked the smart maid to the life; no one knew, or need know, that she had been well trained under a London doctor's eye in the very best asylum near London. She had been accustomed to ladies, and ladies only, and in a masterly manner she possessed herself of Frau von Máoczy's keys, arranged her wardrobe, repaired the ravages the rough life and the sea air had made in her appearance, and treated her as a maid does a mistress, and simply went about her work as an ordinary maid would.

From the first moment I saw Brown I had the utmost confidence in her; later on I had the very fullest admiration for a woman who, in another rank of life—and may be of a different sex—would have made a first-class diplomatist. She never contradicted, never

thwarted Frau von Mácozy; never apparently grew tired, nor lost her temper. A wild suggestion was craftily met by a sane plan; untidy garments were voluntarily given to Dr. Paul for some of his poorer patients; a rather inflated opinion of her looks, her position, her possessions, was encouraged; and, to our intense astonishment, she was induced to pay some calls, and finally to issue invitations for a large garden-party to be held at Winterslowe, into the far-famed gardens of which few—if any—of the Hamworth people had ever penetrated; for the late Lady Winterslowe was even more exclusive than the Beevors, and stuck by “her order,” looking upon those outside it as we in these days dare not—if we would—look upon the dirtiest street arab that runs about the gutters of our teeming towns.

Mrs. Dewdney Paul sent me an agitated note to beg me to come to her at once one morning, and, despite my work, I went immediately. Horrid ideas coursed through my brain; had “Dewdney” been sent for suddenly to see Frau von Mácozy, and had all the late improvement in her health gone by the board?

Really, I do not know which of us was the more agitated when I arrived at their bow-windowed house in North Street and saw Mrs. Paul’s becaped head peering over her wire-blind to see if I were already in sight. She opened the door and beckoned me into the panelled room on the right, sacred to the doctor and called his consulting-room, though I never heard of anyone who ever consulted him there. Poor patients sat on hard benches in the surgery passage in

an excellent draught; richer ones sent for him. They would as soon have gone to him as to the baker to see their bread was properly made, and that, of course, would have been impossible. Everyone in those days baked at home, and made their own cakes and tea-cakes; one of my earliest sins was that I neither did one nor the other, though I was known to possess the best brick oven in the town by every inhabitant thereof.

I had scarcely regained my breath when Mrs. Paul placed the gorgeous von Mácozy invitation in my hand, and begged me to say what I thought of that.

It had a splendidly emblazoned coat of arms at the top (poor Mr. Julius Beevor!) and the usual form of invitation—except that the R.S.V.P., which was *de rigueur* in Hamworth and the neighbourhood, was missing. Mrs. Paul was in a dreadful state of flutter. Was she to reply or not? If not, how would Frau von Mácozy know for whom she had to prepare; and above all—what, oh! what was she to wear?

Her best dress was far too evidently made out of the funeral scarves and hatbands that were the doctor's "perks," her second best was in rags; Edwardney had sworn aloud when she suggested a new dress. Wasn't it too bad? Especially as he must be making pounds out of the Hungarians, though, naturally, half of all that went to the Fillmores, though what they did to earn it she for one never could see, try how she would. I examined all the debatable garments reposing on the bed in the best room, and finally suggested adjourning to Rose Cottage, where the town dressmaker lived, and taking her advice on

the subject. But we found Miss Parker literally in a state of siege, for all the Hamworth ladies were in the same state of agitation; so we returned home—Mrs. Paul determined to make a last assault on the doctor's purse or credit, and I much entertained at the flutter in the dovecots that the von Máccoczy's invitations had caused.

If the good ladies had only known that their best efforts at adorning themselves would never have been noticed except by each other they would have been saved much mental wear and tear, and their unhappy husbands would have been spared some heavy bills. But, naturally, they never realised this fact, and the female half of the town was almost in hysterics before the day of the gathering dawned, the new garments were laid out on the different beds, and the weather proved itself to be all that could possibly be desired.

If these details sound puerile and unnecessary, they really are put in to delay for a few moments the necessity of writing about the end of a day that began in such an auspicious manner.

While we in Hamworth and the villages round were prinking before the glass, tapping the long-suffering barometer in the dim halls, and impatiently waiting for the time to start, Brown was having her first tussle with Frau von Máccoczy. Unfortunately, the necessary preparations for so large a gathering had brought strangers on the scene; she met unknown men in the hall and on the stairs; there was an air of bustle about the place that she could not understand; and recollecting how miserable she had been before when strange comers and men were at Winterslowe, Frau von

Mácoczy had first refused to dress; then, having been persuaded out of that, had shut herself into her room and defied anyone to enter unless she chose to allow them to do so.

At last Michael begged to be allowed in, and the women could hear him eagerly telling his mother how lovely the tea-tables were looking, and that the band had come and the singers from London, and that the party was going to be splendid, splendid! What happened next no one knows, no one will ever know; there was a long silence, the guests were gathered on the lawn under the great cedar-trees, the band was playing gaily, and if people were surprised that their hostess was not on the spot to entertain them, the girls, Herr von Mácozy, and Phœbe were in every place at once; and, knowing how eccentric she was, Frau von Mácozy was not missed as much as one would have thought she would be. Her husband knew Brown and Mary were on duty, that anything could happen seemed literally impossible.

I shall always believe that Michael himself found the stuff that killed him in one of his mother's numerous hiding-places; no one could make him swallow nauseous medicine against his will. Neither was there any sense in the whole proceeding. If his mother had gone suddenly, dangerously mad, surely she would have strangled the child, or stuck a knife into him!

I cannot say. Suffice it to describe how suddenly there crept through the crowd an idea that something untoward had happened; for first Herr von Mácozy

went into the house, hurriedly summoned by Brown; then Dr. Paul and his partner both left the gay scene; and finally Mr. Julius Beevor and another of the county magistrates were sent for. The band ceased to play, and presently the Hamworth carriages came round, and Phoebe, looking white and terrified, gasped out apologies—sudden serious illness, anything that came into her head; for she afterwards confessed to me that she had not the least idea of what she did say; all she wanted was to clear away the crowd, shut the house, and see what could be done.

At her request I stayed behind and talked to Mari and Roszi in the schoolroom, poor girls! They had seen so many curious happenings that one more or less was nothing much to them, and they were frankly anxious for their tea, the strawberries and ices that they had been promised, and to hear the music to which they had been looking forward ever since the idea of a party had been entertained at all.

It was not until nearly dark that Dr. Paul joined us in the schoolroom, and in guarded tones—very guarded for him—told the girls that their little brother had died very suddenly, and that their mother also was extremely ill. I expected the girls to indulge in their usual hysterics, but they merely looked at each other in the most extraordinary way, and then began to cross-question the doctor about Michael, and how, when, and where he had died. Roszi at once exclaimed he must have got at some of "Mother's messes," he was always taking things which he was forbidden to touch; Phoebe had caught him over and over again even seeing how rouge and eau-de-Cologne tasted.

There wasn't a berry in the hedges he did not try to eat; Mother always had funny things about.

I looked at Dr. Paul, and he slightly shook his head—how Brown had overlooked Frau von Máoczy's store of noxious poisons no one knew, and no trace of anything of the kind was ever found in the room or about her person afterwards.

It then appeared that when Brown at last obtained admission to Frau von Máoczy's bedroom, Michael was dead on the floor, and his mother lay apparently asleep beside him, taking no notice whatever of the noise made by the breaking in of the door or of Brown's horrified shriek, which, well-trained automaton as she was, she could not refrain from uttering at the sight. Whatever had killed Michael had merely stupefied his mother; she was carried into another room, and one doctor endeavoured to rouse her, while the other did his best for the child.

But there could be nothing done for Michael. Mr. Julius Beevor and Mr. Corsellis put their heads together; there must be an inquest, but everything should be managed as quietly as it possibly could be. No one would ever persuade the magistrates that Frau von Máoczy was not a murderess and would-be suicide, but as there was no proof and never could be any, and as everyone knew that Frau von Máoczy was mad, the scandal must be hushed up, and the matter finished with as soon as might be. More especially as Dr. Paul utterly declined to believe in the poison idea. Michael had a notoriously weak heart, he had attended him through two very serious illnesses, and he had not recovered completely from either, and it

was only natural that the sudden death of her only son should have had the effect on his mother that it most undoubtedly had. He pooh-poohed the idea of a *post-mortem* on the child, an inquest was absurd; he was quite ready to give his certificate; Fillmore knew that he had always said Michael might die at any moment, and Dr. Fillmore had to say that this was so.

Dr. Paul was in the habit of making the same kind prophecies about most of his patients; there wasn't a soul he attended of whose sudden demise he was not prepared to hear at any moment; but of course this peculiarity of his could not be taken into consideration. The magistrates consulted together, shrugged their shoulders, sent for their carriages, and the house was left to the solemn presence of the dead, and the bereaved father, who was well-nigh as distraught as even his unfortunate wife could be herself.

Dr. Paul and Dr. Fillmore had done all they could do to arouse Frau von Mácozy from the death-like stupor into which she had fallen, and in which she remained until well on into the night. When she became conscious, she seemed quite sane, more sane than usual, and merely asking, "Is that party over?" turned on her side and fell into a natural sleep, which lasted until her usual time of waking.

From the hour Brown found her on the floor Frau von Mácozy never once asked for Michael or mentioned the child's name. She refused to wear a black dress, or allow anyone to come near her dressed in black. She was quieter than ever for some long time, and now, curiously enough, all her old wild love for

FRAU VON MÁCOCZY "AT HOME" 87

her husband had returned, and she could hardly bear him out of her sight.

Poor Herr von Máoczy! If his wife loved him, he simply loathed, feared, and disliked her more than he could say. If she touched him he shuddered; he repelled and repulsed her caresses, and was never anywhere near her if he could possibly avoid her presence. Whoever doubted the cause of Michael's death, his father never did! He was as certain the child had been given some Hungarian gipsy poison as if he had seen his mother administer it. Michael was his one hope, his one joy in life; the girls were only girls, and as impulsive, wayward, and reckless as ever their mother had been in her young days. No doubt they would share her fate sooner or later; and now Phoebe was his only remaining comfort. They used to sit out under the great cedars and talk about Michael while the girls swung in the trees or played croquet and quarrelled on the lower lawns; until Frau von Máoczy would come out, creep close up to her husband, put her arm through his, and, placing her head on his shoulder, either order Phoebe away to the girls, or murmur weird melodies into his ear under her breath until he rose, shook her off, and plunged away into the woods. Then Brown and Mary would appear on the scene and suggest something or other that should attract her attention.

Phoebe was warned by Brown more than once that her mistress was becoming very jealous of her and of the way Herr von Máoczy turned to her for help and consolation, but Phoebe naturally did not see what she could do. She could not suggest keeping out of Frau

von Mácczy's sight; that would indeed be absurd. She was not afraid of poison, that was impossible; and as for violence, there were always people at hand that would prevent that, and Phœbe herself—tall, strong, and young—would be more than able to hold her until more help came should she attack her, even if she were ever alone, which nowadays, of course, she never was. The immaculate Brown had managed cupboards and secret panels in the walls of the room Frau von Mácczy occupied; she could ostensibly lock herself in, but someone could always reach her; someone was always watching her, for the staff had been reinforced since Michael's death, and two nurses were always on duty night and day, albeit she had not the least notion that this was the case.

All the same, day by day, she became more and more uncertain, more and more insane. No one who saw her now could doubt for one minute that she was mad, and we never really knew what she would do next. I have seen her take down her hair at dinner, and, regardless of the servants, rearrange it for herself at the glass over the chimney-piece; she once ate a whole pheasant while we sat and watched her, and at dessert she filled her plate with nuts, cracked and ate them, while we wondered what on earth she would do next!

Nothing appeared to harm her; she would get wet through and remain in her wet clothes for hours at a time. She would walk miles, followed by her panting attendant, and stalked by a couple of men on horse-back. She would plunge into the village schools and talk nonsense at the top of her voice, and then would

try and interrupt the service in church, but fortunately she was a Roman Catholic, and once having given vent to her opinion about the absolute futility of the Church of England as by law established, she never tried to go there again. She made the neighbourhood lively at any rate; we never had so much to talk about in all our lives as when Frau von Máoczy was at Winterslowe, once we got over the horrible shock of poor dear little Michael's death on the afternoon of the "At Home" day, though naturally that took us all some time to do.

Herr von Máoczy had taken the poor little body back to inter in the family vault in Hungary; there had been no inquest fortunately, but when he returned he looked sadder than ever, and he and Phœbe were more than ever companions in the best sense of the word.

I own frankly that I took Brown's view of the subject, and spoke out to Phœbe more plainly than Brown could, but I could make small impression on her. She was older than I was; she did not care how people talked; why should she? she added bitterly. She had no name to lose, that had been already lost for her; when her father failed her, her faith failed her too; he had been her idol, that shattered, what did she care for the world, or anyone else? She could comfort Herr von Máoczy for Michael's loss; he could talk to her about the child, about his troubles; to whom else could he talk? She at any rate should stick to him, and help him all she could to bear his griefs and sorrows; and as for Frau von Máoczy the only thing to do for her was to keep her out of mischief and see she did

no one any harm. Unfortunately, there was always a chance that the poor woman might become normal once more. The family from whence she came had the most extraordinary history, and while the men not unseldom escaped scot-free, the women often passed through a period of absolute madness, to become themselves suddenly, and to end their days as old ladies, benevolent, sweet and good, dying finally of extreme old age in the very odour of sanctity.

That this was the fate before Herr von Mácczy : that he would go wifeless and sonless to the grave was almost certain. Phœbe could console him by being his friend and *confidante*, and Phœbe should take her own course, no matter who tried to interfere or come between her and him.

CHAPTER V

THE DOCTORS INTERVENE

MR. JULIUS BEEVOR came into Hamworth one day in the utmost distress. His mother had been taking one of her very sober and leisurely walks in her exquisite garden when she was suddenly pounced upon from behind, her parasol seized from her hand, and her bonnet from her head, and she was soundly shaken and desperately frightened, before her shrieks of terrified despair brought the gardeners to her rescue, while Frau von Mácoczy's attendants came tearing up and took possession of their frantic patient. If he had not been in such a fearful state, I should really have laughed tremendously to hear of this episode.

If Mrs. Beevor's appearance had the same effect on Frau von Mácoczy that it had on me, I could quite understand the joy it was to the poor mad creature to really attack and terrify one of the most smug, self-satisfied old ladies it has ever been my misfortune to meet. Mrs. Beevor would have no dealings whatever with anyone outside the "County." And when obliged, as she sometimes was, to shop in Hamworth, she remained enthroned in her gigantic landau while the obsequious shopmen took her orders, brought out goods for her inspection, or heard her complaints, almost trembling with agitation at her frown, though as she

never took less than a year's credit and very often a good deal more, one would hardly have thought it worth the tradesmen's while to have dealings with the big House at all. She must have been dead now quite twenty years, but as I write I can see her as well as if she were still before me. She never apparently saw any one of us if we happened to pass her while she was engaged in shopping; all the same she knew every one of us by sight, knew just when we had new garments and of what they were composed, and through the double eye-glasses she held to her eyes at the end of a thick gold chain, she was popularly supposed to see into the houses and know what we were about to have for dinner, and just how long the curtains and carpets and furniture wore, which, of course, properly treated, should have lasted our life-times.

Hers did, that ours did not was another sin put down to the times, which, slow enough then to us who were young, in those days appeared even more rapid to Mrs. Beevor than the present days of rush and hurry appear to us, who in our turn have joined the ranks of the old and middle-aged. Mrs. Beevor always wore a large bonnet tied under the most determined chin with wide strings of beautiful French riband; and on each side of her face, well brought forward, was a bunch of auburn-coloured curls, with a parting on her forehead which showed at once that these curls were false. Furthermore, a large silk mantle enveloped her form; a flounced silk dress over a crinoline could be seen in summer, as could her somewhat stout hands in coloured one-buttoned kid gloves, and I knew she wore spring-sided boots and

white stockings, though not unseldom, despite her age and weight, she wore low thin shoes. Boots were plebeian wear; no one wore boots in her girlhood, and she never really reconciled herself to them to the day of her death. As she went out even in the garden round her house in her bonnet and mantle and with her gold eye-glasses and the chain twisted round her fingers, I could imagine just how she looked when suddenly assaulted by Frau von Mácozy, and despite her son's evident agitation and alarm, I could not restrain a most unfeeling laugh.

Unfortunately for me, I can always visualise a scene at once, and the account of the bonnet and curls going one way and the parasol another while the stout Mrs. Beevor gasped and screamed in the madwoman's grasp was more than I could hear unmoved. But Mr. Julius Beevor was so really miserable and alarmed that I did not laugh long, and could only wonder what he wished me to do in the matter.

Of course, he knew that Phœbe would be the best person to apply to, but what could she do? We were all very ignorant of the lunacy laws in Hamworth, but Mr. Beevor was finding out what his powers were. No one could keep a lunatic at large unless he or she were certified and looked after properly. Frau von Mácozy must be certified at once, and if Herr von Mácozy would not send her away from home as, of course, he ought to do, he must have proper keepers, and see that the neighbourhood was protected from outrages which made everyone feel no one was safe in his or her bed, or at all events in his or her own garden and grounds.

Naturally I told Mr. Beevor that Frau von Mácoczy had never done anything before that interfered with anyone outside her own household, and even there she was more eccentric than really mad. I much doubted if any two doctors could be found to "sign her up," her nurses were always in attendance, and it would be difficult to find her in such a state as could authorise such extreme measures.

I remembered how often I had longed to shake Mrs. Beevor myself, to let her know just what I thought of her and how I had pined to do many of the idiotic things that Mr. Beevor was rapidly recounting as signs of Frau von Mácoczy's madness. To fidget in church, to cough loudly at some of the rector's most banal remarks, to contradict the curate and reprove him for his ways, were all things I should have loved to do myself: was Frau von Mácoczy only natural after all?

Had it not been for the mystery of Michael's death I should have said so, especially as her wild rushes away from home were what I should have often made myself to get right away from all the domestic bothers that often enough beset me, even to reach a place where I had not to order the dinner or see to the nursery and schoolroom, had I been able to make up my mind to "strike a blow" for freedom and be off and away on a jaunt by myself! If a person be mad because she is not just like everyone else, because she wants to see and do things by herself, to go out into the world and really learn all about it, then am I, was I, as mad as poor Frau von Mácoczy herself. And I most certainly should have snatched off Mrs. Beevor's bonnet and shaken her many a time had I had the courage, so

much did she irritate me, so much did her serene satisfaction with herself get upon my nerves.

No doubt Mrs. Beever had had the same effect on the poor creature that she had had so often on me. I was restrained by civilisation from indulging in the absurd deed; she was not, and she had not harmed the old lady after all. I much doubted if anything could really be done in the matter, unless, of course, Herr von Mácoczy would allow the doctors to intervene.

There was a great deal of coming and going between Hamworth and Winterslowe and the Grange during the next few days, and at last Phœbe came in and told me that Herr von Mácoczy had consented to specialists from London seeing his wife, and that measures, if necessary, should be taken at once to secure safety for the neighbourhood without in any way curtailing her freedom. He was beginning to dread his wife in the most extraordinary manner, and would rarely remain one instant in the same room with her. Winterslowe was large, and their apartments were far apart; all the same, she would come to the library window and get in to him there; she would rise in the night and batter at his bedroom door, she would hang on his arm should she meet him in the garden, and refuse to leave him unless she was absolutely forced to do so by Brown and Mary, who were in their turn beginning to feel stronger measures would have to be taken. If she met Phœbe and the girls she looked straight through them as if they were not there; if they spoke to her they were unnoticed, she neither responded nor listened; the girls were getting nervous and hysterical; in fact, the whole state of Winterslowe was becoming unbear-

able, and could not last as things were at the present moment. If she met Phoebe alone by any chance she had the most horrible habit of stopping just in front of her, looking her up and down and then bursting into a fit of laughter, which often enough ended in an attack of shrieking hysteria. The servants were all clamouring to go home to Hungary; something would have to be done, and that speedily, or they would find themselves in a worse state than ever before.

It was time the London men came down, and Phoebe would be thankful when something definite was settled. Herr von Mácozy had lost his dread of the asylum for his wife since Michael's death, for girls mattered nothing to him, though he was extremely fond of his daughters. Unless they were married they could not succeed to the immense estates in Hungary, which needed men to manage them. If Frau von Mácozy were really insane, the estates should be left to his brother; he would have no son to come after him; his lawyers could continue to look after the property until events proved whether he should or should not go heirless to his grave! The girls loved England, they could grow up English in Phoebe's care, they had ample means to secure their future, and in the calm atmosphere of England they would shed their Hungarian nerves and remain abnormal and phlegmatic, even marry Englishmen and forget their nationality at once and for ever.

Even then I do not believe the doctors could have done much had not Frau von Mácozy played unconsciously into their hands. The two grave, elderly men had met her at tea and talked with her, Dr. Dewdney

Paul, Phœbe, and Herr von Mácozy, and never had any woman been in a saner and more delightful humour. She had even called in the girls, chattered to them, and made them quite happy; and her every movement was grace. She was exquisitely dressed, she talked on every possible subject, and had not her manner been somewhat excited, no one could have thought her anything save a most accomplished and witty *femme du monde*.

The doctors were staying the night—Winterslowe in those days was too far away from London to make the journey to and fro in one day—and after tea Frau von Mácozy volunteered to show them the heath land or the woods, whichever they preferred, in order, as she said, to give them an appetite for dinner. Naturally Herr von Mácozy went too, but her excellent humour still lasted, and while she showed one doctor, who was an ardent botanist, just where to find the sundew, the great Cornish heath, and the blue gentian, the other doctor was told all about the birds in the harbour, until both men were perfectly certain that Frau von Mácozy was no more mad than they were, and that Herr von Mácozy simply wanted to get rid of his wife, and, with a side glance at Phœbe, make way for the beautiful creature he had installed as governess to his girls.

All that evening, too, after a perfectly arranged dinner, Frau von Mácozy was at her best. For the first time for months she imperiously bade Phœbe accompany her on the piano while she gave the doctors an idea of the Hungarian music. Finally, she demanded her zither, and charmed the men with the wild

melodies until they looked at each other wonderingly and declared that no one in this world was sane if she were not.

When the women had gone to their rooms, the doctors and Dr. Dewdney Paul and Herr von Mácochy had a long and earnest talk. They could not sign any document that would consign such a charming lady to skilled care; she might be occasionally eccentric, but even of that they had seen no signs; but mad she certainly was not, and they would go over and see Mr. and Mrs. Beevor themselves, and tell them how utterly impossible it was for them to act as Mr. Beevor evidently wished them to do.

I cannot understand myself how obviously insane people manage to know that they are being examined and at the same time are able to behave in such a way that no conscientious man can send them away to a lunatic asylum; but that they are able to do so I myself have seen more than once. In one case the woman was perpetually visited by doctors. In their presence, nay, in the presence of any two men she was as sane to outward appearance as anyone; the moment they had gone she would break out, scream, cry, tear her clothes, and swear horribly. At last she almost murdered her benefactress, but it was only then that she could be certified and locked up. Once in an asylum she gave up all hope, she was mad until she died; but it seems to me that, properly managed, the amount of self-control she undoubtedly possessed could have saved her. Anyhow, it did not, and she ended her days in durance vile, a howling, screaming maniac.

Fortunate it is that this same self-control occa-

sionally breaks down before harm is done, but all too often it does not; a semi-lunatic, to coin a word, can make home hell, can ruin his family, can do endless foolish and even wicked things, but no one can interfere. I have known a woman half-starve her husband, taunt him to the verge of madness itself, finally leave him alone in a wrecked house to die by himself, while she remained without speech for years; yet no one could prevent her from doing as she chose. She was sane enough when the doctors or a magistrate called to see her, but became witless and destructive once more when they had gone, and she only had sufficient sense not to spend all her money. Another woman I knew did; no one could certify her, though she gave sovereigns to crossing-sweepers, pine-apples to beggars, and entertained all the riff-raff of the neighbourhood to enormous suppers, for which her unfortunate relations had to pay, for most certainly she could not!

If we in England were able to avail ourselves of the French family council, I think a good deal of misery would be spared, but we cannot. In consequence a great many folks are shut up who ought to be at large, while still more are left at large who most certainly should be in skilled hands. If Frau von Mácozy had not been so cunning, so terribly strong, I still think she would have been better at Winterslowe, but one never knew what she would do next, or how far she would walk or what she would say, or how she would behave to her unfortunate maids. When the doctors told Herr von Mácozy it was impossible to certify her, we felt in despair, and Dr. Paul and I went back to Hamworth wondering what would be the next step in

the drama at Winterslowe. We had not long to wait. I suppose the excitement of the evening had upset her more than even the doctors knew; anyhow she rose in the middle of the night, escaped in her most cunning manner her maids' vigilance, and was discovered making a huge bonfire by her husband's door, as she was determined to see him and know the meaning of the afternoon's visit from the strange men.

There was no difficulty about certifying her then; the discovery of her bonfire was succeeded by the usual screaming fight with the nurses, the doctors were roused and came hurrying to the scene of action; then measures were taken to quiet her, and the next day trembling Mr. Julius Beever came over to Winterslowe and acted as the necessary magistrate, while mental nurses from the Dorchester Asylum arrived until such time as the doctors could arrange for her to be taken away. After the night alarm Winterslowe was pronounced unsafe for anyone, and Phœbe and the girls came in to stay with me while Herr von Mácoczy and Dr. Paul remained at Winterslowe, in case of accidents. Finally, to the rage and disappointment of Hamworth, Frau von Mácoczy disappeared as she had come; the steam yacht once more vanished away out of the little harbour, and the girls returned to Winterslowe, and life was perceptibly flat in Hamworth, for some little time at all events.

Even Dr. Paul did not know where Frau von Mácoczy had gone; his bill was paid ("half, of course, went to Dr. Fillmore, my dear," said his spouse vindictively), and, moreover, a very handsome gold watch and chain, which he could not be supposed to share,

made the good little man very happy. Albeit I think he would have preferred a secret cheque, for, some new clothes and unpaid bills being much on his mind, he would have appreciated money more than what gave him the uncalled-for appearance of egregious riches! If the present-day Hamworth doctors possess the old ledgers of the 'sixties and 'seventies they must feel very ill when they look back at the pages. The big houses all round were full of residents, the township was full of growing families, all of whom obliged them not only by being born, but by having measles, whooping cough, and all the rest of the regulation childish diseases in the good old style, while many venerable ladies and gentlemen were "chronics" of different kinds, and had the obstinate winter bronchitis and asthma with a regularity that was as sure as that the bills for attendance there would be paid at once the moment they were sent in.

Now there are no old "chronics" left. Those who would have taken the places of the old folks whose names are on the ledgers and on stones in the graveyard are young and hale and vigorous at the age when their forbears took to caps and coughs and wrappers and asthma, while few people continue to have infants, and the big houses are empty, swept, and garnished except for the shooting and hunting seasons. Then no one wants a country practitioner there; if an accident occurs he may be sent for for the moment, but he is shunted the instant a London or a Bournemouth man can be got at, and soon I fear the dear old general practitioner of the country will be quite a thing of the long dead past. The poor folk even find it

cheaper to go to a Bournemouth hospital. The train fare is less expensive than the doctor's fee, and there is the excitement of the journey and the chance of becoming an in-patient, about which event the sufferer can talk volubly for the rest of her life.

Mrs. Dewdney Paul tried hard to find out from everyone not only where Frau von Mácoczy was, but how they managed to get her away, but she was never any wiser for me. Indeed, it was some time before even Phœbe knew how she had been decoyed on board the yacht on the plea that the Emperor had sent for her husband, and that she must see him as far as London; she was then sent mercifully to sleep, and when she woke found herself in a beautiful house and great garden where she was to stay to be near London until her husband returned once more from Hungary. As Mary and Brown were with her and she could roam where she wished in the grounds, she had not the least idea she was in confinement; if she wished to go farther afield a carriage and pair was at her service, but after one or two drives she declined to move outside the "Park." The country was pronounced dull and stupid, and as she hated London she seemed quite content to remain where she was, more especially as Herr von Mácoczy wrote regularly giving her the most astonishing descriptions of the Emperor's goodness to him, and in his reflected glory she shone—as she imagined—to her heart's content.

I began very soon to feel rather uneasy about Phœbe. Always handsome, she appeared to grow more beautiful every time I saw her nowadays, and the unhappy look of sorrow that had never really left her since her

father failed her appeared to vanish entirely, and she was even gayer and more light-hearted than in the dear old days of Kensington Palace Gardens. Of course, Hamworth began to talk : whenever did Hamworth hold its tongue, or kindly refrain from imputing motives, or trying to drag anyone's skeleton out of the best locked closet in the world? Indeed, one need not even possess a skeleton for Hamworth to try to discover one; a bone, and that a very dry one, was quite enough out of which to compose a whole tragedy.

I recollect they made quite a respectable piece of gossip out of the fact that our nurse's surname was the same as my father's second name. Of course, she was a poor relation, but that once settled to their satisfaction, they let her alone. It was great joy to them to believe dear old Nan was my thousandth cousin; that she was not; and that I do not to my knowledge possess such a connection was nothing to them. Anyhow, it did me no harm, and gave them an amount of pure joy that amused me at all events as much as it was supposed to annoy and shame me. But gossip always did run off my back as water does off a duck's, nowadays I might have made quite a fortune had I been as thin-skinned as people appear to be. I might have landed half, nay, the whole, of Hamworth in the law-courts had I brought the inhabitants to book for all the "slandrous statements" they made in those days about me and mine. But it amused them, poor dear things! It amuses them still to imagine me guilty of all sorts of awful crimes; all the same, they have done great harm now and again, and made people wretched

who did care what people said of them, and some day no doubt they will receive their reward.

Phœbe now naturally began to interest them most particularly, and even Mr. Julius Beevor thought it his duty to come and see me on market day when the Justices had a very light day's work, and after a good deal of preliminary humming and hawing ask me if I had considered the delicate—the very delicate—position such an elegant, and indeed he might say beautiful, young lady as my friend was in, now there was no lady at the head of the von Mácoczy household. I could not fail to understand what the good-natured gossip meant; at the same time, I did fail to see what business the Beevors had to interfere in the matter. Surely they had done enough when they were instrumental in removing the erstwhile female head of the household to the excellent asylum at Little Heather. Phœbe was thirty years of age, I remarked; to me in those days, when I was twenty-four, she seemed almost venerable; surely she was old enough to look after herself, while there were the girls, and what more could be required? They never left Phœbe for a moment. Poor Herr von Mácoczy was as harmless a man as I had ever met; surely enough nonsense had been talked about Winterslowe. Now Frau von Mácoczy was in safe keeping why worry about it any more?

But Mr. Beevor could not be happy without blurting out all he knew and a great deal more than he meant to tell me at first. Mrs. Beevor *mère* had a confidential maid—so like her, by the way, that I really might have been excused for thinking they were related had I wanted to annoy her on the subject—and this maid's

brother was one of the gamekeepers at Winterslowe. All the outdoor servants there had been bred and born on the place, and were as much part and parcel of the estate as was the house. Lord Winterslowe paid their wages even, or rather the agent did, and this man, too, had felt it his duty to speak to Mr. Beevor of the "goings on," as he termed it, at the big house, more especially as Saxon, the gamekeeper, had shown him the utterly disreputable sight of Phœbe and "her master" walking arm in arm in deep consultation in one of the mossy rides between the trees where the partridges and pheasants were bred.

The agent was an elderly man with daughters of his own whose fair names had suffered a good deal at the tongues of the Hamworth ladies, for they were considered much above their place, which they were not, and undoubtedly flighty, which they most certainly were. But under these circumstances one would have thought Mr. Truecox would have been the last man to hunt other women down. Unfortunately he took quite the opposite view of the case; if he and his had suffered from plain speaking others should too; and between him, Saxon, and Saxon's sister, gossip was raging madly round Phœbe, and the Beevors felt quite sure that something must be done. If I did not tell Mr. Beevor to mind his own business—and bold as I was I was not quite bold enough for that—I did say that he would be wise not to listen to the gossip of a small country attorney or even of old and valued servants. Naturally Phœbe had much to consult Herr von Mácczy about, there were even the expenses of the girls' dresses to be mentioned, to say nothing of those

of the household; why should they not walk arm-in-arm, especially as the mossy rides were always slippery and made walking under any circumstances a rather difficult process altogether? Then Mr. Beevor asked me straight out what I knew of Phœbe's people; if she had any, that is to say; what they were or had been, and under what circumstances I had made their acquaintance. He would have been rather astonished had he known how I longed to tell him to mind his own business, but I drily replied that we met at a dance when I was quite a child; that her people had once been very, very rich, and that suddenly they had lost their money, and that under the circumstances Phœbe had been obliged to earn her own living. A common enough story, I said, and one that could only redound to her credit. Mr. Beevor agreed, and then asked me how Phœbe spelt her name. I said casually, "Oh, in the usual manner," to which he replied at once, "Pardon me, but there is no usual manner—there is Somers, we all know those Somers; but Summers—now I can't recall ever meeting anyone who spelt their name in that way." "It is an ordinary name," I said easily, "I know crowds of Summers, yes, and Winters too, if it comes to that."

Mr. Beevor looked first puzzled and then pained. "Of course, of course, you do not naturally take the same interest in family history as I do; it is a hobby with me. All the same, I think you should caution your friend, and if she has a mother living, write to her and state the case for her consideration."

Oh! these county magnates! I for one cannot weep on their graves or over their empty houses, for I

know how they used to try and rule their "dependents," and even regulate the lives of those whom they considered rather below them in the social scale!

But even in those bygone days I could not refrain from telling Mr. Beevor plainly that I should most certainly decline to interfere. Phœbe was quite old enough and quite capable enough, too, to look after herself, and it was an outrageous insult to suggest that Phœbe's position was not all it should be. Now I happened to know that in the stern Beevor family there had been what I—not being county—should consider a most abominable case; yet no one had taken the smallest heed of the occurrence. The girl had been above her station, decidedly pretty, and the mistress of the village school run by the Beevors at their sole expense long before the Act of 1870 came into being, when Dissenters had to look out for themselves as far as education was concerned, and wherein the Beevor schoolgirls and boys alike were hustled through the "three R's," and started out in life as soon as they possibly could be made ready for work.

Mrs. Beevor was head and front of her school, and the mistress was naturally her pet and *protégée*. Somehow there was a hurried wedding to one of our men; no one could understand it at the time. The man was rough even for his station in life, but a charming little cottage was furnished; Milly Beazley and Joe Shepherd were married, and not very long afterwards a healthy, beautiful little boy was ushered into the world by Dr. Paul.

I always was very stern over these "misfortunes." I refused the usual fortnightly dinner and "baby

bundles" to similar cases, but Milly had been so fascinating and pretty I weakly went to see her. There was no doubt in my mind whose child that was. It was a Beavor to the backbone, a small, lovely, little autocrat. Well for him he never grew up, and fell a victim to the appalling feeding he received, his last meal as a child of four, dying of consumption of the bowels, being herring and plum-pudding! He was the exact image of the golden-haired, blue-eyed second Beavor son, and long years after they were all dead, I learned he wanted to marry Milly, but Mrs. Beavor naturally enough saw to that. He died unmarried, really I think from sheer inability to keep alive. She died too, but of Joe Shepherd's brutality. He was always "throwing up at her" why he married her; she pined for little Charley, and soon followed him to the grave.

All "common people," of course, yet all made wretched by the Beavor family; and now they were to interfere with Phoebe and tell her her duty as if they and they alone could regulate the morals of an entire neighbourhood. If they could, it is a pity they did not begin with their own family, but that, of course, never entered their heads for one instant!

For several months, I should think for nearly a year, I received periodical visits from Mr. Julius Beavor, and he never left without telling me anecdotes of what was happening at Winterslowe, the inhabitants of which were now left severely alone by their neighbours. A few of the men went over to shoot, but "there being no lady of the house," no one called, and the women would have been astonished had they known how

relieved both Phœbe and Herr von Mácoczy were at this same abstention.

Phœbe and the girls, accompanied by Herr von Mácoczy, paid me their usual visits, and I went over to Winterslowe, and once I heard that Lord Winterslowe had written to Phœbe and told her of the Beevors' anxiety for her moral welfare, and that he had scotched the snake of gossip by telling them Phœbe and he had once been engaged, and that only the stress of poverty had stood between them and marriage.

But as it appeared, this unfortunately had sent Mr. Julius Beavor once more on the warpath. He recollected the engagement in a moment, and all the circumstances connected with it. Mr. Summers was a criminal—a fugitive from justice—was it, could it, be right for Herr von Mácoczy's girls to be educated by a woman whose father, if he were caught, would speedily be an inmate of the neighbouring island of Portland? Mrs. Beavor, ever ready to "do her duty," wrote a prim little note to her Hungarian neighbour, and asked him to a frigid luncheon in the great bare dining-room with the monumental sideboard, the heavy horsehair chairs, and horrible crimson rep curtains that had seen out two or three families of Beevors and saw out two or three more. Over the cold beef, boiled mutton, rice pudding, and Stilton cheese and celery, which was the never-varying *menu* during the year when no cold game was available, Mrs. Beavor retailed the painful story in such agonising French that certainly her guest was no wiser, while the servants, who knew exactly why the feast was spread, simply laughed over

the conversation. But as soon as they had left the room, Mrs. Beevor became English once more, and then was truly astounded to find that Herr von Mácozy knew all about Mr. Summers from Phœbe herself, for she had frankly told her story before she joined his family, and really he could not see why it should now be raked up against her.

As Herr von Mácozy had double the amount of quarterings on his shield that the Beevors possessed, Mrs. Beevor could say no more. She had, naturally enough, her own opinion of the looseness of the morals of any foreigner, but that a man could allow his daughters to be taught by the daughter of a fraudulent bankrupt passed her comprehension.

No doubt it equally passed her comprehension how Phœbe would have lived if everyone shared her ideas, but that did not trouble her and her world. "The sins of the fathers should be visited on the children," says the Bible; it is a great thing to have Scripture warrant for what one does, and Mrs. Beevor, at any rate, always took care that all the penal clauses in the Testament should be carried out if she could in any way assist them in being so. More than one gay young Irish cleric fell under her displeasure by remonstrating with her on the manner in which she interpreted "the Law." We had a constant succession of these jovial youths in my early days in Hamworth; but they soon let her alone. If they did not, they generally moved on quickly; she would have no tampering with Providence, not she; she, at any rate, would see that the will of the Lord was carried out to the very letter thereof.

Mrs. Beevor was for once in her life almost at a

standstill as regards putting Nemesis on the scent when she heard what her guest had to say about Phœbe Summers, and she parted with him in despair.

I do not quite know what steps she would have taken on the subject had not another thread been placed in her hand to guide her through the labyrinth at Winterslowe. Unfortunately Mrs. Beevor had relations in Yorkshire who were quite as insistent on keeping Providence up to the mark as ever was Mrs. Beevor herself, and from Lady Martha Micklethwaite she heard that Phœbe's mother lived in great style near York, but was so stricken by her husband's awful crimes as to have changed her name, and likewise was much worn and tried by the fact that her daughter declined to live with her as long as she kept her settlements intact, and refused to throw "good money after bad," and become a pauper chargeable to the rates, to satisfy a silly scruple.

It did not take Mrs. Beevor long to make up her mind as to what her duty was now. After a long and, as she termed it, painful consultation with poor feeble old Mr. Beevor, and with Mr. Julius and Lady Mary, she wrote a polite note to Madame de Fortuna, and begged to know if she were aware that her daughter was governess in a family where the mistress was in an asylum, and where the master was a singularly fascinating man, not much over forty years of age? Madame de Fortuna had at first the good sense and decency neither to reply to the letter or even to write to Phœbe, but as this did not satisfy Mrs. Beevor, she wrote again to Lady Martha, and begged her to call and explain more fully what the circumstances of the case really

were. As she justly remarked to Mr. Julius Beevor (who naturally enough told me), "one could say more than one could write." Not that the law of libel troubled Mrs. Beevor. If she had lived in these days she would have been reduced to her last penny, but then people only laughed at her stories and let them die a natural and speedy death.

I never quite knew what happened at that interview, and neither did Phœbe; she and her mother had not corresponded for years; she had never cared for her girls, and when they both gave up their money and sided with their father, she passed out of their lives in a great measure, if not entirely. She was quite happy at Dringhouses, where she had a charming old-fashioned house and beautiful garden, and quite as much society as she required, to the members of which she could dilate on the folk she used to know, and the houses she was once familiar with in town. Her own family was a good one—her name showed that. She had been unhappy in her marriage—she only wished to forget it; and forget it she did until Lady Martha's visit recalled her to her painful duty to Phœbe, though how to reach her she really did not, for the moment at least, understand.

I do not want to think much of Madame de Fortuna, but she was a remarkable study of cool, calm selfishness, and as such deserves a few words, if only as a warning to others. I am certain that if poor Mr. Summers really sinned, he sinned for her and her alone, to give her more luxuries, more pleasures, more jewels. Furthermore, as long as her boys and girls did well and were a credit to her she did her best

for them, but once they went against her, she solemnly cast them off. Her first thought was for herself alone; her one aim in life was her own comfort; and her money was left in her first will to some well-known charity which existed under the ægis of Royalty, which said charity was liberally helped during her life and knew, under the pretence of secrecy, the ultimate destination of the whole. Why should she now disturb herself about Phœbe? She was over thirty, she had chosen her own path in life, and she failed to see what she could do in the matter. That Lady Martha showed her what she could and must do was proved by her arrival at Hamworth, where, escorted by her maid and an enormous footman, she took up her abode at the "Peal of Bells," the large red hotel in the middle of the Hamworth market-place.

CHAPTER VI

SO DOES MADAME DE FORTUNA

PHŒBE came in to me alone the day before her mother arrived at Hamworth to tell me that she was expected at the "Peal of Bells," and that she had been commanded to meet her at that delightful old-world hostelry. But she did not feel that there was any necessity for her to obey her mother's behest; she had neither seen her nor heard from her since the smash, why should she interfere with her now she was happy once more, or at least as happy as she could be while a slur still remained on her father's beloved name?

I once heard a man say, *à propos* of a woman who spent the rest of her days in retirement after her father had really and truly disgraced her, that no woman ever would feel a sin in such a way, in such a personal manner; but I knew better than he did how these family sins or errors simply scorch the soul of every feminine member of the family when a similar *tracasserie* arises. Doubtless this sensitiveness is not what it used to be, but it existed in our time, and Phœbe would have cheerfully given her life could she have felt that, in doing so, there would have been no stain at all on the name she bore. She had always placed

her father on a pedestal, she had not only loved him but had idolised him; when that idol fell her life ended, albeit she never believed him a criminal, or even guilty of anything save a foolish lack of firmness and power of concentration, of which others who were criminals indeed (though they went scathless to their graves) took advantage and flourished mightily, at least so far as this world and we ever saw.

Why, only the other day one of these very men died, leaving behind him the comfortable little sum of over £200,000. He had lived in "abject poverty" in a small £40 a year villa with a couple of maid-servants to wait on him and on his old wife. Everyone said what an example he was; a constant attendant at church; always ready to give from his "slender means" to any charity, he was as a beacon and a shining light! There were whole families in the poorest of circumstances owing to him. What was the joy he experienced, I wonder, in knowing he still possessed his ill-gotten gains? I suppose he felt himself a monument of virtue when he lived sparingly and most uncomfortably; all the same, if he had given up three parts of his plunder, he could have lived in just the same way and had, besides, the consciousness of having done his best for the creatures he had ruined. But people's consciences are so differently constituted that I have no doubt he looked upon his own life as the penance, and saw no wrong in leaving the money to those who came after him.

Phœbe would have stripped herself to the skin to have paid all her father owed. She did so strip herself, yet how did the world look at her? How did it

delight to blacken her name, and make her tread the path of thorns from the day she left her childhood's home until she reached her grave! She could not, try as she would, love her mother, and truly her mother had never loved her since Lord Winterslowe's engagement to her was broken off, and she took, as her mother termed it, a place as a menial, having foolishly squandered her patrimony in paying off people to whom she was not under the smallest obligation. If people tried to get eight per cent. for their money they deserved to lose it. True enough, but I do not think Mr. Summers had ever promised anything so ridiculous, yet before Madame de Fortuna died she really made herself believe that the victims were really the criminals, and that rash speculators, not speculations, had been the entire cause of the *débacle* in Kensington Palace Gardens.

But all this time Phoebe is waiting to talk matters over with me, and truly I did not know what to say. I knew from Mr. Beevor's chatter what Madame de Fortuna meant to try and do, or at least what she had promised to attempt; all the same I felt she was far too much a woman of the world to make a ridiculous fuss about a matter that did not concern her at all, and that was nothing but mere frothy gossip of the countryside. I own I was not prepared to find that Phoebe had quite determined that under no circumstances whatever would she ever discuss with her mother her position in the von Mácozy household. She was happier at Winterslowe than she had been since her father went away. She was mistress of the place; she loved the girls, and she stopped suddenly—bit her lip and looked

past me out into the garden. Unfortunately for me, I possess not only a species of nonconformist conscience, but more than my fair share of mid-Victorian morals. I have a bright, amusing friend who calls me a prude and a prig and other pleasant things of the same kind, and I cannot believe in the divorce laws or the right of a woman to give all for love and think the world well lost. I have seen so many, many cases of a similar kind, and they have one and all ended in the same way. Lacking the legal tie, the others wear thin far too soon, and at the age a woman requires care, love, and attention more than at any other, old times are forgotten; she feels, nay, becomes, an encumbrance, and she is often enough left to a squalid old age, shunned by all who once knew her, and passed by on the other side by those who, though legally married under the ægis of the Church as well as the law, are not one half as good, one half as pure in heart as their erring sister, who, whatever her faults, sinned in the open light of day.

Now Phœbe knew quite well how even in those early days I regarded those who, to use the old country expression, "went wrong," and when I saw her face, my heart sank. Had she whom I loved so tenderly, had even revered and made a fetish of, become as one of the nameless ones? Surely not. Yet why did she hesitate and falter and leave her sentence incomplete? For a few moments we neither of us spoke. Then she said, "There is no reason at all for my leaving Winterslowe—indeed, I would not if I could. Imagine that house without me; has not Herr von Mácoczy suffered enough without my failing him now?"

I hate digging into people's hearts and dragging

their secrets from them; but I could not help saying, "Is there no danger for you, Phœbe?"

She walked up and down the long, ugly drawing-room at the Brewery house for some minutes with her hands clasped on her breast, saying nothing. Then she burst out. She had never known in the least what love was before now; but now she knew and understood what it was, what it could be, and she dare not, if she would, cast it from her. She had no name to lose, no one to harm; she adored Franz and Franz adored her; true, they could not be married, but what did that matter? A few foolish words muttered by a foolish priest, and the whole world smiled. Now all would frown; but as it mattered only to herself and Franz, why should anyone interfere or care? If she had behind her a long line of stainless ancestors, she might perchance stop, hesitate, and flee; but now—why should she? Her father was, as I knew, a fugitive from justice; she did not even know who her grandparents were. Her mother's people were absolutely unknown to her; they had cast her mother off when she married into trade. This was her one chance of real true happiness, and she meant to take it.

Alas! the moonlight walks at Winterslowe, the tender courteous treatment given her by Herr von Mácozy had done their work. I never before believed in passionate attachments, and here was calm, good Phœbe trembling with love; surely the world, or, at any rate, my world, was falling suddenly about my ears.

I had entered an atmosphere I could not breathe; it was as if I had been hustled suddenly into the worst cyclone I ever could have conceived. There was some-

thing truly tempestuous about Phœbe's outbreak; what was I to say or do? A stern moralist of twenty-five or so, one does not look all round the subject, as one does later on in life; albeit, even now I cannot change my ideas on the subject of such frailties; but there are infinitely worse sinners than even my poor Phœbe was. What shall we say for her who crept deliberately into a happy home, where mother, father, and children were alike blissfully content, who with astute flattery so cast herself at the man's head that he fell? Truly, the home was not entirely wrecked, though the wife's peace of mind was; that it was not worse was not due to the woman, but to the tender faith and patience of her who took back the foolish wanderer and kept him by her side until the end of her life. Then there are marriages where not even the most flowery of reporters can say anything save that the bride was graceful, or the bridegroom is a well-known figure, or in the world of fashion, or on the racecourse, or as a financier.

Can I not recollect one marriage, long and long ago, where the girl married a rich man, thrice her age, for his money, and at once proceeded to live the life of a gay and foolish butterfly? Truly, his money took to itself wings, and flew away; he died imbecile in some Home; she scraped and screwed a living out of her friends until the children could help her; then she died too, and is now forgotten.

Could Phœbe's case be worse than either of these, I wondered? Betty never pretended to love Gustav; he was an alien, almost nameless, kindness itself, but hideous to look at, and, at first, ignorant of the common rules of social life. Even before she was married,

Betty had to tell him English folk did not put their knives in their mouth, nor eat soup as a pig eats at a trough. Not one of these things was criminal, even wrong; all the same one forgot his goodness and kindness when one saw him at table, and even met him out at any social gathering of the past. If he could wear the wrong clothes he did; if he could be awkward he was; he smashed cups and glasses, trod on everyone's skirts, and rent out gathers by the handful. One fled before him. Yet was there never a dearer soul! It was only a pity we could not see that soul, and could only contemplate the homely-looking old German, and hear his guttural voice making all kinds of slips as he conversed cheerfully at the top of his voice about things people may think of, but never say unless in the privacy of a very familiar *tête-à-tête*.

We never could imagine how he made his money at all; he lost it so very easily. But someone came from America who had known him there, and it turned out that he had had a partner with any amount of brains. Old Gustav worked as a horse does, and succeeded excellently, either between the shafts or as one of a pair. The moment the harness was off and the guiding hand taken from the reins, there was not a foolish thing he did not do. Betty once showed me, in an access of rage, a box full of so-called securities, not one of which was worth the paper on which it was printed. There were shares in railways that had never been begun, in mines that did not exist, in companies that faded away a month after flotation: Phœbe's father had something to do with some of those. I verily believe if Mr. Summers had offered Gustav a share in

a company to open up and explore the moon, he would have taken it thankfully, and from that moment would have bought a telescope and spent hours in trying to see how the men employed in that luminary were getting on. Poverty with such a man must have been dreadful, no doubt. All the same one could not help liking the good kind old fool. He was so abject over his failures, so fond of Betty, so quite sure she was a martyr, and he was a wretch, that my heart bled for him. All the same, Betty was served quite rightly by Providence; she only took him as a "make weight" with his money, so that when that went, all went, and even her children, being his, did not console her, especially as she had not the least idea how they were to be clothed and fed, let alone educated and put out in the world.

What ups and downs one sees to be sure, in all marriages! I did not in the least alter my own virtuous opinion on the subject then—who is anything save severely virtuous at twenty-five, I wonder? I had lived, too, among people whose morals had been fairly easy, though it was only in later life that I knew this. I ought to have seen both sides of the picture, but I did not, and I begged Phœbe with all my might to leave Winterslowe before any real harm was done. From the heights of her superior age she looked down at me naturally enough, and told me not to talk nonsense; no harm could be done as long as she was at Winterslowe, the harm would begin if she left the girls and Franz. They would not return to Hungary as long as they had to stay within touch of Frau von Máccoczy. What could they do in England left to their own devices?

Once more I recollected Rosa and the splendid-look-

ing young man we used to derisively call Carlo, because handsome as he was, he always reminded me of a great black Newfoundland dog. What a marriage that was. She jilted at least two men before she married and went off on her marriage morning in quite a blaze of glory; such a good-looking pair, so rich, so charming, so altogether all they should be!

Rich, yes; but money was not made to be spent, but to hoard more and more. Bills were never paid until the creditors came and sat in the great hall and refused to leave without their money. Every soul-destroying saving that could be enforced was insisted on. The fires were never lighted until five minutes before the rooms were to be used, the gas was turned out almost before the guests left the house, potatoes were counted, meat weighed; even the dressmaker called over the coals and made to detail every item of her account, which then even was not paid until she threatened proceedings. What was the use of all that money, I wonder? The wife died first, then Carlo, and the children scattered the hoards to the four winds, and almost one and all came on the parish before they died.

The happiest longest marriages often enough fade out into mere tolerance of each other's company; the bright good old days are forgotten all too often. Why should not Phœbe grasp at what came her way?

Now, I should undoubtedly tell her to do so, though my morals would be scandalous, and I know I should be wrong; all the same, happiness is so short-lived, I cannot blame anyone who snatches at all he or she can get. I should not do it myself, simply because it would never have made me happy; at least, I do not think it

would. All the same, I have neither been tempted nor tried. I am placid and easy-going in "affairs of the heart." Phœbe was not. Let us leave the position at that, at all events for the moment. Furthermore, I could not see any real reason why Phœbe should leave Winterslowe, but, at the same time, I felt that she should meet her mother and hear all she had to say on the subject. Phœbe declared it was an insult, both to her and Herr von Mácoczy to suggest harm where no harm was, and I could but agree with her. Still, Madame de Fortuna was not only Phœbe's mother, and, as such, entitled to be heard, but she was quite capable of driving over to Winterslowe and making what is vulgarly called "a row" if Phœbe refused to see her at "The Peal of Bells" or at our house. "The Peal of Bells" was quite out of the question! It was the centre of all the gossip of the place; reputations were made and lost, locally at all events, in the bar and the bar parlour. Already the big footman and the lady's maid had caused a sensation; a meeting between Phœbe and her mother would spread like fire among the heather. Better have it in our house. We knew, according to Hamworth, all sorts and kinds of dubious folk; one more or less did not matter. The inhabitants could not talk more about us than they did; why not give them a real subject of gossip that they could positively enjoy?

I often wonder how Hamworth gets on nowadays that no one gives them anything to wonder about? Still, if anyone strange or out of the way comes there, is there not the halfpenny Press ready and willing to tell them all about them? I have had folks with

world-wide reputations to see me there in my time—poor dear Hamworthians! yet even the names of these people told them nothing—they were made secretly uneasy because they never had heard of them, so no doubt they were disreputable, for, unfortunate creatures, they were not Hamworthians, they had even dared to be born and brought up outside that special county of England! I had once a visit there from Miss Braddon: surely she should have been heard of? But, unfortunately, she arrived with a husband and a child or two: her married name told them nothing, and her unmarried one even less: Dr. Doran, Canon Farrar, the Landseers—all were my visitors—none had ever been heard of in Hamworth forty years ago! and were looked at askance: one visitor more or less meant nothing as far as we were concerned, naturally; all were queer; scientific men sometimes, sometimes authors. Oh! it was a funny, funny place! Even the one great novelist of the century has only now come to his kingdom there, and you can buy his books in the county town; I do not know if you can at Hamworth; I doubt it, but no doubt the bookstall may have one of his, or, at any rate, will get them for you speedily should you care to ask for them.

Yet it was a quiet, kind, and delightful spot to live in, if the aborigines left one alone and one could only look on the bright side of the picture, the exquisite country and the long, lovely lines of purple, ever-changing hills. It is thirty years since I lived there, but I can recall each season as in a dream, and nothing can take away from me the beauties of the countryside. The people I knew are one and all dead. At

any rate, they cannot do any more harm; let me forgive them if I can for the wrongs they did us, and, above all, for the manner in which they persecuted Phœbe, and through her nearly broke my heart.

At last I was empowered by Phœbe to send a note up to "The Peal of Bells" and ask Madame de Fortuna to come at once and have her talk out. Phœbe would not see her alone, and I had to be present, much against my wish. We went out under the faithful mulberry tree, we did not want anyone to hear, and one never knew what a Hamworth "maiden" might not pick up and repeat out of sheer heedlessness, and there we waited for Phœbe's mother. I can see her now as she walked towards us from the drawing-room window to the tree, but I should never have recognised her for the woman I saw last at her own dinner-table, blazing with jewels, clad in lace and yellow satin, and with masses of dark hair crowning her unruffled brow. Now she was all in black; handsome, indeed magnificent black, but the whole of her costume was of the same sombre hue. A heavy moiré antique spread round her tall form; a black lace shawl fell round her shoulders, and her bonnet was of the same lace, with a stiff aigrette at one side. One saw she was in black; all the same, there was not a hint of mourning in her costume of any sort or kind. She was aloof from the world of life and colour, of course, but she was not in trouble; and as she advanced she looked at her daughter first and then at me with a species of good-humoured, tolerant smile that made me at once long to shake her and in some way dispel her self-complacency.

She did not attempt to kiss Phœbe, and merely

nodded at us both as I gave her a garden chair, and she sank gracefully into it. At last she spoke. It was very inconvenient for her to come so far south; it was very, very painful to her to come through London and recollect all it had once been to her; still more painful to know May did not offer to give her house-room, and that she had been forced to stay at an hotel, and, furthermore, to come on to Hamworth and "The Peal of Bells" almost without a break. Not that "The Peal of Bells" was bad; far from it; her room was in the older part of the hotel, only lately a good old family house just annexed to it, and all the oak panels, carvings, and ceilings were still intact, and the carpets, curtains, and the china had all to be discussed before she left that subject. Furthermore, we heard the mistress of the hotel was a most splendid cook; she had lived as cook at Winterslowe in the good old days, when cream flowed as water, and eggs and butter, flour and meat could be had for the asking. A pity Winterslowe was let, yet it must be a dismal hole; Mrs. Frampton had mentioned there was only one post a day, and the newspapers had to be fetched some time in the afternoon, and rarely reached the servants' hall until the next day. Surely Phœbe missed all the strenuous life of London: the many books and papers of Kensington Palace Gardens; what on earth kept her in such a place? Surely, now she had what Madame de Fortuna's maid called a "long character," she could soon get somewhere else? Somewhere away from those wretched foreigners and the unhappy recollections that must always cling about her intercourse with the family. A mad woman and the little child's

SO DOES MADAME DE FORTUNA 127

mysterious death—oh! she had heard it all from Mrs. Frampton at “The Peal of Bells.” Mrs. Frampton had spoken of Phœbe very nicely—“poor dear young beautiful lady” she had called her; she thought it a pity her relations did not interfere; but there, she had only a sister and two brothers, at least so the postmistress told her, and the only letters she sent or received were either from them or from one or two friends who evidently were no relatives of hers.

I watched Phœbe as her mother prosed on and went round and round the subject of her visit without getting any nearer the real point, and I could see that her talk was absolutely unheeded. Of course she knew, as we all did, that not a letter came into Hamworth without scrutiny; often, indeed, she and I both posted and received our letters elsewhere because of this pleasing habit of the postmistress. Mr. Summers’ infrequent letters had to be sent first to May in London, and then posted on by her to Winterslowe; a foreign letter would, I think, have been steamed open over the tea-kettle, for foreign letters were so rare in Hamworth, an important one would never have been safe.

Dear me! how well I recollect making the first “wallet” envelope ever seen out of a sheet of paper, after coming into the post-office shop unexpectedly and seeing old Mrs. Gorel squeezing an old-fashioned envelope in such a way that part of the contents could be deciphered by her. I was more abashed than she was, but I went home, concocted the envelopes now seen everywhere, and much regret I did not patent them, when forty years ago I sent them up to the

stationer to be made, and he asked my permission to carry out my idea wholesale, which he did with great profit, no doubt, to himself, albeit I never had anything for my invention at all. I found myself wandering in this manner as Madame de Fortuna talked on and on.

She had now got as far as Dringhouses and York, and her delightful home and life there. Would not Phoebe care to come and see her, if only in the holidays? She supposed she had holidays? Yes? Well, she could be a young relation if she declined to acknowledge her mother, and change her name *pro tem.* merely. There was the Minster; the clergy set was dull, but very delightful and learned; and there was the military element. More in Phoebe's line than hers; military folk were gay, and she, at any rate, could never feel or be gay any more. Besides, see how grey she was! Grey she certainly was now, as she might have been before had she not dyed her hair. Honestly, the masses of white hair were splendid; she had lost nothing by growing old. Indeed, had she grown old at home, with her husband and children round her, she would have been handsomer than in her best days. As it was, she was always apparently on the defensive, always stating how rich and happy she was, much as a creature who dreads she is a cancer victim insists on her splendid health; much as a woman whose house has fallen about her ears says how well and strongly it is built, defying anyone to contradict her and to prove that she was labouring under any delusion.

Phoebe appeared in almost the same state of mind; she knew quite well why her mother had come; she also knew quite well she had not the smallest intention

of giving way to her. She felt she was in an atmosphere of love at Winterslowe; she was sure of herself; she had grand ideals; platonic love was possible, of course it was. She would never be ashamed of loving Franz von Máccoczy; she loved his children and his home. That she thrilled when their hands met, that her heart beat almost to suffocation when she met him unexpectedly, that she lived only for the long walks and the rides among the pine-woods; the long talks in the evenings after the girls had gone to bed; ought to have warned her, but she was not warned; she was strong, she defied her mother to influence her, and was bitterly indignant when she suggested what the world would say, and what Hamworth was saying at the very minute.

At this Phœbe at once sprang to her feet, and spoke out rapidly, angrily, rashly, if you will, but to the point; nevertheless, Madame de Fortuna had first to listen to her daughter's idea of her mother's own marriage—vows to live together for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse; what had become of those? Even her father's name had been repudiated. If marriage were the one thing on earth, and love nothing, why had it not bound the Summers together in such a way that nothing save death, and that only for a time, could dissolve the bond? She was sick and tired of such talk. She had looked round on all the couples she knew; five or six years was the outside limit of those who were bound by the real bond; after that it either wore through or became a loose riband-like thing that neither party troubled about. Custom staled all that made life splendid, heroic. She was a

lawless outcast from society, anyhow, and she and custom were at war.

I suggested meekly that Phoebe could call to mind lawless unions that had likewise ended in staleness, and, moreover, that the woman had always the worst of the case. Did she not recollect little Margot, who fled with a "splendid officer," and who ended her days as one of those whose further flights by night mean desolation, despair, and ultimate death. Yes; and she recollected staid, respectable Sir Francis and Lady Somerton—Cecily Spencer that was; she had had her "tender episode" with a man far beneath her in the social scale; the whole thing was well managed, hushed up; Sir Francis never knew to his dying day that old, unhappy story; at all events, if Phoebe did what we called wrong, she would do so openly, and not in that hole-and-corner manner. Oh! of course I was no judge; how could I be? I was a child when I was married (I was over twenty, but that did not matter to Phoebe); I knew nothing; she was a woman at least. Nothing would induce her to leave Winterslowe and the house where at last—at last—she knew what real happiness meant.

Phoebe then turned to her mother and gave her the real history of her girlhood, and how she had always longed for and dreamt of a better, wider life than the one afforded her at home. Did her mother remember how she had wanted to visit the poor, even the children in the workhouse and hospital only, always to be told such an occupation was not for her? Splendid horses to ride, masters for accomplishments without stint, were hers for the asking. But if a tale of sorrow reached

her ears, and she longed to take her share in the world's work, she was stopped at once. Sorrows seen would dim her eyes, furrow her forehead, make her look sad; she would catch some detestable disease, or bring one home to the others. She could not even pet or walk with her father. If she ran to meet him when he returned tired and wet to his splendid house, Mrs. Summers' eyebrows were raised. What were the men-servants for if not to take his coat and valet him? What would they think of Phœbe if she endeavoured to do this work? If her father liked to walk, and walk, too, in all weathers, Phœbe should most certainly do nothing of the kind. There was her complexion to think of; her very feet were objects for lectures, thick boots would make them coarse and large; wet skirts were out of the question. Indeed, in our girlhood's days a wet walk was a serious thing. There were no light, short, well-cut dresses for us, all was crinoline, fuss, and multitudinous petticoats; but, in any case, Mrs. Summers did not allow such messes, and if Phœbe could not be happy making futile calls in a great swaying landau, she must be unhappy. In the season, too, there was the Park! What more could she want than the crush of carriages there, where every second or so one was stopped by the slow progress of the vehicle in front, or by the fact that one's last night's partners were leaning over the rail and were waiting to exchange badinage and talk at every minute.

The present generation which can never see the Park as it was in the 'sixties and 'seventies is very much to be pitied; never again will the exquisite horses, the magnificent coachmen and footmen, and the

splendid carriages drive up and down that long expanse. Never again will the muslined and curled and fluffy darlings of that period lie back lazily in the great wide *barouches*, looking quietly out from under their shielding parasols at the whiskered, top-hatted, peg-topped-trouserred dandies only now to be seen in Leech's and Du Maurier's pictures. Then everyone who was anyone knew everyone else; horrid little shivers would run through the feminine crowd as notorious, brazen-eyed "creatures" rode or drove by, while the men nudged each other, and the older men winked or even brazenly spoke to one of the more presentable members of that wretched class. Few dared then to hire a livery stable "carriage" and take a turn in the Park. Then livery stable carriages were worse than the worst cab is to-day, the horses more disgraceful, the vehicles battered and wayworn, and everyone who was obliged to hire for shopping or for evening work kept a regular carriage-rug. This was to conceal the bent old shabby legs of the "coachman," who otherwise would have boldly displayed his venerable trousers unashamed, being quite guiltless of owning anything so superior as breeches and top boots, or even gaiters.

Phoebe had often heard these same vehicles sneered at, especially when they bore some of her father's oldest friends to call, or even to a second day's dinner. There was never an idea in Mrs. Summers' head that a drive in her carriage in the Park would have been heaven to the venerable women who had been good to her husband in the old days, and friends of his mother's before him. If Phoebe suggested such a thing, once

more her mother raised her eyebrows. Did Phœbe recollect old Mrs. Bacon's best bonnet and shawl, the wretched red roses and brown riband in the one, and an ancient Scotch plaid devoid of colour in the other, that made Mrs. Summers ill to think of? Or there was lame old Mrs. Casterton—what about her moulting fur coat, which summer and winter she always used to drive in? Was that object one to be seen in the Summers' carriage? Perhaps Phœbe would wish to keep garments to lend the old dames, in the way the old dames themselves kept their carriage-rug!

At any rate, there were always calls to make, the carriage could never be spared; every day it was the same silly round, the same wearisome waste of life's best days for Phœbe! She had left school at eighteen, the smash came when she was twenty-five, and on the point of a most brilliant, most reluctant, marriage with Lord Winterslowe. She had had seven absolutely wasted years in her early youth, and she would waste no more. Oh! yes, she had had good times; of course she had. She had loved some of the parties, she had loved the rides to Richmond or round Harrow or Hampstead, or even as far as St. Albans with her father; but how often had these been possible? Only sometimes on a summer Sunday, when they had stolen away before breakfast, so as not to shock the Sabbath-keeping public of that era, and had breakfasted and lunched, too, at little wayside inns, returning after the evening service had begun, to dress themselves and help at one of the enormous Sunday dinner-parties, which did not shock Mrs. Summers or the neighbours (when the

latter were asked), albeit their horses most undoubtedly did, should they be seen or heard either coming out or going in.

Then there were the occasionally snatched walks when Phoebe, attended by a maid, waited at the Circus to meet her father's brougham; he would get out and the maid would get in and go home, and they would trot down Regent Street and along Piccadilly to the Wellington statue, talking hard all the way. Mr. Summers knew all the old houses, all the old stories; there "old Q." used to sit and gaze at the pageant of life in which he could no longer share; there Carlton House had stood, and he had watched Princess Charlotte come out after a dutiful visit to the old rascal her father; and as she entered the waiting carriage she caught Mr. Summers' eyes, and coquettishly raised her dress so that he might note her slim ankle and her small and twinkling feet! Then came the walk along the Park where the carriages were all gathered—past the Albert statue just rising into being—and then one turned out into old Kensington, where the real old church was still un-restored, where the "old original bun-shop" displayed its wares, and where perchance one might meet Thackeray, or even, oh! joy, hear him speak to a friend as he passed swiftly along—all those events had, of course, been perfection! But once home, one felt smothered in food, in clothes, in hothouse flowers, and in stupid, dull people, one and all alike, one and all merely anxious to get "tips" from Mr. Summers about things in the City, or to compare their possessions with the Summers', and wonder as they went home how

much longer all that show and splendour were going to last.

As Phœbe poured out all this, Madame de Fortuna looked at her in speechless amaze. She recollected, of course, that Phœbe had wanted to help with the children's hospital, and that she had made feeble suggestions about the old ladies' drives, and, furthermore, that she always wanted to be "running after" her father; but that she had such a volcano in her bosom was naturally a thing that her mother had never dreamed she possessed for one instant. Girls in those days thought of clothes, dances, possible husbands—indeed, for the generality of girls a husband was a necessity. Life was impossible, barely respectable, without one. Phœbe had had offers enough, goodness knows. Lord Winterslowe was the only man she accepted, and that because he was charming and pleasant, would live in the country, and would allow Phœbe a free hand among his tenants and people generally. He was a quiet, good man, but even he could not marry without money; his old mother would have made Phœbe's life a burden to her had she married him without her dowry after the smash. Indeed, Lord Winterslowe only just did not jilt Phœbe; she did not give him time or opportunity; he even combated her decision that the engagement must be broken off at once.

All the same, broken it was, and neither of the engaged couple was a penny the worse. As to listening to puerile gossip about the von Mácozys, that Phœbe never, never would. Nothing would stir her from Winterslowe, or from her post at

the head of the schoolroom. She was happy and content; what more could she be or do in any place? As to talk, Hamworth would talk about the angel Gabriel if he came on earth, and it would object most strongly to a costume presumably of feathered wings and flowing garments; the Hamworth folk would object if someone pensioned them one and all for the rest of their lives—first, because it had never been done before, and, secondly, because it was no one's business to do anything of the kind. Had they not talked about Mrs. Pearson in North Street simply because as a Unitarian she had joined hands with one of the curates on the subject of training the boys and girls to sing properly, irrespective of creed; and had they not one and all pronounced her no better than she should be because she had the temerity to undertake the task? Then how about the Glovers—silly, foolish young people, cold-shouldered, all because they were unconventional and did not live and move according to the Hamworth code? Then, too, how about the Summers' own past? Was there no reason there to do as one liked, and to refuse to be tied and bound by every vain custom? Phœbe's seven wasted years, those splendid possible years from eighteen to twenty-five were mentioned again; now she should do as she chose, live as she chose; time enough for her mother to interfere when she remembered she was her mother, lived with her dear, dear father, gave up her ill-gotten gains, and was once more known by his beloved name.

How Madame de Fortuna listened to all this as quietly as she did I, for one, shall never know, but she did not move or even "turn a hair." She was

absolutely still while Phœbe laid the past, present, and future before her; and when Phœbe stopped, drooping her head, clasping her hands, and sobbing beneath her breath, she rose, looked first at me, and then at her child.

I rose too, and followed her to the door. "It's evidently no use," she said calmly; "she will go her own way. Take care she does not drag you and yours along with her."

I said nothing; I could not. The carriage she had hired was at the door; she drove away.

I found out afterwards she had gone to the Julius Beevors', where Lady Mary had assembled the old Beevors and one or two more of the county who had presumed to sit in judgment on Phœbe.

But I think the Day of Judgment, if such a day ever comes, will have a few surprises for Madame de Fortuna, though she had heard her record read under the mulberry tree; and I was not astonished to find Phœbe in an agony of tears, utterly broken down with misery, but determined more than ever to live out her life in the way she had chosen for herself—at all events, until she saw that it was for *his* happiness that she should go out of Franz von Mácozy's life.

CHAPTER VII

AT LITTLE HEATHER

THE buzzing of flies on a hot summer day was nothing to the hum of gossip that pervaded Hamworth and the neighbourhood after Madame de Fortuna's visit, not only to the Julius Beevors', but to me. That she should have come to me first and then gone on to the Beevors' was simply more than they could understand, and I was, as usual, the object of all their visits for some weeks at least, while the storm of questions I was deafened with almost passed belief. If nothing be sacred to a "Sabreur" according to an old French proverb, certainly nothing was holy to the Hamworth tongues. Fortunately for me, I was summoned to town quite suddenly to the assistance of one of my few old friends, who had, apparently for no reason at all, gone quite out of her mind, and had to be removed from her home without an instant's delay. I could not understand the matter in the least. Marta had always appeared to me the sanest and most balanced creature in the world; yet now I heard she had risen in the night, tried to smother her husband, and had made a frantic dash towards the window with the idea, he said, of getting away from him into the street. I had never liked the sombre, sardonic man Marta had married, simply because he was extremely rich and she had nothing

before her save a life of hard work and a possible old age of penury and want. Life is very hard on women if they are poor! No woman can earn enough in her most strenuous days to lay up provision for the time when she can work no longer.

Perhaps some day there may be some state endowment for working ladies; we should be saved many a tragedy if there were. Surely, if for forty years a woman has worked hard at anything, and can bring forward proofs that she has done so, a modest 25s. might be found for her. The old age pension of 5s. is no use to a lady, even if she reach seventy, but the knowledge that at sixty 25s. a week will come her way, would hearten many a poor governess, hard-working journalist, or typewriter. As it is, many of them work feverishly on a starvation diet, hoping to save, and break down utterly, because there is no future before them at all.

Marta's case was one of these, or at least would have been one, had she not married Sir Lucius Branscombe, and so made her future safe by sacrificing her present and all her girlish hopes and loves at one fell swoop! She was the third daughter of a poor Yorkshire parson, who had thought he was merely fulfilling God's will by bringing small souls into the world as fast as his frail, foolish, and colourless wife could manage to produce them. I do not think that his income and hers combined ever reached £500 a year and the use of the parsonage house, yet that couple had fourteen children, and both parents died quite comfortably, sure of a future Heaven and that God would provide, though when they died the eldest child was but twenty, and the youngest one scarcely

able to walk! What did it matter to the defunct parents that Providence meant the lame old grandmother giving up her small luxuries of a pony Bath-chair and a glass of wine a day; that friends were begged from for votes for this or that orphanage for the little ones, or for places in schools and offices for the bigger members of the bunch? Nothing, naturally, and Marta was not the only one of the children who suffered a martyrdom, for the girls could only take wretched situations as "mother's helps," their education did not allow of more than this hybrid species of place, neither governess nor servant, worse paid than the latter and less considered than the former, because they had no certificates, and so could not aspire to be really teachers in the best sense of the word.

As for the boys, it does not do to think of them, but I never saw a ragged, slouching "out of work" creeping past our garden wall, looking furtively this way and that, and clutching a meagre coat across a shirtless breast, without wondering if he might be one of Marta's brothers, one of the little high-spirited lads I knew in the Vicarage garden, with the gentle, feeble, foolish father and mother looking on smiling, and recking not at all of the future, when the pretty boys and girls would be men and women grown. Marta's marriage, of course, was to do so much for all the family. The grandmother grew young once more, and looked out her old laces and jewels; they were few indeed, and anything but costly, but they fetched a little. Marta had her *trousseau*. Of course, Sir Lucius would have the girls in Berkeley Square, and find them husbands, and, naturally, the boys would be all right! But the moment the marriage was over, Sir Lucius put

his foot down. He did send one of the boys to Branscombe to learn land agency work under his factor, but the foolish boy gave himself airs about his brother-in-law, the factor said he "could not thole" him, and either he or Laurence must leave. Naturally, it was Laurence who left. He turned up now and again as a member of some more or less disreputable theatrical company, always "on the road," never having a shilling in his pocket, and telegraphing now and again to "my sister Lady Branscombe" to get him out of pawn with his landlady, telegrams that were generally taken to Sir Lucius and consigned to the waste-paper basket without farther ado.

Once there had been a horrid scene in Berkeley Square, and from that day not one of the Prescotts had been allowed to see their sister. Marta had returned from a royal party; she was radiantly dressed and adorned with the Branscombe family jewels, and Sir Lucius, stern and unbending, was following her into the house. A disreputable, ragged boy slipped in after him. Another of the brothers was already waiting in the library, the other lad joined him, and both declined to leave without help. Sir Lucius tackled one, and the butler—an old family servant—saw to the other, while Marta cast herself down on the library sofa in an agony of tears. It was dreadful to know how much she had, while her own brothers were starving and her sisters working for a mere pittance. Surely she might do something to lessen the misery she had just seen? Sir Lucius, scarcely ruffled from the slight exertion it had cost him to eject the weak, hungry, undesirable brothers, came in and spoke very plainly about the matter. Marta had nothing to give. All she wore, had, or ate

was his; she had not one penny that she had not to account for to her hard taskmaster. He had married her for her looks; he had purposely taken her because she was poor. A rich woman would have given herself airs, have demanded this and asked for that; have insisted on going about and travelling, and seeing the world. This Marta could not do. She must obey. She was his chattel; he had most certainly not married the family, and from that day onward she must recognise the fact, and drop her relatives once and for all. Poor Marta, whose one idea of marriage had been pretty frocks for the small ones, change for the girls, and chances for the boys! She had been the most useful one of the brood, and really the little ones were more to her than to anyone else. It was not hard to give up her young sailor lover if the little ones were to benefit; not even hard to live with Sir Lucius, albeit his cold politeness made her shiver, and she even longed at times for the dear, shabby, noisy old Vicarage, with its scanty fare, its untidy garden, its grimy walks, and its venerable and, far too often, broken-down furniture, even when she was dressed in her Paris frocks and "fared sumptuously every day."

She could not look round her own rooms without seeing splendours that were priceless; but all was her husband's. More than once she had tried hard to earn a little money. Smocks were then the fashion, and, through her maid, she was able to dispose of several, and a few postal orders were despatched to the old grannie at Clifton. Then Sir Lucius found this out. His rage was terrible. Marta had been used to scant fare and shabby clothes, but

had never had a rough or cross word from her parents. They had been more as two old babies in a nurseryful of younger babes: always smiling, always good-tempered, welcoming each new baby as if it brought its keep with it. Well! if they can look down now and see all their children I trust it is with "other, larger eyes than ours." Otherwise Heaven will be hard put to make them happy, as happy as they both most comfortably expected to be, when they went out smiling into the darkness, content to leave their brood to "Him who had never yet failed a righteous man."

Now here was Marta, the one success of the fourteen as far as money was concerned, at Little Heather, the very place, as I recollected with a start, where Frau von Mácozy had been sent after the last outbreak at Winterslowe. It appeared, from Sir Lucius' account, that Marta had continually asked for me. I had not seen her for some years, and our once frequent correspondence had almost ceased, for I knew Sir Lucius scanned our letters, and I felt this put a bar to anything like free intercourse between us. Marta had tried receiving letters through her maid, who posted hers to me, but I hate anything that savours of deceit, especially when a servant has to be employed. If we have a low standard of honour among ourselves, how can we expect domestics in their turn to rise superior to the many temptations they have to read our all too often most uninteresting letters, and to listen at the door, hoping they may discover secrets we have never had? So I merely wrote direct on birthdays, Christmas, and very occasionally between whiles, and she replied stiffly and constrainedly, and when we met in

town Sir Lucius seemed always at her elbow. I could want nothing from her, he knew; all the same, I was an old friend, I knew all her people, I might perhaps remind her of them, or even tell her of what they were all about. I did once mention that Christobel, the fair-haired darling of mine, was pining for the sea, but as I further added I had asked her to join our brood at Presteign, I received a mere scowl: all the same, Sir Lucius' eye was on me, and I never even spoke of the child to Marta again.

We had a long dreary drive to Little Heather from Berkeley Square, for there were no motors then, and the beautiful horses Sir Lucius always drove were not to be hurried, but I could get few particulars from him during the journey. He was terribly angry because Marta—one of such a tremendous family, too—had not given him an heir. Now he supposed he would never have one; then Branscombe would go to a brute of a fellow he didn't even know by sight; he loved Branscombe; he wanted to see a child of his there; he had had hard lines, of that there was no doubt at all. Here was Marta costing him £1,500 a year at Little Heather—well, if she got no better, if the doctors did not soon give him hope of her recovery, he must find something cheaper; it couldn't matter to a lunatic where she was, and he would save all he could in case she died and he was able to marry again.

I was thankful when the great gates of the beautiful park were opened and we drove slowly along the wide approach to the enormous house. It stood in those days on the edge of a lovely common, one mass of gorse and heather; it might have been in the depths

of the country instead of only ten miles from London. There were great clumps of flowering shrubs in the park, and splendid flower-beds and rich herbaceous borders; no one could think it was a lunatic asylum; it was ridiculous to use such a word in speaking of such a calm and exquisite retreat! A staid butler and a couple of footmen received us at the door, and showed us into a charming sitting-room; books and flowers were everywhere, and a restful shade of greeny-blue appeared to be the scheme of the decorations. I went to the window and looked out on the vast spaces of lawn and shrubbery, and wondered where Marta and Frau von Mácozy could be.

In front of the long windows a very old clergyman was walking up and down very slowly, talking to himself quite under his breath. As he passed my window he raised his voice and addressed me in language that was most undoubtedly Scriptural, but that is not the sort of thing one is accustomed to hear; then he glanced in a frightened way over his shoulder, furtively shook his fist at me, and scuttled away quite out of sight. I looked round: a tall, dignified man had entered the room and was speaking calmly to Sir Lucius. This was Dr. Ebers, the head physician of Little Heather, and we were introduced at once to each other, and he began to question me immediately about my friend, as he called Lady Branscombe. Sir Lucius was very angry when he was told that I was to see her alone, and that at present it was not advisable that he should speak to his wife. His very name put her into a state of terror. She was much better, much; in fact, Dr. Ebers was inclined to think her brief attack had almost passed; all the same, Lady Branscombe required the

most tender care and consideration, and had begged so hard to see me that he felt sure I should do her more good than anyone else, and there were other reasons—and here Dr. Ebers looked very meaningly at Sir Lucius. But Sir Lucius thought of nothing but himself, and never took a hint; and I must own that I was greatly surprised when I heard that Marta might expect a baby in a few months, and that her access of mania was due to her condition and to other facts, said the doctor gently to me, as we went along the quiet corridors to her room, that Lady Branscombe would no doubt wish to tell me, and me alone.

A door opened suddenly on the left, and out rushed the most extraordinary man I have ever seen, his hair literally stood on end, resembling Traddles' hair in "David Copperfield," and he was waving a large barometer round his head. "Doctor, doctor!" he called, "the equinoctial gales are due; they begin on the first of September and end on the twenty-fifth of March! Quick—hurry!" and, without waiting for a reply, he tore back with his barometer, and I could hear him singing at the top of his voice something about the "stormy winds do blow-wow-wow-wow," until someone persuaded him to stop, and all was once more peace.

Then we reached a rather large room, in which several ladies were sitting very much as an ordinary five o'clock tea gathering sits, and with about the same amount of chatter going on. An old lady was weeping profusely while she held the hand of a friend, and Dr. Ebers stopped for a word with her; afterwards he told me she had tried to murder one of her children; she now never ceased to cry for them, and to declare that she was kept away from them because her husband, dead

these five or six years, was jealous of their mutual love. Another woman, who looked more evil than I can say, had not uttered a sound for over nine years; someone had told her that she talked too much when she came to Little Heather first for treatment—since then she had never spoken. “She will some day,” said the doctor, “and then she will go out. She is no more mad than you or I. Half our cases are temper, and the rest! Well, they are dangerous at times, but not to those who know how to manage them.”

I then told him I should like to see Frau von Mácozy if I might before I left, and he was most interested to hear that I knew all about her. He considered her a truly interesting case, and one that would most certainly recover in due time. He gave her ten years at the outside, and not as long by half if she remained under his care and were not worried by any outside interference. We sat down for a little while in the corridor while Dr. Ebers discussed the case; he did not believe that Frau von Mácozy was really mad at all, but then, unlike most alienists, he was inclined to believe that madness was wrongly named—at any rate, three-parts of the cases under his care need never have come there had they been properly managed at first. Business worries, excess, improper education accounted for the men; and as for the women, harsh treatment, lack of exercise or poverty often enough sent them mad. Of course, poverty could not come to Little Heather, but he had studied in several asylums, and he had founded his theory after many years of practice among the insane. Bad air, confined quarters, lack of interest in life, all were to blame; while were a poor person once called

a lunatic, lunatic he or she became and remained so, often enough not confined long enough for safety, but it was impossible without money to have the necessary conditions for recovery. Neither did they recover unless it were possible to save them from the conditions of life that had been the cause of their incarceration.

I recollected with a shudder a night at Brighton when I could not sleep, and when I had heard rough voices under my window and looked out to see what was happening. A drunken drab of a woman was clinging to the railings of the crescent, and was vituperating a man who first gently and then firmly commanded her to come home. He was a respectably-dressed working man, and in the quarter of an hour he stayed there I heard his whole family history. She had drunk the clothes off the children's backs and the blankets off the beds, all the things in the house were gone for drink; would she come home, and he would forgive her once more? Not she; her plan for the night was stated in the foulest language I ever heard, and he struck her and left her flat on the pavement under the window out of which I was looking. I heard the end of the history from one of the local magistrates. Driven mad with misery, he drowned his children in the sea, and then attempted to drown himself; he was recovered, to end his days in an asylum. There are some things in life, after all, one cannot understand. No doubt he would have been wiser to separate from the drunken wretch who had once been a bright, good woman; but he did not, and this was the outcome of what might have been a respectable and pleasant life.

Marta's case, Dr. Ebers told me, was not a case of

insanity at all. She simply hated her husband, and felt that a child, instead of being a pleasure, would be but as a millstone round her neck. If it were a boy, he would be made into a second Sir Lucius, and if a girl she would be trained to make a great marriage, and so add to the lustre of the Branscombe name. The estates went in the female line, if the title did not, so the sex of the child would not trouble Sir Lucius. A baronetcy was a paltry thing at best. His second cousin could be the next man to wear the title if the property were safe, and that was truly all he desired. Marta had had an insane impulse to murder her husband or else herself, but Dr. Ebers thought he had talked her into a better state of mind, at any rate, I could see her alone. Nurses, he added, were within call if I felt nervous, and he would talk to Sir Lucius, and see if he could make any impression on that selfish, disagreeable man.

I must own I felt a little creepy when I was shut into the pretty pale pink sitting-room, and Marta came into me quite alone. All the same, the moment she saw me my fears vanished. She threw her arms round my neck and burst into a passion of tears. However, this did not last long, and she then told me that the moment she realised that she was to become a mother, she felt she could not go on with her life another moment. It would be a stronger link in her fetters, even as it was her life was unendurable. She could bear things for herself; she could not bear the idea of having to stand by and see her child become the inhuman icicle that was Sir Lucius' idea of what a true Branscombe should be. Marta grew visibly excited as she recalled our old days in the vicarage garden; our games, our plays, our grubbing in the dirt, and our cheap delights; our old frocks

and our loving ways : now, if her child could have the same calm happy times as she had, how different would it all seem ! The mere idea of those padded, scented nurseries at Berkeley Square maddened her. Then a pretty bright girl in a pink frock to match the room, came in with tea, and Marta became quieter, and allowed me to talk. I asked her about Branscombe. Yes, she would like Branscombe. If nurse and her sister Christobel could go too, she would not ask for anything else. Then Lucius must promise to let her read and write and work as she chose. She loved Branscombe, and she was beginning to be her merry old self over the tea, when Dr. Ebers came in and told me I had only a quarter of an hour if I meant to return to town in the way I had come.

I found out that the journey by train was quite easy, and I really could not leave Marta already, and, moreover, I was determined to see my poor mad acquaintance, so that I might tell Phœbe about her as soon as I went back to Hamworth. Marta had spoken to Dr. Ebers, and begged for half an hour more at least, and Sir Lucius had to drive home alone, and I did not see him at all until the next day. I obtained a promise from Marta before I left that she would be both good and happy if the pretty pink nurse and Christobel were allowed to go to Branscombe with her, and Sir Lucius, having been told of what might be hoped for later on, was ready to promise any single thing. I found Marta's old love for me was as warm as ever it had been : we talked merrily about the swing in the orchard at the vicarage, wondered if the new vicar had had the old pond cleaned out, and the broken fence by the barn mended, and I promised to find out.

Mad! Marta was no more mad than I was; she even insisted on having the future arrangements put down in black and white. She would not return to her husband, and be subjected to the life that had been hers. Fortunately, Sir Lucius had had the sense to hold his tongue about his wife, and no one, save the necessary authorities, knew a thing. All the same, it is easier to get into even such an asylum as that of Dr. Ebers than to get out, and all sorts of fuss and ceremonies had to be gone through before Marta was once more free of restraint, and able to travel up to her quiet home in Scotland, whither the pink nurse and little Christobel accompanied her, while Sir Lucius scowled about the place, was rude to everyone he dared to be rude to, and made the lives of his servants and even of his very masterful factor a burden to them for the time being. But this, and other things too, were in the future.

That special afternoon passed happily enough, and, promising Marta that I should see her again very soon, Dr. Ebers came for me and took me towards the suite of rooms set apart for Frau von Máccoczy. As we went along, I noticed, seated in an arbour in the garden, one of the handsomest men I have seen in all my life. He was apparently engaged in counting endless piles of coppers. When one pile fell down, he cried as a child would, and called for his attendant to re-arrange them for him. "One of the richest men in the City," said Dr. Ebers. "No, he will never recover. If he had had a single vice, it would have saved him from this fate, though it sounds horrible to say so, doesn't it? Yet it's true all the same. Ever since he was a lad of twelve or so he worked for bréad: he would even scrub out his school; he was a German Jew, I think; he would

starve to add a penny to another, and a shilling to another shilling. He got a chance once of making a large sum of money, and after that he has spent thirty solid years in money grubbing. He has seen money in everything : he has cared for nothing else. And this is the end. Violent first? Yes, very ! nearly killed his head cashier, whom he suspected, quite without cause, of theft, and then the office lad, because he spent 1s. on his luncheon, and he knew what that meant. Fortunately his old father interposed. Poor old boy, he was living in some home for aged persons in Houndsditch, or some such locality. He used to go and see his son at the office once a week, on a Friday, I think, and heard what had happened. Fortunately his doctor sent him here : he thinks it costs him nothing, and that his father pays. Now he plays with pennies all day. He is paralysed ; can't move. It won't last much longer, and when he dies the old father will come out of the almshouse and won't have the least idea what to do with all the wealth. Some charity may benefit. Anyhow, Muller won't, and all he has done is to soften his brain.

"The waste we see is something ghastly. Muller need never have come here had he not been a man of one idea ! The *idée fixe* ! That's what fills the asylums, and, unless people are rich and can come here, they get madder and madder once they are 'signed up.' I have not the least faith in the ordinary mental nurse or the ordinary mental treatment, and, indeed, I think many nurses are the worst specimens I know of the sex. Give a woman unlimited power over another woman and she becomes a fiend. You see if a creature is once called mad, no one believes a word he or she says. Then the nurse does just as she likes, and all too

often the doctor plays into her hands. We haven't time, often enough we haven't money enough to save our sick, either our bodily or mental sick, and even where we can, we set about it in such a foolish way. Your little friend Lady Branscombe will leave here cured, and, given her own way in reason with her child, should never relapse; but I warn you emphatically that she will not have a chance if she is bullied or coerced. I shall enter my opinion in writing for Sir Lucius and the Commissioners, but I don't see what good that will do.

"Now, about your Hungarian friend: hers is a most curious case, and, of course, we have Hungarian nerves and a certain amount of heredity to consider. All the same, I feel sure she will recover; then if she can return to her own country all the better. I am convinced she likes to shock and alarm the people in England, and that what passes for madness here is merely a love of freedom of action and an amount of unconventionality, too, that would never be tolerated in an English country place. I have had no trouble with her, neither have her attendants, or maids, as we prefer to call them. The only thing that worries me is that she does not appear to care one morsel about her children or her husband, and I am rather hopeful that the sight of you may awaken her interest in them once more."

I told Dr. Ebers that her children had never interested her much, that they worried and puzzled her, and that she had given them over entirely to Phœbe, but that her love for her husband had been great and often enough most exacting and embarrassing, and I really fancied she had sickened him of her by her vehemence. Dr. Ebers had not heard of Michael's fate; all the same, he was not inclined to think his mother had had any-

thing to do with that; her attempt to get to her husband was another matter altogether; still, she had neither suicidal nor homicidal mania; all she wanted was freedom.

By this time we had traversed part of the exquisite garden and reached the other part of the great house. A gentle, grey-haired lady was wandering about in the long corridor, and stopped us anxiously. "Any news, Doctor Ebers?" she asked anxiously.

"Not yet, dear friend," he replied quietly; "but how could there be? It takes months for a letter to come, you know."

"Ah! I forgot. I forget all, nowadays——" and so saying she sat down on a sofa in one of the deep windows and gazed anxiously down the long drive that led to the house. Poor creature! She had been suddenly summoned to her husband years ago at the time of the American War, to find him dead and buried from yellow fever. She had one little lad, and he and she came over to Europe to wait until the wicked strife was over. When the child was seven he was attacked by meningitis, and he died in a few hours. She then determined to take the little body home and bury it with his father. That once accomplished, she roamed ceaselessly about the foreign hotels until her brain wore itself out. She was unable to manage herself, her money, or anything. Relatives placed her with Dr. Ebers, because they did not want to be troubled with her at home, nor did they wish their friends to see her. She spent all her days looking out for the return of her husband from America, or at least for a letter from him or from her child, of whom she thought as first a boy at school and then

as a youth at the University. "She goes on mentally," said Dr. Ebers, "and quite expects to find her husband and son the ages they would be were they alive; but that is all the sense she shows; she does nothing but expect and look forward. I don't often allow her to mix with the other ladies; she makes them melancholy; but she constantly goes over to my house. Our boy and girl love her, and if they can get her to talk of the war they are quite happy. We loved the South, and she comes from Virginia. I think she even believes the South is just as it used to be, and at any rate her talk is charming. All the same, I cannot see why she should be forced to go on living. She merely exists; she cannot enjoy; she resembles some beautiful flower grown in the dark, and at times, of course, her misery is extreme. Now, if she were poor, what a hideous fate hers would be!"

I made some remark about his saying that she went on as regards time, and asked him what he meant:—

"Merely that she recognises time passes, and knows that people alter with time. I have had cases," he replied, "where the mind works backwards in the most curious manner. I had an artist here who, when he came in, painted beautifully; at the end of five years I saw he had lost his sense of colour, and then the sense of form went, and he began to draw as some child does on a slate; finally he merely scrabbled on paper with pencil; a two-year-old infant would have done better; then he died. Yet, when he came here first, a magnificent genius was lost to the world, and to this day I cannot quite make out why his mind should have worked in the manner it did. He could see no difference between the scrawl on the paper and

his splendid last picture; the one thing made him as happy as the other. I wish one could see into the brain and know just how it does its duty or doesn't do it. Some day, perhaps, we shall. Insanity is not understood really at all. People are terrified of lunatics, and until their dread ceases, not much will be done, though when I recollect what my father told me of the chains and whips they used to apply to lunatics, perhaps I am wrong in saying that."

Dr. Ebers, I think, found me a most absorbed listener, for before we went into Frau von Mácoczy's rooms he told me a most interesting thing that had happened to his father, who was head of a large pauper asylum somewhere near the docks. He had been waiting at a railway station for a friend who did not come, and he was turning away after seeing the train emptied of its passengers, when an old Scotswoman rushed up to him: "Oh, sir!" she cried, "thank God you've come. Now take me to him." The doctor could not, naturally, imagine what she meant, and she explained that she had lost sight of her sailor son for some months, and that she had been warned in a dream to go to London and wait at the station, where an old gentleman would meet her and take her to where he was. "And you are the old gentleman," she said. The poor old creature had come all the way from Scotland with very little money. She was almost at her last penny when Dr. Ebers came into the station, and her relief was extreme. Dr. Ebers did not know what to do; it was late; but finally he took her to his house and told the story to his wife. Suddenly he recollected that some months before, a sailor was sent to the asylum; he had fallen from the mast, cracked

his skull, and was only now slowly recovering after an operation. Could this by any curious chance be the son? Next day he managed a meeting; the mother and son were reunited, and in a very short time went back to Scotland, both firmly persuaded that a special leading of Providence had managed the meeting. For though the sailor had recovered his senses, his memory was dormant, to be awakened the moment he saw his old mother, and from that day on he rapidly became himself. There was no doubt about the truth of the story, and I to this day cannot account for the coincidence at all, neither could Dr. Ebers or his son. It was one of those events that have happened, and when that is said, all has been said that can be on the matter.

I could have listened to Dr. Ebers for hours, but naturally he was soon called away, and I went in with one of the pretty smart pink nurses to see Frau von Máoczy. But I think my visit was a mistake. She began by merely looking at me and talking of general subjects: such as the garden, the weather, or even about the books she had been attempting to read. Then I saw her furtively examining me carefully, and finally the memory of where we had last met returned to her. She started from her seat, and demanded her husband, and, rising feverishly, dashed away into the next room, where I could see her dressing herself hastily, ready to go off in search of the man she loved. She was not hindered at all, and she rushed off rapidly into the garden, not even followed or hampered in any way. The nurse told me there were plenty of people to watch; she could not harm herself; she would return tired out, and in the morning would

forget that I had been. The nurse could not say they were fond of Frau von Mácczy, and thought she could have been either in her own house or in her own land, for where the necessary money could be spent, their own homes were the best places for insane folk. All the same, the nurse agreed with me that the girls should not see their mother as she was at present, and, moreover, that their father's life was to be considered as well as their mother's. "English women do not understand Hungarian," she said, "and we should do better if we had someone of her own nationality about her. She does funny things, wants queer things to eat and drink, and really knows nothing of the ordinary self-restraint of an English woman. All the same, I can't help thinking she is much better, though she does not want at present to see anyone who reminds her of home. Oh, her health is splendid," she added; and then smiling, said, "In fact, if she had been brought up in an English nursery and schoolroom she would never have come here. I should gather she has never been checked in any way. Temper, morals, all alike are unrestrained, undisciplined, but let us hope it is not too late, and that the very mild discipline she has here will restore her to her home."

I said good-bye to Little Heather with relief, for the time at any rate, and found my way back to Berkeley Square, and at breakfast next day Sir Lucius was in a perfectly saint-like mood for once. We talked about Marta all the morning, and I really hoped that once she came back he would behave decently. All the same, I noticed that his real anxiety was centred on the coming child, and we had a long and really amusing

talk on the subject of the education of the poor little creature who, after all, might not even be born. Sir Lucius had been brought up himself in the good old style, school, public school, college, then the grand tour, afterwards coming home to his inheritance without one soul to love or welcome him. His had been an arid childhood, a loveless and self-indulgent and foolish boyhood and manhood. His parents—lovers to the last—had been drowned together on board their great yacht, which was anchored off some place in Scotland; it had been run down and cut completely in half in the night by an enormous German steamer. No one would have known its fate had not the look-out man jumped on board the steamer as it cut through the yacht, “as,” he said in describing it, “a knife cuts through cheese.” The yacht sank in deep water; nothing was ever recovered, and Sir Lucius saw about the accident in a paper he took up at a railway bookstall on his way, at the age of ten, to join his people on the yacht.

Henceforward tutors and guardians took the place of mother and father; he meant his children to have a real home, one very different from his old one, and one they should always recollect all their lives long with joy and gratitude.

Here was my opportunity to say something about Marta, and to assure Sir Lucius if he did not give way to his wife somewhat, nothing could make his home happy. I had known her from her cradle almost; she was never in her element unless she could wait on or care for someone besides herself. She never had a present but she shared it; an apple must be cut into sufficient pieces to go round, or else it would not be sweet; a shilling was spent over and over again

mentally before it passed out of her hands, and surely a shilling never went farther than did Marta's scarce coins. Her parents first, and then the little ones, had been her care; she must be allowed to do things for people, or she could never be happy or healthy, of that I was convinced.

Sir Lucius had the most contemptuous recollection of the home he took Marta from, and even the old Grannie did not escape his censure. Old fool! she sat at home and shivered to help keep those brats—she looked as a pauper looks; there wasn't a decent meal in the house, even a decent chair; she was seventy, but looked ninety at least, and Marta's mother at forty had seemed sixty; no wonder she died and left the family to starve. He did not intend Marta to lose her looks or turn into a head nurse; he wanted a beautiful woman to go about with and do him credit. He did not mean to live at Branscombe; three months in the autumn and a houseful of guests was all he could endure.

Once the child was born, Marta must take her place in society, of that there was no doubt at all. Good nurses could be had. Yes, I knew those good nurses, the nurses one finds in fashionable houses where the mother never enters the nursery and the fathers do not know their children by sight. Even in my mother's time we had once had one of these beauties for our last unexpected little sister; I fortunately found her out in time, smacking the infant, and then dosing her with something to keep her quiet; and her shrift was short. All the same, when my mother spoke about her experience to some younger, smarter woman than herself, she was told of the receipt of an

anonymous letter, warning her that the moment her back was turned at night these women went out to dances, theatres, or parties, and that if she wanted to find out the truth she was to return home suddenly. If she did not find the nurse, she was to go at once to a certain address. She carried out the plan; she found neither nurses nor baby, and off the distracted parents rushed. A dance was in progress at some public hall, the nurses and servants were enjoying themselves madly, while all the babies too small to be left at home for more than an hour were fast asleep in clothes-baskets in the "cloak-room." My mother's friend sought hers; there was a terrible to-do; the children had all been drugged, poor little things, and some very smart servants were to be hired very cheaply for the next few months! I told Sir Lucius this story and many another; he smiled at me compassionately; of course, I did not understand how matters were managed in his rank of life. He was very much obliged to me for having come to see Marta, and we would say no more. But I got in the last word. "If I see Marta is not happy, I shall remind you of the promises, the written promises you have given her," I said.

"Promises made under duress," he replied, "are not promises."

"Well, we'll see about that," I remarked airily. "At any rate, Marta can rely on me, and on Dr. Ebers too, and she knows it," and I turned away. I caught sight of Sir Lucius' face in the mirror by the fireplace. I am thankful to say I never saw him again, for he came to a sudden and tragic end, and after long years my poor little friend became a happy and delightful woman and mother!

CHAPTER VIII

ALL FOR LOVE

It was a relief to turn my back on London—which I dearly love, and where in those days I always spent far more money than I could afford in the gay and brilliant shops—and find myself on our queer little station, where the ponies were waiting to take me the mile that lay between it and home. It was a much greater one to hear all was well, and that nothing had to be “broken” to me, no one had smashed a leg or a collar-bone, or even a pane of glass, and all were comfortable and well.

Phoebe always used to say things invariably happened where I was, and I think they did. In my early youth I was always pining for something to happen. I never went out for a walk from the age of ten upwards without expecting to find a suitor for my fair hand waiting my return; an unexpected visitor to the schoolroom meant for me great possibilities, and the postman’s knock was rapture. I have sat on the red velvet sofa in the window at our old home literally pining for something to happen. Now I say, keep all happenings out of my sight, out of my way; but still they come, and, at any rate, I cannot complain that lack of variety has been wanting in my journey through

life. Fortunately, these happenings have very often been to others, so, in consequence, I, a looker-on and helper at an emergency, have seen most of the game. Indeed, at one time of my career I bid fair to turn into a prop, and nothing else. Just as Marta sent for me, so others sent, and I had very sternly to put down my foot and decline to shoulder every burden that came my way, or I should really have had no time to attend to my own concerns. Indeed, these often suffered very badly in consequence of the way I was invariably called upon to take in a sick relative who required a change of air, or else to go and advise during some of the many crises that occurred in the family on both sides of the house. Shall I ever forget a long drive over stony roads in a December storm to see after a sister-in-law who had suddenly developed bronchitis? What a curious study she was! Beginning life as a Dissenter, she passed through a phase of spiritualism, and another of unbelief; then she became an ardent member of the Church of England, finally ending in Rome, where she died, and was buried by that grasping Church, which at the same time grabbed the money she left behind, and which should have come to her own relations. When I arrived at my journey's end, I found she had persisted in going to early service on a pouring wet day, and had sat in her wet clothes, despite the fact that the doctors had warned her that she was crazed to do this. She was seated in a strong draught, while the aunt with whom she lived was roaming about in a distracted manner. She had been sent for to a sick daughter, the servants had left in a huff, and I had to arrange to bundle that woman, as old as

I was, into a hired carriage and get her to Hamworth to her sister, who did not in the least want to take her in. That I would not put her up myself was a family affront for years, but it was impossible at the moment, a fact for which I, at any rate, was most profoundly thankful.

I am forced almost to recollect all this, because at the moment of my return from seeing Marta I discovered that Phœbe likewise was in the wars, and wanted to see me as soon as she possibly could. Not only had Mari and Roszi obliged with measles, but Herr von Mácozy had fallen and injured himself in some way that required an operation and the attendance of a hospital nurse. What between the measles and the nurse, Winterslowe was in a state of worry that I have seldom seen equalled. The girls were nearly all right, and had ceased to be infectious, but were in such a state of riotous boisterousness that it was almost impossible to keep them in their beds first, and afterwards in their room. Phœbe had turned the Hungarian nurse and maid on to them, and, despite the hospital nurse, had insisted on taking her share of nursing Herr von Mácozy, albeit the nurse had complained mightily to the doctor, and had insinuated that if she were interfered with she would throw up the case. When I saw the dark-browed, tall woman who was in charge, I pitied Phœbe more than I can say. A trained nurse is always far and away nicer to a man than she is to a woman; all the same, I would not have left a dog I cared for in her hands. The Gamp system was bad, horrible, I know; but there is an enormous amount to be done in the present day to

remove patients from the tyranny, first of the surgeon, then of the nursing home, and finally of that most spoiled, pampered, and odious person the regulation trained nurse. Thirty-five or more years ago the first thought of one's relations was not that a sick member of the family was to be carted away from their own houses to a nursing home. Personally, I would rather die in my own bed than recover in one of those horrible places!

Oh, of course I know that they are beautifully managed, that the doctors are excellent, and the nurses superfine; all the same, they are dreadful. They must be run on certain lines: whether one wants to wake or not, one has to be roused and washed and fed at a certain hour to be ready for the doctors; one may sleep better after six than before, and in one's own home the house would be hushed for one. But in the palaces where one pays £8 8s. or £10 10s. a week one has to conform to rules, and, while paying "like princes," is treated more as a pauper than anything else. I hate the whole system, home, trained nurse, and all.

I have actually known a trained nurse sent for for ordinary measles. Any woman can nurse measles if she uses common sense and obeys the doctor. I think in our rage for hygienic conditions nowadays we treat all invalids as public dangers and nuisances; we send them away just when they want us most, and turn on an unfeeling, callous woman to nurse them, when, unless it is a case which requires surgical dressings, anyone can nurse if she has a heart and the usual amount of common sense. If she has neither she is best sent out

of the way while relatives are installed in her place who possess both, and can see that the sick creature is not made wretched by trained nurses and a nursing home, and an *entourage* that is strange, and managed under conditions that are fitter for a criminal than for an ordinary ill and wretched individual. In 1872 or 1873 the nurse craze had not reached the height it has at the present day, but it was bad enough. Now one almost dreads a headache or a cut finger lest a nurse should be sent to see the hygienic conditions are all they should be; of course, a cold may be pneumonia, and blood poisoning may ensue from a cut finger, but I would rather run the risk than have one of those starched creatures about me. They set the day and night by the clock; one may not want to be left from three to five, but nurse must go out; one may not want breakfast at 8.30 every morning of the week, but nurse wants to get your own and then have hers. How can anyone convalesce under such conditions? I know I never recovered from my long illness until I sent the nurses flying. When they were good nurses, they were gloomy tyrants; when they were pleasant, they forgot all the doctors told them; and so I, the patient, had to see that his orders were carried out.

Phoebe had never had any experience of what was then "the new nurse," and she was more astonished than she could say when she discovered that everything was taken out of her hands, and a second nurse installed for night work as long as the measles prevailed in the schoolroom, and she had to keep an eye on the girls. At the same time, she had made use of the "observation chambers" prepared for watching over Frau

von Máoczy, to see exactly how this same nursing was done.

Somehow Herr von Máoczy did not appeal to his dragons in the way a man usually does to the ordinary nurse, and Phœbe very soon found out how he detested his "guardian angels" cordially. The night nurse entered his room at 9.30, carefully turned out the lamp, which promptly smelt horribly, after making him "comfortable for the night." Then she proceeded to see to her own comfort, and was soon sleeping peacefully, while Herr von Máoczy twisted and turned on his hot pillows, and vainly tried to attract her attention should he desire drink, a cool side to the pillow, or one of the many small wants an invalid requires, or even only fancies that he does.

Very soon, Phœbe, in list slippers, used to creep into the room, and do all that was necessary. The nurse, sunk in a vast grandfather chair, her print skirt above her knees, was close to the fire, a heap of pious little books lay by the night lamp, where also stood the medicine and an apparatus for making tea or heating food. Soon Phœbe had her own bottle of medicine, and the tea or food required, and brought all in noiselessly, but nothing roused the nurse. She had slept the clock round during the day; I wonder how long she would sleep had she had nothing to do. Herr von Máoczy had excellent nights, so the doctors were told! Only he and Phœbe knew what they really had been, and how terrible they might have been had Phœbe not been for ever on the watch. One night, indeed, Herr von Máoczy did suffer. Phœbe had almost broken down, and had to go to bed, and she had left a

small silver bell by the bedside before the night nurse came on duty. The moment she saw it, she asked what it was for. When told it was to rouse her in the night, she treated her patient to a scene: she never slept, never; the doctor could tell him that. Of course, Herr von Mácczy always did sleep, and to end the argument she took the bell away, and all the long night Herr von Mácczy lay awake and suffering, for wake the nurse he could not.

Finally, he threw some books on the floor with a loud bang. That did wake her. She was furious, did what he required, and next day handed the doctor her resignation of the case: Herr von Mácczy had been violent, and really she did not feel up to continuing the case. "One of my best nurses, too," said the doctor to Phœbe, who then and there undertook the work, and when the nurse had gone, her horrid blue uniform and veil disappearing in a cloud of dust, Phœbe told the doctor all she had seen. He smiled in a superior manner. He had known Nurse Mildred for years; this was the only time the smallest complaint had been made against her. Was Phœbe quite, quite sure she had not dreamed? At any rate, Herr von Mácczy was almost well now, two nurses were not needed; he would leave the grenadier (known to him as Nurse Broom), and, no doubt, she might do the dressings, and a little nursing if Phœbe would see to the meals and the finer parts of the work.

Phœbe was one of those women who are literally born nurses, and I venture to state that no woman who is not so born, and has not a vast store of imagination, should ever undertake the work, for

what I and my friends have suffered at "trained nurses'" hands would most certainly fill a book. I suppose a certain amount of callousness is necessary. All the same, while there is no need to weep over a sick bed, surely tenderness is not out of place in such a situation? The best of my nurses, used to entertain me with chapters of the horrors she had seen in hospitals, and how she had managed dipsomaniacs—generally by throwing them on their backs on the bed and reducing them to quietude with drugs first, and afterwards keeping them quiet with cords, by which she tied them down. The worst used to put her head into my room, ask me if I wanted anything, and then rush off on some jaunt, for which I paid, all too glad as I was to see her clear out, and be my own mistress for some hours of the day at least.

A doctor is born; he cannot be made any more than a poet can; and, in the same way, a trained nurse should be born. She is invaluable in hospitals for the poor, for surgical work, or to help in a family. She should never—unless that family consists of feeble folks—be given a free hand about a patient whose nearest and dearest are often enough banished when he requires them most, and both he and they are treated more as criminals than the sufferers they most undoubtedly are. I had not had the experience then that I have now. All the same, though I could not think Phœbe should be as much in the room with Herr von Mácozy as she was, and believed that his valet could have helped more than he did, yet I could see that the less nurse Herr von Mácozy had, the quicker he improved. The grenadier took it out of the household; her meals were

numerous and large, her hours ruled the routine, her health was her capital, she said. So it was; all the same, she might have made herself pleasant, and made allowances, too, for the foreign establishment and the distance they were from any decent shops.

The isolation of Winterslowe was another great grievance. She had never been so far from a town in her life, and she never would be again, and I was not surprised to meet her in Hamworth surveying the shops there with her nose in the air, and declaring she could never have believed such a benighted spot existed in England, had she not seen it for herself. To placate her, I asked her in to tea, and gave her some of the excellent local cake; but even that did not please her. But she unbent over the tea, told me her parentage, which, of course, was something extra fine—a nurse's pedigree is always longer than anyone else's—and finally warned me most solemnly about the way in which that Miss Summers managed Winterslowe and was carrying on with the man she was pleased to call Phoebe's master. Naturally, I stopped her at once, took her round the upper walled garden, and showed her where the old castle once stood. I pointed out the old moat, now occupied by cow-sheds and poultry-houses, and the garden of the castle, still garden to this day. Then I found she cared about flowers and books, and once on these subjects she left Phoebe alone; albeit I made up my mind to speak to my old friend, and ask her if she were not playing with fire in the most dangerous way.

I have always wished I could really understand the curious state of mind that gives "all for love," and

counts the world well lost, but I never could, and now I never, never can. How often have I seen splendid careers checked and happy homes spoiled from this cause, and I have never once known the passion last, or result in anything save disaster for the man and cruel suffering for the woman who caused the downfall. How well I recollect that patriot and statesman at whose trial I sat day by day, and watched him at every point of the long and terrible case. He gained that action ostensibly. Then in stepped the woman. All went down before him, country, home, friends, career, and he died broken-hearted : died say some, killed himself say others, because his work was spoiled and all was ruined by the hand of her who should have died to save him from himself and from her.

Then, again, I recollect another man, the world all before him, a sweet wife, pretty children, honours his for the asking. Then the temptress arrived—he fell; it took years and years for him to creep back into his place; but he suffered until the end : all suffered, even his children never took the standing they ought to have in the world, for he had no real friends to help or advise them. What madness is this so-called love, I ask once more, that makes sane creatures irresponsible in a moment? Is it the jealousy of the gods, I wonder, that scatters the seed? The mortal is advancing too quickly, knows too much, climbs too far! Something happens. It must be the gods! Otherwise, surely no one would cast themselves to the swine as, not one, but so many men and women too do nowadays! I look back over long, long years, and I have never seen a case which did not end in mist and

tears. I recollect one who fled at night from her husband, her children, and her splendid home, with an actor. How tired they got of each other before the end! They separated, he died, and she lived out the rags of her days as a lay-sister in some Roman Catholic convent abroad.

If the man who has only just died had lived a decent life, where might not England be now, I wonder? People say he suffered more than he deserved. I who knew him, and recollect the whole case, know he only received his deserts. Indeed, he ought never to have sat in the Commons again, but should have gone out into the silence of another country. He did not. I do not know his real inner life of later years; I do not want to, but the bitterness of death was his years and years before he really died, and no rapturous experience that he may have had can ever have paid him for all he went through in 1885-1886!

As for the women, who in the ordinary sense of the word go wrong, they always pay far more heavily than does the ordinary man. The tie that binds man and woman closely and for ever is the tie of years. It seems to me that those frantic passionate souls resemble the butterfly. They never know they must grow old. How can they grow old comfortably without happy memories of long silent years spent together, of things shared in common, or pictures, or books, or music, or beautiful journeys to lovely places? I wonder, I wonder at life and the God who shaped it when I watch the stupidity of human folk!

How idiotic are their amusements, their ways, their clothes! They might all be so happy, so good

if they would only see life sanely, and see it "whole." What does the bewigged, rouged, and plastered, tight-laced woman of fashion think of when she is taken to pieces carefully and put to bed by her censorious maid? I wonder! She must know that once past sixty she can only please if she is amusing, witty, and suitably dressed. Does she recollect she must die? That what is real of her gets less and less daily? Or does she drug her mind to sleep and think she is as she hopes she looks? I cannot tell. I am forced to think all this when I recollect Phœbe, and how she was caught in the net, and know that even at the end, she paid all too dearly for falling away from the ordinary woman's path!

It was with a heavy heart I saw her come to me alone one day soon after the grenadier had gone, and the household at Winterslowe was on the point of being moved to some warmer place, while the house was disinfected, and every horrid trace of illness removed. The girls generally came when Phœbe did, but that day they were absent, and as she sat down by me, she fidgeted with some tassels which hung about my dress, and I saw at once she had something more than usual to talk over with me.

At first we spoke only of the von Máccozys; how unlucky they had been since they came to England, how Dr. Ebers still thought a few years would see Frau von Máccozy all right again, and how hard, how terribly hard it was that Franz was tied for his life to that woman, and could not free himself in order to marry again. A divorce case, on the same lines almost, was making England ring at the moment, and

people were hotly divided on the subject. For once I owned myself on the side of divorce. An unbalanced woman is not fit to be the mother of children, and it is a premium on vice to leave a young man tied for life to someone who, even if she may recover, is not fit to give him an heir. But I maintained that the law should be made more elastic, and to suit each individual case, and not be inflexibly applied to all alike. Herr and Frau von Mácozy had been married sixteen or seventeen years, they had daughters; undoubtedly if Frau von Mácozy recovered she would relapse at once if she found her children mothered by another woman and other children, maybe, replacing them, even in their father's heart! Phœbe told me that Franz, as she now always called him to me, had never loved his wife; he had married dutifully; but he had never known real love until he knew Phœbe. It was an old, old tale, and I told her as much. It was her place to protect her lover against himself, and to leave him alone with the girls to work out his own salvation in the best way that he could. She had no right to put herself in another woman's place, even if she could only do so illegally, and in such a way that the world would turn its back on her as it always does on any sinner that is found out or lives in open sin.

Of course, Phœbe had cases at her fingers' ends to quote to me of other women who were smiled on by Society, asked here, there, and everywhere, albeit Society knew quite well who paid for the jewels and dresses that the husbands certainly could not afford to give them. She mentioned bitterly the husband who had said, "My wife is a genius. She's so clever; she

makes £1,000 a year go as far as ten," and really meant it. She spoke of Lady This and Mrs. That, all well known to live lives that she would not even think of; yet they went to church and were received at Court. Their husbands were either complaisant or fools, for if divorce were resorted to in those days, the Court was closed to them, and that meant social suicide simply. Still, I have heard of women being received, even by the old Queen, to whom I would never have spoken, though, as a rule, in her best days, she took care to discover that this could not occur, and a woman found out paid heavily for straying from the straightest of straight paths.

Phoebe was almost transfigured as she spoke of her wild affection, her passionate love, for Herr von Mácozy. She was then over thirty: in all her life she had never known love. She had no name to keep stainless, no friend who cared for her: May was absorbed in her house and husband; her brothers never wrote nor saw her; her father and mother were quite indifferent to her welfare. Oh! of course, she knew her mother had come to see her; but she could not live on money that was owing to her father's creditors, neither could she breathe in the false, stuffy atmosphere by which Madame de Fortuna was surrounded at Dringhouses.

To whom did she do harm by loving Franz, by giving herself to him, by mothering his children, and taking tender care of the whole household? Of course, they would leave Winterslowe and send the Hungarian servants home; the girls were not likely to question the position, they would take it for granted that all was *en règle*. Mari and Roszi had never cared for their mother

and had adored Phœbe; to them she was all-in-all. I said a few words about Phœbe's own self: would she not feel degraded by such lawless passion: suppose there were children, what then? Phœbe laughed. She could not see that a few idiotic words spoken by a parson made any difference to an alliance, that love was the real marriage altar, and that even if she had children, she should teach them that they were born of love, and not of expediency, and that, therefore, they had a right to be in the world. As to feeling degraded, what nonsense, what utter, utter nonsense! Did Esther Soames feel degraded when she broke faith with her lover, the curate, and married eagerly the rich marquis who turned up almost at the last hour, and bore her away amid a crash of wedding bells and showers of roses and old shoes? The curate broke his heart, and died in his poor lodging of most convenient consumption, but Esther is a splendid figure at all the great functions of the year, while her children are puny and neglected, and the poor little Marquis trots at her heels adoringly, and does not receive the attention, certainly not the love and petting, the Marchioness gives to her great dog. Whatever happened, Phœbe meant to be true: she had been true to her father, and had done all she could for him, now she meant to be true to herself. She might have five years of pure happiness with Franz. Even if his wife returned, she would have had those years, and if she had a child, she would have something of his, something to remind her that she had been happy, at any rate, for one portion of her life.

All sounded very plausible, but I knew it meant I should lose my dear old friend; she was older than I

was, surely she must know better? She had lived abroad, she had seen more of the world; could she by any chance be right? I had naturally been brought up to think the smallest deviation from the path of virtue something too dreadful to think of; indeed, we knew so little what it meant that we never did think of it. Later on we did catch hints of unspeakable creatures who left their homes and husbands, and were once and for all consigned to outer darkness because of this. Yet I had heard a duke's daughter rejoice at her likeness to the forbear of her line, who had not only been a king's mistress, but an ordinary orange-girl in the theatre of long ago! It was difficult to know where virtue began and where it ended; if kings were allowed such latitude, and if their descendants boasted of such things, why blame Phœbe? I had her dear long-fingered hand in mine, and twisted the rings round her fingers as I thought. Such pretty rings! Here was one her father gave her when she was eighteen: blue turquoises, slightly discoloured with wear and tear, and minute pearls, which meant tears; then there was the diamond and sapphire ring Lord Winterslowe had begged her to keep as a souvenir of what might have been; and there, too, was her father's seal-ring, with its crest and motto, a closed hand and *tiens ferme*, from which she would never part. What had the future to give Phœbe if she left the von Máccozys and started off into the world with a broken heart and a more tarnished name than she had when her father disappeared into space?

Of course, the grenadier and Nurse Mildred had both talked to Dr. Dewdney Paul, and Mrs. Paul

had considered it her duty to speak to me. Mr. Julius Beever, too, had told all the gossips in Hamworth about Madame de Fortuna's visit, and "The Peal of Bells" landlady had in her turn given her version to her many cronies in the bar-parlour. Already the good folk of Hamworth either did not see the von Mácozy carriage in the streets, or else passed it with their noses high in the air, while the baser members of the town giggled openly and nudged each other if they saw Phœbe; and, of course, I had been persecuted with good advice, and had been solemnly warned of what would be my fate by the head of our little society, who, having migrated from Birmingham, where her father had made a fortune in hardware, had settled down with him and his spouse as County, and therefore might be supposed to know what is what.

Moreover, our dear old rector had trotted in to see me, and had tried to get out all sorts and kinds of warnings, of what occurred to those who touched pitch and walked with wickedness. But I assured him I was in no danger, and he went away comforted to think he had spoken, albeit I am quite sure he had not the least idea what his discourse had been about. Poor dear old man! he knew far too well that the glasshouse in which his family then lived did not allow him to cast stones! I had had to ask him to forbid our back-door to one of his sons, who would snatch a kiss from a pretty housemaid whenever he could, though she boxed his ears soundly, and spoke to me on the subject more than once. Besides, was there not the splendid son who

suddenly appeared and disappeared like a meteor across the sky? Ah! poor dear old man—he, at any rate, was not on a sufficiently firm pedestal to allow of his holding out a lamp to guide the steps, faltering or otherwise, of his starched and solemn flock!

But, anyhow, he could say he had spoken to me as urged by Mrs. Flowerdew, the most upright and disagreeable of our set, whose steps never faltered, who walked with her eyes fixed on the heavens above, and, having never been tempted, and, moreover, having lived a narrow, comfortable life all her days, could see nothing but horror and shame for anyone who walked aside from the narrow path among the lush verdure, and even picked flowers as she passed along the way! Alack! in all I write I feel I am condoning vice and taking Phœbe's part in the story more than I ought, a great deal more, most certainly, than I did at the time! Dear me! how virtuous one is at twenty-five; how certain that everyone else is wrong, and that nothing can excuse the least divergence from the right walk in life. Even now I doubt if Phœbe would have been either happier and better had she left Winterslowe and trusted to that something folk call Providence to find her another occupation or start in life. For in those days the openings for women were few and far between, and one must be a governess, or nothing.

Even the two old Miss Blacks thought they were lost socially for ever when their father died penniless and their acquaintances started them in one of those meagre, pathetic shops one used to find in small country towns. I think old Black had been a small auctioneer; it was before my time, and I do not quite recollect his calling,

but it was not one that enabled the Miss Blacks to dine out or entertain, but that did allow them to share the horrid "Jews' basket" and attend all charity meetings at the Rectory, and even to help now and then at bazaars and at the clothing and boot clubs. Anyhow, once the shop was opened even the "Jews' basket" never came their way, though they got on in the shop, and lived more comfortably as regards food and raiment than they had ever done in the father's best days.

There could be no shop for Phœbe; she could not even take a "place" in one of the London establishments where the "young persons" swept about in long overpoweringly brocaded black silk dresses; she must teach or starve, or go her own way, as she evidently most fully intended to. The question was: what was to be my attitude in the matter? After all, Phœbe was her own property; if she chose to smirch her reputation, that was her business. I could warn, I could preach, but I could not lose my friend. No one would meet her, then no one should be asked to meet her; she could come when I was alone; but what about Winterslowe? Then it came out that an unexpected legacy had allowed Lord Winterslowe to contemplate coming home if Herr von Mácozy would release the place and cancel the lease.

Naturally, this he was only too glad to do. He had been miserable there; there Michael had died; there the last straw had been laid on him by the attitude of the people towards Phœbe; for while he and the girls were occasionally asked out, Phœbe was utterly cut and ignored. He was a kind man, very,

very kind; he had done his best for his wife, and really wished her well; but he naturally loved Phœbe, and longed to make her his own. If she could have been his wife and the mother of his heir, nothing would have been wanting, but that being impossible, he must snatch the next best he could out of life. Frankly he believed in taking all he could get. He meant that, whatever happened, Phœbe should not starve. True to her principles, she would never wear fine clothes or spend money. She should be merely secured from starvation, and not that if she could work for herself, and she knew she held her treasure very, very lightly, for at any minute Frau von Mácozy might return. Oh! it was a cruel fate for both—for her, because she and Franz were really lovers; for the poor mad wife, who must never know if she recovered what that recovery would mean to her husband.

The girls would see no difference; at least, Phœbe and their father thought they would not. Phœbe was to be housekeeper and manage the household; the girls were to go to school in England; and Herr von Mácozy meant to go to some foreign watering-place for the baths and take a villa there. The girls could spend their holidays with them, no one knew what might happen once the old Hungarian household was broken up and dispersed. It was not to be a case of "guilty splendour" with Phœbe, and neither did she intend to pose for one instant as Herr von Mácozy's wife. She was his housekeeper, and his nurse if necessary; what their real relations were was their business, and that of no one else in all the world.

Naturally, I was not sorry, much as I loved

Phœbe, to know she was leaving Winterslowe, otherwise my position would have been almost impossible. I should not have cared if all Hamworth in a body turned up its nose at me and left me alone; it was always my secret hope that some day I should cease to interest them at all; still, that never happened. But relations are a different matter altogether, relations on both sides were fluttered about the Winterslowe establishment. One aunt had written to another, letters from all parts fell about me freely. I took no notice, naturally. But, of course, I saw what it would mean if Phœbe stayed at Winterslowe and she and I went on in the ordinary way.

At the same time, except for what she told me, and which I, of course, never mentioned to a soul, Phœbe's life did not alter one whit from what it had always been. She taught and walked with the girls, drove with them and their father, and made excursions on their yacht; only the evenings were theirs, maybe the nights. There were no servants to tell, and I always strenuously derided the idea of anything wrong.

But appearances have to be considered in the country, at any rate, and the country had decided against the von Mácozy household. With the illimitable impertinence of the "County," the Beevors, father and son, had interviewed Herr von Mácozy and told him people were talking; that Phœbe was far too handsome to be in the house without a lady at the head of the establishment, and a good many broad hints were given that Herr von Mácozy did not take, or, indeed, apparently understand.

Of course, the morals of the whole benighted

foreign races were always worse than those of smug John Bull, and in the 'seventies this was an axiom. No one who had the dreadful misfortune to be born outside the United Kingdom ever had any pretence at morals at all, but Phœbe was English, she was a "John Bulless," as dear, delightful Markino nowadays calls Englishwomen, and the Beevors meant to rub this in. If Herr von Mácczy had Hungarian latitudinarian ideas, it was natural, and could be forgiven; but Phœbe had been born a "happy English child," as the dreary old Dr. Watts' hymn says, and, in consequence, different behaviour was expected of her.

Then old Lady Jane Forman drove over to Winterslowe in her tremendous chariot, laden with tracts and all the authority her position as an earl's daughter gave her, and—greatly daring—she interviewed Phœbe, much as I should in those days have interviewed an erring kitchen-maid, and gave her to understand how far her feet were on the path that led to perdition (only she called it hell straight out), and what she might expect in this world and the next if she did not at once leave Winterslowe and avail herself of a very nice situation Lady Jane knew of at the moment. "In a Christian household, too."

Phœbe listened quite quietly to all the good dreary old woman had to say, and then she turned on her. She knew rather more about the Forman household than even Lady Jane did, and the poor creature knew quite enough. It does not do to look too closely into these matters. Anyhow, Phœbe put Lady Jane to flight. The great chariot drove away back through Hamworth, and Lady Jane

told more than one of her friends that she believed Miss Summers was a brave, good girl, and for her part she should speak to her when she happened to meet her in Hamworth. That evening Phoebe very, very nearly broke away, but the moon was high, the garden beautiful, Herr von Mácoczy tender and dear.

How much has the moon to answer for, I wonder? They say that lunacy wanes and waxes with the moon, I am quite sure sentiment does. Given a full moon shining over the hills or the perfect sea, and even I wax sentimental; as a girl, I could have wept for nothing merely because the moon was bright and the whole earth was exquisite. I expect if anyone had made love to me under such circumstances in the passionate way Franz von Mácoczy did, I should have responded. I should have been disgusted afterwards, but at the moment—well, I never was tempted, and so I cannot say in the least what might have occurred. Whatever were Phoebe's faults, she was never double-faced. Of course, she had every right to keep her own secrets and refuse to confide in anyone, but to me she never pretended to be what she was not.

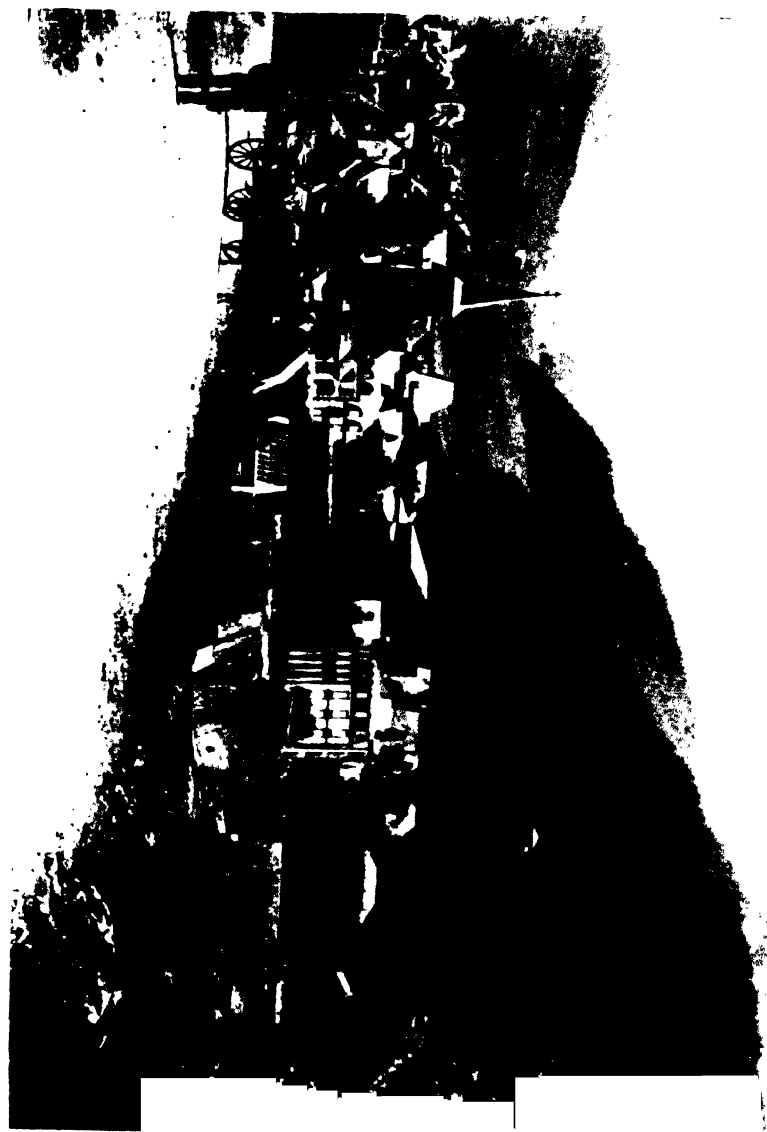
Now the time began to race on; packings up had to be done; a school had to be found for Mari and Roszi, who flatly refused to leave Phoebe, and declared they would make any school too hot to hold them if they were placed there; but, anyhow, the school was found and the schoolmistress warned. I fancy she earned her tremendous fees; at any rate, Mari and Roszi, after one mad rush for freedom, never tried it on again. I went to see them more than once to report about them to Phoebe. They resembled newly-caged larks; nay,

were more as young lions would be shut in a close cage, and I told the headmistress what her sternness and confinement would mean to such natures. She smiled; if I could get them to promise not to run off they should be free, but there was a limit. Already her school had suffered in reputation from their wildness; more than she had done she could not do unless she had their word. They did keep their promises, and she had no fault to find with them on the whole. At last, by representing that the holidays would be spent in durance vile away from Phœbe, I obtained their promise, and I could write to their father with a clear conscience. All this time I had heard little from Phœbe herself. Lord Winterslowe was back at Winterslowe, very anxious for news of her, and her address if I had it, but I would give him neither one nor the other. Whatever Phœbe did, she would never marry; that was out of the question; she had the most faithful heart. I never thought Herr von Mácczy had; he was selfish, loved comfort, and in a way he loved Phœbe also, but I felt certain he would some day want to return to Hungary, and would tire of anyone so unlike his compatriots as was Phœbe herself. But that was for the future to decide. In the meantime, I had plenty to look after at Hamworth, where fate began to find us out and point towards the severance of our ties there, and to a new home in some more civilised portion of the globe.

CHAPTER IX

"THE WORLD WELL LOST?"

I DID not see Phoebe again until we met quite accidentally at that most melancholy of all health resorts, Roncevalles-les-Bains. It is thirty years since I was at that desperate place, and I can only hope, for the sake of all who may be sent there, as I was, to get well, that the conditions then existing there have considerably altered for the better. Worse they could not be, of that I am confident. It was then twelve miles from a small station, and when we arrived there, shattered and shaken from the long and tedious journey, it was almost dark. A dreadful diligence was waiting for passengers, but, after making a tremendous fuss, we were able to raise a carriage and pair, which loomed out of the night and had been ordered for us, and the driver of which had quite forgotten what had brought him to the place. It was the heaviest, most ramshackle vehicle which I had ever seen, and looked as if it had been built at the same time as the Ark was. The driver appeared to be a bloodthirsty bandit as he sat on his sheepskin-covered seat, himself in a sheepskin coat, while yet more sheepskin decorated the collars of the poor thin horses, which were, moreover, embellished by a couple of fox-brushes each; indeed, I think they had



THE WORLD WELL LOST! 11

three, one hung down in front and one each side of their collars. The harness was tremendous, and appeared to be as old as the carriage, but once under weigh we rattled and bumped along in a manner that reduced me to a state of speechless fright.

The road apparently consisted of a series of "switch-backs"; we rushed down one hill and tore up another; but, the moon having now risen, I could see hideous precipices on the right hand, while rocks and great trees clothed the sides, which terminated in a brawling, dirty, bad-tempered little stream.

I have been in many noisy places in my life, but none I have been in ever came up to Roncevalles-Bains. When one hotel had a meal it rang a bell furiously, then another hotel replied, until the whole place, which then consisted of little else than *pensions* and hotels, was filled with the horrid sounds. When the diligence came in or left, a bell was rung; when the post came in, yet more bells; when it left, the bell was more in request than ever. We rose to a bell, went to rest to several bells, and all through the day and night, when no other bell obliged with its noise, the little church bell had its say. I think there was a monastery attached to that church; if so, the unhappy monks could never have slept two consecutive hours, for at the expiration of every second hour someone or other rang that dreadful little noisy bell. I know I never managed to miss the sound, and by the time our so-called "cure" was over I felt as if the bells were ringing in my head, for upwards of one drove right out into the country one was never out of the sound of the fearsome things.

Driving, too, was anything but a joy. I am never good at negotiating precipices, but in other spots I have been able to believe the horses knew their business and were well looked after, but at Roncevalles-les-Bains they sat down, poor wretches, whenever they could, or else fell forward on their scarred and broken knees, and I very soon discovered the reason of the decorations and heavy harness with which they were burdened. It seemed to me that each ornament hid an open sore, and that the wide bands of the harness were really employed to keep the poor creatures together! Once more I had the experience of drivers who sat sideways on the box, smoking and chatting with us, while the poor beasts clambered up hills and slithered along down hills, till I declared I would never drive again; and at last we only went along the valley towards another "cure," which then consisted of a cluster of hotels and a few shops, all of which we felt convinced were taken to pieces in the winter and stowed away in boxes, to be taken out only when the next season was well in sight.

At Roncevalles-les-Bains a melancholy band played in a yet ~~more~~ melancholy garden, but I soon preferred this to the blood-curdling excursions, from each of which I returned more battered mentally and physically than I had ever been in all my life before.

The "season" was on the wane when we arrived, but we had one evening, at all events, that I shall never forget. Somehow a couple of great singers, whose names we never discovered, were at our hotel; there was also a well-known violinist, and Daudet, the French author. Even now I can see the *salon*, with

these men gathered round the hearth, on which crackled and sparkled the log-fires that were the one bright spot in our sojourn at the place. The polished boards of the *salon* reflected the scene; we had two or three most uncomfortable chairs for our use, and beside that was a sofa, occupied by a bright and charming Frenchwoman, her sister and her lame boy, and a couple of Spaniards lounged against the wall, papered hideously as it was with a blue and green check, with gilt stars thrown in now and again apparently for no earthly reason. We were just on the point of slipping away, when we were asked if we objected to a small entertainment; it was the last night, all the celebrities were leaving next morning, and they would like to take a musical farewell of the place.

I shuddered. I feared the usual ear-splitting yell of the ordinary concert singer, or the plaintive moans of the distinguished amateur; but the door was near, and I could escape if I would. In a moment the piano began to ripple and whisper, and a tender delicate voice repeated the same refrain. I looked up in amazement. A great fat woman was touching the notes as if she loved them, while an even larger fatter man was warbling as a bird does, and playing on our heart strings just as he chose. Then the violinist followed, with the same effect; then we had more songs, and then, finally, M. Daudet rose—I can see him now—put one hand lightly on the piano, and, while the fat lady extemporised, he recited "*Je n'ai jamais vu Carcassonne*," until I felt that unless I did see Carcassonne for myself I, at any rate, should never be happy again.

After that, the delightful entertainers stood in a

row, hand in hand, bowed to us all severally, with great pomp, and backed out of the room. We never saw or heard any of them again, but it was an evening to remember all one's life, and that made me forgive Roncesvalles-les-Bains for much that I endured while I remained in that most insanitary spot. Another good thing, though, was our hotel, for the rooms were spotless and the attendants sweet. The waiter who looked after us sought high and low for things I could eat (and, oh! how few and how bad they were), but even he could not force me to try the "truites," which were the stand-by of the place! They came out of the little river that ran by the hotel and through the town, and, as the river was also the dustbin and, I truly think, the sewer as well, the "truites" went unscathed by me, though François nearly wept on my shoulder while he told me that "Les Français" came season after season from Paris, "vraiment," to eat of the delicate and delicious little things.

We were now reduced to the French group and the Spaniards, and I did not spend much time with them, for although I liked them all fairly well, they could neither speak nor understand one word of English. The French widow and her boy were all right, she very amusing and "fetching," and the boy charming, and, with my usual love of boys, he and I were at once friends. I often wonder if he grew up: he was a delicate lad with bad bone-disease. His mother openly told me Roncesvalles-les-Bains was his last chance, and had not done him any good; all the same she meant to try Lourdes. She had more faith in that than she had

in either the doctors or the very grimy "établissement," where the baths of Roncevalles-les-Bains were then housed. I am thankful to say that I never had to try the terrible things, for it turned out that the consultant in town had sent me to a place that was not in the least suited for me, and that all I could do was to drink the waters and spend three desolate weeks in the hideous spot.

What an extraordinary little man was the local doctor, then the only medical man in the place! Dr. Hubert, as he was called, had been all through the Franco-German war, and had very narrowly escaped being shot, not once, but many times. He had also lived through the siege of Paris, and he was rather too graphic at times, over the things he had to eat, to be quite a comfortable raconteur. He was then burdened with a sick and fanciful wife, who could not live if she did not have what he termed a "shop de mouton" every day, and he was quite overjoyed at being able to see that, somehow or other, her desire was gratified. It was "shop de chien" and "shop de chat" now and again, yet she never knew, all was "mouton shop" to her, and she got better during that awful time than she had been for years before. Dr. Hubert's father-in-law kept two hens in his bedroom, and those admirable ladies laid their eggs regularly day by day. One day Dr. Hubert was given one for his wife, and he was rushing home with it when his services were commandeered by some Communists. He had to bind wounds and amputate legs and arms, and generally superintend the ambulance; and when he reached home, he found he had sat on the precious egg, and had not only destroyed that,

but the inside of his best coat as well. Someone suspected Dr. Hubert—Heaven only knows why—of unfair doings with the enemy, and had he not been warned by his cook, he would have been shot on his own doorstep. But she had received a hint, and he escaped by the back door as the Communists came in at the front, and reached Versailles, where the “government” then was. Every hole and corner of the house was searched; even the mattresses were ripped up in case weapons were concealed in them. Madame Hubert protested in vain. I do not fancy even the “shop de chien” turned up until M. Hubert did, which, however, was not until the Commune was a thing of the past, and Paris began to look round once more and come to her senses. Madame Hubert awaited her spouse, or news, quite placidly; she knew he would turn up, and all she said when he came in was “Ah! C’est toi, mon ami!” “She was a wife in a thousands,” said M. Hubert. “Well, well, she is dead, and I have now anozzer and two babes, and no worry about the shops de mouton. She can see to that, and I can doctor in peace.”

I do not know if he could doctor, but he certainly was a most entertaining creature, and at that moment was looking after the late Lord Salisbury and Mr. W. H. Smith. I used to enjoy seeing the hooded, shrouded chairs, carried by four perspiring men, containing these great statesmen, first trotting down and then toiling up the hills, an important-looking valet carrying towels walking proudly alongside, and I often longed to hear how they and Dr. Hubert got on. But I fancy their London man had given them full directions. Dr. Hubert never spoke of

either, and he was ready enough to tell me about the real and fancied invalids who spent their lives going from spa to spa, and never getting any better or any worse, and who never, in some miraculous manner, appeared to die.

In the winter, or rather early in September, he told me the snow came down, and the roads were impassable for months; sometimes a sledge got through, but not often. He did not stay; no, he went into a town; he left his assistant at Roncevalles; only the monks and a few peasants were left, he should die of *ennui*. Madame and the children often stayed; it was "sheap," his villa was a good one, well warmed, and it was 'ealthy for them, and without a house and children one is less bound—*hein*? I thought otherwise myself, and should like to have heard madame on the subject; all the same, I believe Dr. Hubert was quite right. She had been the daughter of a rich farmer, or what would be a farmer with us; she had always lived in the wilds, and I think she was secretly relieved when her mercurial spouse went off for the six months in the town, and she could see after the *bébés*, without the everlasting cooking that she had to supervise to keep her greedy little spouse in anything like a good-tempered state of mind.

I often wondered what she would do if the children were ill, for the assistant, a Bourdelais, very nearly slew me. I started a sort throat a day or two before we were leaving, and as I dreaded nothing more than a delay in that awful spot, which might be serious indeed if the snow began, I sent for Dr. Hubert, to find he had gone off thirty miles, and that his assistant had come in his

place. I could not understand his French, nor he mine. I got the dictionary and pointed him out the words, but nothing was any use. At first he wished to inject morphia, then he declared chloral was what I wanted. I then gave him up in despair, made him write down his prescription, and in the morning showed it to Dr. Hubert. "If you had taken that you would have died," he said calmly. "And that's the man you leave here in the winter," I replied. "Oh! he understands the peasants, and my wife, she knows more than he does," he answered cheerily. "Well, well, you'll be all right now. Off to-morrow, isn't it? *Bon voyage!*" and off he trotted, having secured the prescription.

I wonder what he said to the Bourdelais. He had suggested a dose of chloral on paper that would most certainly have ended my days at once, and if ever I heard of any other unfortunate being ordered to Roncevalles-les-Bains I have always mentioned the Bourdelais, though I think I should have been wiser to secure the prescription, and so have had documentary evidence of the peculiar way he treated any victim who came his way.

But this, of course, came at the end of our wretched three weeks, and between this and then I had found out that Phœbe was in a villa rather above the town; and I wrote her a line and begged her either to come and see me or let me go and see her. I was hoping for a reply one morning and sitting out in the hideous little garden where the desperate band was playing, when her reply was brought me by one of the handsome Spaniards at our hotel, who was, moreover, the possessor of one of the most charming and delightful poodles I have ever met.

I had often tried to make friends with "Mirelle," but her master had always whistled her away; she could beg, walk on her hind legs for the length of the street, could "speak," could sing, could turn head over heels at the word of command, and, indeed, I do not know what she could not do, from picking anyone's pocket of a handkerchief to standing on her head; but make friends with those her master did not know she either would or could not.

When her master, with his best bow and twirl of his hat, gave me the note, and sat down by me for a few minutes, Mirelle jumped on my lap, and I asked why she had treated me so coolly before. The dog knew she was not to make friends by herself, people over-fed her and took liberties, but once her master knew anyone, Mirelle, as a rule, knew them too. She had wanted to be friends with me; the note gave her master the chance he had not had before; now Mirelle would be at my service, but not to feed, no! No child was ever as carefully dieted as Mirelle, and I wonder what her master did when she went to the Dog Star, for a friendship existed between them that was beautiful to behold. The Spaniard, being a Romanist, went to the early service in the dirty, tawdry little chapel in the valley, and Mirelle went too; indeed, all who had dogs took them, and as the chapel was very dark, those who went there had to look out that they did not sit or step on a dog. The smaller ones sat in the chairs, the bigger ones lay in the aisle and groaned dismally when the monks chanted or the villainous little organ was more than usually out of tune.

Indeed, music was not a feature at Roncevalles-les-

Bains, at least at the end of the season. Every day some instrument was missing from the band; the day we left it was reduced to a drum, a violin, and a cornet, and was more like the wretched thing one hears on a seaside steamer than a band at a fashionable health resort.

I heard a good deal from my Spanish acquaintance, whose surname I never discovered, though he was called Luis by his brother, and I suppose had a surname of sorts. He and Herr von Mácozy had made acquaintance at the baths. They had both sworn equally loudly at the attendants, at the grime of the baths, the slimy floor, and the damp and often filthy towels, and had united in bringing about a few much-needed reforms. They had fraternised over many things, including hunting and shooting, and the Spaniard had even been asked to the villa. I found out that both Mari and Roszi were married—they marry young in Hungary—and the girls were twenty-three and twenty-four years old by now; and that Herr von Mácozy had a beautiful housekeeper and a sweet little boy of about five, who was a great friend of Mirelle's. The boy could not be quite accounted for, as the housekeeper was Miss Summers, and he was called Jock; all the same, she was charming, and so was the *ménage*, so well arranged, so bright and so pretty; but there was an air of sadness about the place, and they all seemed very sorry to think the season was over, and they must move away to a warmer, brighter place.

My Spanish acquaintance did not ask questions; had he been German instead of Spanish, he would have cross-questioned me on the spot, for I told him I had

known Miss Summers when I was a very young girl, that I had not met her for years, but that I hoped she meant to let me see her now. I had not opened the note, and "Luis" took the hint, whistled Mirelle, and went away to get an appetite for dinner, which I could not understand that anyone could want, so horrid, so dull, so monotonous was the food; and at last I opened the letter and saw Phoebe's writing once more.

Of course, she spoke of Jock, and that, in consequence of his presence, she could not pretend or allow me to pretend to myself that she was "without sin," if sin it were; but she would love to see me if I could come. Herr von Mácczy would enjoy a chat over the old brewery experiments with my husband, so would we come up to lunch? She would be neither surprised nor angry if we did not come; but she would be sorry, for she longed to talk with me. She had not been in England for years. Did I know that her mother and father were both dead, and that her mother had left all her money to her sons? Alas! they were then both married, both had families; they took the money quite calmly, although when the smash came they had given up all they could. Well, ideas changed; the brothers were inclined to blame the speculators who lost money, and not their father who had speculated for them; at any rate, they were poor now, here was this money, so of course they took it, and Phoebe should have her share if she only spoke the word! Naturally, she did not speak it. She did not want money, but she longed for her old friends at times, and above all she longed for me; and, wrong as she supposed it was, she wished to show me Jock,

who was the best and sweetest and brightest little lad in the world, of that she was quite convinced.

The villa where Phœbe dwelt was about a quarter of a mile up one of the very steepest of the steep hills, and we settled to creep up there on our own legs. We both felt rather guilty, and our Puritan consciences gave us a good deal of trouble. I recollect we stopped much longer than we need by the one village shop, and once more examined the miniature "charrette" with its pile of hay and two beautifully carved bullocks that I went and bargained for every day, and regret to this moment that I did not buy. The woman was obdurate; I wonder who did buy it after all? Then we gathered the charming little wild pansies with their innocent faces (my only really pleasant recollection of the place) and the beautiful purple crocuses or saffron, which should never be picked at all, they are so lovely growing, and so very unsatisfactory once they are taken from the soil.

But the villa was all too soon in sight, the rough gate was wide open and fastened back, and the most delightful little black-eyed, black-haired rascal of a boy was standing on one of the rungs, his red *bêret* waving madly in the air as we advanced, while Phœbe, the same old lovely Phœbe, stood with her arm round him, waiting for us.

They had, of course, expected to hear the carriage, and Phœbe laughed in her old way as I told her what I had suffered from the horrible vehicles and the poor, dear horses, and that, if only I could, I would walk back to the station rather than endure all I had done when we came first to stay at Roncevalles-les-Bains. We were

soon joined by Herr von Máoczy, who saluted me first and then my husband, and they went off at once together, while Jock pranced in front in his absurd little tunic and knickerbockers, his bare legs, and his tall red boots, in which he delighted more than he could say. Indeed, it was difficult enough for me to know what he did say, for he chattered in a curious mixture of languages, which spoke volumes for the manner of his bringing up. In vain Phœbe tried to keep him to French or English; he made valiant efforts to obey; then German and Hungarian names turned up, and I could only laugh and pretend to understand. At last Jock thought it was time to question me, and once he found I did not object he never stopped his quest for information. Who was I: was I an aunt, or a sister, or a friend? What was my name? Could I tell him about England? "Tia," by which he meant Phœbe, would never tell him about England, and yet he was an Englishman he knew. Did his father live there? Did my father? Was it greener than Roncevalles-les-Bains? Tia said it was greener and more lovely than any other country, but Tio would never go there, he could not think why.

Somehow I understood that Tio meant Herr von Máoczy; I do not know how Jock had given these names to his parents; they were his own invention, Phœbe said, and made explanations unnecessary to the amazed stranger. It was rather awkward to find that Jock had no nurse and no apartments set aside for him; he was always with Phœbe, and I began to wonder how I was ever going to have a real talk with her. Jock turned out to be six years old, and sharper than the average

child of that age; not that he was Americanised in the unpleasant manner a cosmopolitan infant all too often is, but there was nothing he did not know—nothing he did not see. Indeed, if he did not understand what was said at the time, he waited until he and “Tia” were alone; he never asked questions in general company, but he saved them up relentlessly for her to explain when they were once more by themselves. Phœbe had very strong ideas on the subject of bringing up her son, and I wondered how she would manage in the near future. Up to the present time she gave her whole soul to him; he could read, write in a fashion, and draw, and he could remain still for hours over a picture book or with a pencil in his hand. But the child often longed for a real home where he could have a garden and a room he could be accustomed to and quiet in, and where he had not to be moved on perpetually in the way he was now; and above all did he wish to see England and the English.

I could see that Phœbe was already beginning to find the position she had placed herself in a very difficult one. Herr von Mácozy was as good to her as ever, but I noticed her eyes follow him about the room with a curious, almost sad, expression in them. Once he put his hand on her shoulder and she held it there an instant and put her cheek on it, then she recollected our presence. There was none of the easy confidence of man and wife; rather it appeared to me that Phœbe at least felt the tie was slackening, and that something was coming between them, only a shadow at the moment, but still a shadow that denoted that a presence was near!

At lunch time I remarked that Jock had model food

and disposed of it in a model manner; there was no teasing on his part for what we elders had; he took what was given him, ate it as a little bird picks up seeds, and never spoke unless Phœbe asked him in a low tone if he required more, or if he would like to run on the grass in front of the window, give "Mouton" his dinner, and then play about with him where we could see him and yet not be heard. Mouton, an absurd, shock-headed, good-natured, blundering sheep-dog, came out of the corner when he heard his name, and Jock and he went off together. Phœbe took out the dog's dinner and gave it to Jock, and she and I went just inside the long French window, and very soon began to talk.

I found out almost at once that matters were as I had expected to find them, and that Phœbe had discovered her life was in a tangle that she hardly knew how to unravel, or indeed how to dispose of in the best way. Franz was goodness itself to her, but the Hungarian nature was a fickle one; no, he had never given her the least occasion to complain. All the same, he hankered after his home, his girls, and all the old friends at Buda-Pesth, and also his old property in the country. His brother had died; even while he managed the estate things had not gone well, and now Franz was always going to and fro; she could see he longed to live in the beautiful, desolate spot, but, of course, as long as Phœbe and Jock were with him, that could never be.

There was a greater chance than ever that Frau von Mácozy would be able to join her husband; indeed, there was some talk of Franz going over to England to

see her, and as long as that was possible Phœbe could never go to the estate. People would talk of her and the boy, and of course this would come round to Frau von Mácoczy's ears.

Then the boy himself was not in any great favour with his father. He seemed to look on Jock as a living reproach to them both; he pined for an heir; he could not endure the two stiff and starched Austrians who had married his girls, and who flatly refused to allow them to visit their father as long as Phœbe and Jock were with him. Yet these men must inherit the property between them, or at least the eldest grandson must have the land, while the money was divided. Franz was fond of the girls, and would have adored Jock if he could have acknowledged him openly and feel that he could be his own true son altogether. As it was, Franz allowed Phœbe her own way entirely with the child; he was to be English, and go to an English school, and if he liked into the army. There was money settled on them both, quite enough to ensure their future would be all right; she was not afraid of that.

But the first "fine careless rapture" of this love story was over and done. Phœbe was too proud to lay her heart at his feet for him to tread on or even put aside carelessly with his foot; she adored him still, he loved her, she made him comfortable; but there was something wanting, something she did not know exactly what! I ventured to ask her if she regretted the step she had taken at all, but she very soon replied that she did not, no, not for one moment. She had had nine or ten very, very happy years; she had a store of memories no one could take from her; lovely scenery, exquisite pictures, in some cases good friends.

These were, of course, few and far between, for she made no secret of her position or her relation to Jock. She never obtruded it, of course, but when women admired the splendid little fellow, and made advances to his mother, Phœbe always told the truth. Sometimes the women drew back as if she were poison; generally these were people whose own morals were none of the best, if the truth were known, and who sheltered themselves under their husbands' names and protected themselves by their wedding rings; sometimes she met old ladies who were sweet and kind, and did their best to save her from herself, as they put it. More than one had seen with Phœbe's eyes, and had gone so far as to say—trembling—they might have done the same had they ever been tempted or tried! One very dear and sweet-voiced woman had made friends with Jock and Mouton in the horrid, hard-benched little train that runs up to Grindelwald from Interlaken. Miss Kershaw had also a dog, the saddest little creature Phœbe had ever seen, for it was deformed and half-paralysed, owing to its having been given gin in its food to keep it small. Jock gave Miss Kershaw's Peter one of Mouton's cushions, and Miss Kershaw at once became friends. Peter was left in Jock's charge when Miss Kershaw went to church, albeit he was a melancholy little object, who only lived when he could see his mistress, and sighed his heart out in the most agonising manner possible when she was out of his sight. Even Phœbe could not make him happy; he would lie on the sofa with one eye on the door, groaning, and then the moment Miss Kershaw appeared the little creature was transformed; he leapt towards her literally smiling, nestled into her arms, sighed rapturously,

and went to sleep in the most engaging manner possible.

In her usual direct manner Phœbe had told Miss Kershaw her story the moment she saw that a friendship was imminent, and for a few minutes the good and dear lady was silent, thinking very, very deeply. She had once had a love-story herself; but she could not leave her old and infirm parents. It was the age when youth was sacrificed to the elderly folk, and a good daughter put her parents before the man she loved and who in his turn loved her. He had gone out to India. The story was not a happy one; she had heard nothing of him for years; then someone had found him dying up country; a wild, selfish *declassée* had left him at the very word fever; his life had been a wreck. Miss Kershaw could not help thinking all would have been different had she fulfilled her promise and become his wife. She felt now that she had no right to judge anyone. Phœbe had given all for love; she had laid down her own life for her lover. Miss Kershaw even whispered a text, "Greater love hath no man than this——"; then she stopped. "I am an old woman," she said; "I will be your friend. God knows you will want one before you reach my age." Once more she said she was afraid Phœbe's punishment would come to her through Jock—Jock, who must know some day that he had no name, no father; what would he say when he found out his mother was Miss Summers, and had never been married at all? Would it not be better to call herself his aunt, or else take the married prefix, which would prevent awkward questions being asked?

But here, as always, Phœbe was inflexible. Whatever

the world called her she would never tell or act a lie ; she would never live in an atmosphere of dread lest she should be found out. All should be above board, and Miss Kershaw had told her she was right, albeit she was nailing herself on her own cross. Phœbe told me she often wondered if she would ever meet Miss Kershaw again ; she had gone home from Interlaken and Grindelwald to her great house in a dim square, while they had gone to Egypt for the winter, afterwards making their way to Roncevalles-les-Bains, where we had once more met. I found that Herr von Mácoczy was very uncertain about his plans ; they were to leave Roncevalles and go to Mentone at once, but after that he must visit his Hungarian estates, and perhaps even go on to England to see his wife.

Phœbe felt very, very unsettled. Dr. Ebers had written more than once to say he thought that at any moment now the Commissioners would suggest that Frau von Mácoczy should go home ; Dr. Ebers could see no signs of insanity about her, and she appeared normal in every way. She was confused a little about her identity and about the immediate past. But Dr. Ebers did not dare arouse her dormant intellect too much until Herr von Mácoczy was near enough to consult, and to talk over what was the best thing to be done. Phœbe hoped he would take her and Jock to England too, she would then break off all the old ties, and leave him free to return to Hungary. I gazed at her in amaze. Had she no feeling at all for Franz, for the father of her child ?

She understood, as she always did, of what I was thinking, and she said, quite quietly, "I

do not consider myself at all. I bought my happiness, it did not come to me, and I should be a coward if I do not pay the price. I will never steal from another woman. After all, Franz has duties to that poor creature; he never loved her as he has and does love me, but she is his wife, and there are the girls. As long as their mother was insane, they had no right to interfere with us. Now they have every right, and I shall acknowledge it and go my way. Ah! you calm, quiet, married, respectable people do not know what passionate love can suffer for the object of its love. I declare if Franz were made happier by my death I would die to-morrow, but he would not be, and there is Jock to consider. Franz will always love me and recollect our years of happiness, but now he wants his home. If his wife is well he must have it and I have Jock." I did not want to be cruel, but I could not help asking her if she had reckoned with the future Jock, with the fatherless, nameless lad to whom she had given birth. She declared she had, and that she had never, would never allow him to grow up in ignorance of what his real position was. "It should be so natural to him," she said, "that it should never strike him as being abnormal, and I shall simply tell him not to give himself away at school, because boys are often fiends, and would hurl insults at him he would never forget; all he has to say is that his father is in Hungary. I shall protect him as a lad, as a young boy; after that no one will ask questions. If they do I can answer them; at any rate, Jock can never be ashamed of his parents, though they never were married in a church. I am

ashamed of mine a thousand times a day. Yet they had a bishop to tie their knot and half a column in the county newspaper to describe the happy event."

I did not tell her that, in all probability, Jock would be most bitterly ashamed too. What was the use? He might not be; people are very differently constituted, and what means shame to one does not touch another even with a scratch! Meanness, cruelty, lying, stealing—none of these things would ever soil Phœbe's soul. If love were not a sin, she was then stainless indeed; her one thought was for Franz, his future her one care.

If that were to be spent apart from her, well! she could bear it; she had had ten good years, and there was always, would always be Jock!

I was rather disturbed to hear on our way down through the wood that Herr von Mácoczy had spoken out very plainly about the position of affairs, and that he had asked if I would once more see Dr. Ebers on our way home, and learn from him what was best to be done. Moreover, I was not to keep from him the present position of affairs as regards Phœbe and Jock. Herr von Mácoczy had spoken with the deepest feeling about both, but it was evident that he longed to live at home, and that he was desperately tired of travelling about in a most equivocal position.

He would have given worlds to marry Phœbe and legitimise his son, but that being impossible he was getting on in years (I think he must have been over sixty, but I am not sure), and he wanted a tranquil evening to his long and stormy day.

It was a curious position, after all; he had been

passionately devoted to Phoebe, and he had never had any warm feeling for his wife, but he wanted what she represented; he wanted the girls about him, and above all he wanted to see the second generation. He had taken their portraits out of his pocket; they were just like the long-legged girls I knew at Hamworth, just like Michael asleep so many years in his coffin in the vault at Buda-Pesth!

Of course, they were smaller, younger; all the same, I could understand how they clutched at his heart-strings, and I felt sorry—sorry for them all. Robert even ventured to say that he thought Hagar and Ishmael had been vilely treated, and he thought Sarah should have been contented to remove them into an adjacent tent, but really that was rather too much for me, though I could not help feeling dreadfully sad about the whole matter, more especially as I could not see what would be the end of it all.

My Spanish friend was in a very communicative mood that same evening, and was very glad that I had been to see the dear lady in the villa. "You English are always so stiff and starch," he said in his queer, broken French, "I did not think you would go. Did you see the little good man, Herr Jock, and that absurd beast Mouton? He is a sheep—verily Mirelle will not speak to Mouton, though she loves the little Jock—what a boy! I wish he did belong to me, I know that!"

"You'd bring him up as well as you do Mirelle, I am sure," I said; "poor little boy, I do not know how he will fare."

"Oh, well enough," said Luis, easily. "I and

Ramon have spoken much of him; he will make a fine soldier, you'll see; he knows no fear. Mouton fought at Mirelle, and Jock dragged the great beast off at once. True, I was there soon, but he did not think, did not wait; he cast himself into the rescue at once. Oh! he is brave, I tell you—I who know.”

Luis seemed to think, with Robert, that two wives were quite a reasonable allowance for one man, and that it was a thousand pities that grand and beautiful woman should be made to leave her lover even if the wife objected, and, added he naïvely, she need never know. I explained the position fully, the daughters, the sons-in-law, the estate on which the von Mácozys lived in the full glare of publicity and were as small autocrats on their own domain. Neither would Phœbe submit to such a thing. She would not come between man and wife if the wife were well. This the Spaniard could not understand; of course, Englishwomen were funny, funny! Then after putting Mirelle through her performances and bowing profoundly he turned away to join his brother, who had found two other men capable of playing cards, and so they sat down to a game that lasted considerably into the night, although the garçon brought our antiquated candlesticks and dissipated-looking candles at ten sharp. Then he looked into the billiard room and groaned; he would have to sit up until *ces Messieurs* chose to go to bed! We went off as usual, and I having fed a dear little tame mousikin which always popped out its head for crumbs the moment it heard my footstep, I covered in its hole and went to rest,

albeit I could not sleep for thinking of what the next few months might bring my old friend.

Phœbe was now forty. It sounded a dreadful age to me even then, though I was making towards the same bourne myself; the six or seven years that stood between us and made an almost impassable gulf in my early girlhood were now diminished to a third, and I felt as if I had to protect her. What could she do in England, what would she have to bear? Would May, would her brothers speak to her? Would she not be wiser to remain abroad, or even go to what was then thought of generically as "the Colonies"?

I saw Phœbe once more before we left Roncevalles-Bains, and I mooted the question of domicile to her. But she was absolutely determined that Jock should be English, and go to an English public school. She was too much of a cosmopolitan now to think that no other scheme of education was good, but she said she had never seen any that satisfied her yet. On the Continent the parents had too much control; French boys were sneaks, German boys prigs, pedants; Austrians would have none of Jock because of his birth, Hungary was out of the question. It must be England under any circumstances; of that she was quite convinced. I arranged with Herr von Mácozy to report to him as soon as I could hear Dr. Ebers' ideas, for he gained sufficient courage, I am glad to say, to speak to me direct on the subject, and I promised, if necessary, to do my best for Phœbe and Jock.

"What she has been to me all these years I alone know and can know," he said with the greatest emotion; "she is a great, a grand woman; without her I should

have died or joined my sad wife in her exile. I shall love her to the end, but now comes duty. She sees it, we see it, we shall love for ever; but that is over if my wife comes back cured. We faced that from the first; we knew it, but it is hard, hard now it comes."

I was surprised he could not care for Jock, but evidently he not only did not care, but he even disliked the boy. I think he felt the injury he had done him deeply. He had none of Phœbe's passionate love for a child. Jock was a living reproach; worse, he might have been the heir; he was not, therefore he did not want to see the child again. "Mother and son will have each other," he said; "it is better for Phœbe, and she will not be alone. She will teach him well; he ought to have a happy life, and make up for much to her." Herr von Máoczy had evidently reached the age when he disliked emotion or being made uncomfortable; and I parted with him for always at Roncevalles-les-Bains, not sorry that after I had seen Dr. Ebers, I need never hear of him again, not sorry, either, that I parted with both him and Roncevalles-les-Bains on the same day!

CHAPTER X

AT LONG RIDGE

As soon as I could I wrote to Dr. Ebers, and once more found myself within the alarming, if hospitable, portals of Little Heather. All looked very much as when I was there last, and the old man was still prowling up and down before the windows, and saluted me in the identical manner in which he had done before. But he had considerably added to his vocabulary and was proceeding to even more awful sayings when Dr. Ebers came into the room, looked out of the window, and though he apparently did not make a sign to anyone some man came forward, drew the venerable lunatic away, and very soon he was completely out of ear-shot.

"You'd never believe that man was a most excellent clergyman once," said Dr. Ebers, "would you? Even now he is most gentle and pious, unless he sees a young woman. He puts down all the sins and miseries of the world to females, and his language on the subject of Eve is quite awful, while if he sees a young lady—well! you have unfortunately had a specimen of how he addresses her."

I asked Dr. Ebers how such a man had accumulated his store of vile phrases, and he told me that he verily

believed the brain resembled a phonograph, and merely reproduced under certain circumstances all that it had unconsciously assimilated.

"Now," he added, "if you ever come under my care, which Heaven forbid, or even if you are ever delirious, you may use the very language my poor old patient does, which is one reason why young folk especially should never hear or see things that are bad for them. Seeing is as bad as hearing! Ghosts are the repetition of things we have seen and retained at the back of our heads, and in certain states of weakness, even of exaltation, these are released, and we see what we think are ghosts, of that I am perfectly convinced!"

This being an idea I had often entertained myself, I was much inclined to get Dr. Ebers to enlarge thereon. What a temptation it is to continue a talk with a man who has ideas out of the common! All the same, I knew Dr. Ebers' time was valuable, and I had to discuss Frau von Mácozy's case with him at length. Dr. Ebers was quite certain that she was now normal, and he much wished to see if she would recollect me and speak of the past at all, for neither he nor her "maid" could induce her to do so. She had her letters now, she asked and obtained newspapers from her old home; she had spoken of the Emperor and things about Austria and Hungary, and she had had many photographs to look at. It was therefore curious that she never spoke of her husband and children, neither did she object to Little Heather, or ask in the least to go away.

I had not the most comfortable recollections of our last meeting, but I did not feel afraid at all. We went

across the dim autumnal garden, where the gardeners were making all tidy for the winter in the melancholy manner that suggests death and the end of all joyful things which invariably depresses me; but the green-houses were full of bloom, and Frau von Mácoczy's room was a bower of chrysanthemums glowing and gorgeous, if not quite the curled and pampered and tremendous creatures they are at the present day.

I should never have known Frau von Mácoczy had I met her elsewhere, and I was simply astonished at the change in her appearance. All the wildness had disappeared from her looks. She was as usual gracefully and well dressed, and most appropriately also; she had long flowing skirts, and her hair, now completely white, was braided and waved softly round her head, and she looked more beautiful than I could have imagined possible.

Where had been restlessness, lack of repose, and hurry, was now quiet self-restraint. She wore some jewels, but not one too many. Neither was her dress anything but just what it should be. She had the skin and complexion of a girl, well! if that were the effect of a residence at Little Heather, I began to think that mad folk were better off than sane ones after all.

Dr. Ebers' treatment and the von Mácoczy wealth had worked wonders; at first she had been uncontrollable, then the only thing to do was to allow her to tire herself out with the tremendous walks she loved in all weathers. Then her food was managed scientifically, and at the age she went to Little Heather she received the calm and sane evenly-balanced treatment which ought to have been hers as a little child and a young girl. The quiet, the absolute

freedom from worry and restraint soon began to tell; she was assured all was well with her own people once; then she never asked any questions again. Dr. Ebers had her entire confidence, and he had promised to tell her anything she ought to know. She believed him, and trusting in his courage and his treatment, had become the calm, delightful creature I soon saw that she was.

Naturally she did not recollect me, and at first I think she believed I was a new patient to whom she was to show courtesy and be kind, and we talked only on general subjects. Presently I could see she was rather troubled. I then said I was just back from Roncevalles, and we spoke generally about Europe and the parts I knew, which, however, did not include Vienna. I found she shared my dislike of Switzerland and the Alps generally, and as neither of us was ashamed of the fact that always brought down storms of reprobation about my ears, we laughed over our experiences, and agreed that the mere sight of the gaunt, white, overwhelming mountains crushed us to the earth, and that we gladly left them to others who worshipped where we could not.

Sometimes I wonder if Frau von Mácoczy has been to Switzerland of late years! Thirty years ago it was a country I could not bear; now it is an abomination! Horrible railways creak and gurgle up all the mountains; stout female Germans with large bags marked "gute reise" reposing on the most prominent portions of their persons, swarm all over the place, while the male Teuton carries his family's umbrellas in a case likewise embellished with a motto, often enough "gute reise" also, and he smokes and puffs and drinks beer

until one wonders what will be his end! The glaciers resemble corporation dust-shoots nowadays, for the cheap tripper swarms there in crowds.

I only wonder why they go; in a week they come and they vanish, getting more and more crumpled as to clothing, and more and more bewildered as to mind, whilst they are absolutely ignorant of where they are, where they are going, and above all what they have seen or are going to see. Then a second lot turns up, then a third, all crushed, all crumpled, all bewildered. Personally, I do not believe the trippers are any the better for such a trip; far better a fortnight by the sea than such a "rest." Surely the happiness of being able to tell their fellows they have been abroad does not make up for all they endured in the process, which does them no good, and has totally ruined the most accessible parts of Switzerland for those who like the awful overwhelming Alps and the depression of the snow!

Something that I said about the vulgarising of Paris appealed to Frau von Mácozy, and she showed me photographs of her home among the hills and valleys of Hungary. Then she appeared to remember me. But she asked no questions about the past, though every now and then she drew her hand over her eyes as if she wished to remove a cobweb from before her sight. At last I said, very gently, "You are going back, are you not?" Frau von Mácozy looked relieved, she had somehow found the thread that might guide her through the labyrinth, and I was astonished to find how much more she knew than we had any of us the least idea of.

That she possessed intimate acquaintance with

Phoebe's position amazed me as much as I was astonished to find that she did not resent it. Of course, all would have to be altered now. She was a good girl, a good, nice girl, she allowed; no wonder Franz had turned to her. She was glad Mari and Roszi were married and had children. She never really cared for children herself, but she might perhaps for theirs. She was not responsible for them, and they would not trouble her. She would be glad to be home with Franz; they were getting old now, and it was nice to be able to go down the hill together. Frau von Mácozy had lost every idea of responsibility. She had never had much, I will say that for her, but she had none now; she was anxious to see her husband and her own country, but she would never forget her calm, quiet home in England.

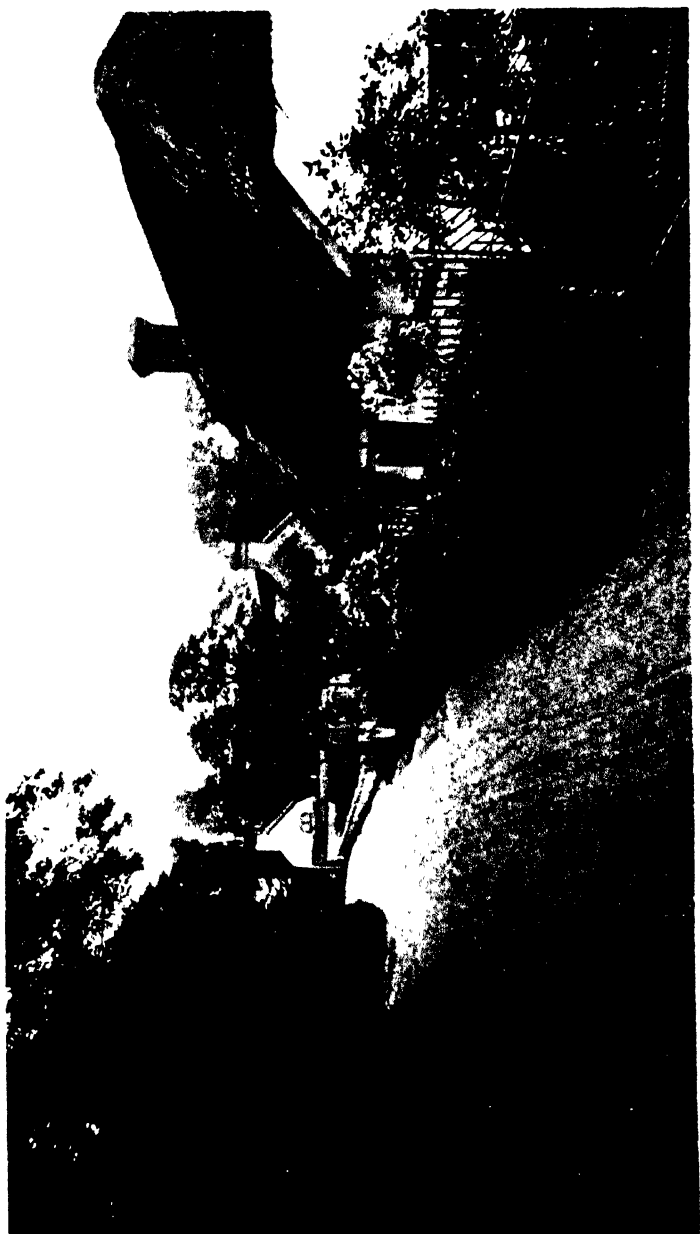
She never felt wild now, for no one ever worried her and made her do things she hated, and, above all, she had forgotten the rush and clatter of Buda-Pesth and Vienna life, and she had no wish for society, and only longed to be in the places she knew so well. Moreover, Dr. Ebers had managed to make her take interest in the garden and hot-houses, and she had haunted Kew and had learned to garden in a most practical way. She was eager about the flowers she meant to introduce at Lasayka, and she had all sorts of schemes about the peasant and work people, far too English, I felt certain, ever to be carried out, but after all that was not for me to tell her.

She had crowds of books in all three languages, French, German, and English, and even the latter she could read perfectly well. I felt quite convinced that the sooner her husband fetched her now

the better. There was no use in prolonging the agony, no use in leaving her at Little Heather a day longer than was necessary.

Dr. Ebers impressed on me that there should be no excitement on the journey, which should be taken slowly, and as much at night as possible. Crowded towns and streets were to be avoided. She was to drive up to London at night and cross at once by the night mail. Her first stoppage must be some quiet place, a village for preference. Herr von Mácozy would arrange that, and she was not to be in a town at all. She may, said Dr. Ebers, settle down at Lasayka without any trouble at all if my plans are carried out to the letter; but I feel sure a town after all the ten quiet years she has had here will be too great a strain. "And now," he added, "I want to ask you if you have heard anything of your friend Lady Branscombe since she was sent to Long Ridge?"

I could not think what Dr. Ebers meant. I had heard very little of Marta since her two children were born, and I had only seen her once in town since that time. She had then seemed very *distracted*, very quiet, but she roused considerably when I asked about Jocelyn and Mavis, the babes who had arrived at Branscombe, and were always left there when Sir Lucius dragged her up to town for the season. Mavis was the girl, and had arrived first, much to Sir Lucius' rage, but as Jocelyn soon put in an appearance, he was calmed down. There were only a year and three months between the children, and, as Mavis was small, and Jocelyn large for his age, they were always taken for twins, and caused much amusement when they appeared. They were too small then for their educa-



BRASSCOMBE VILLAGE.

AT LONG RIDGE

tion and management to be much spoken about, but could see Marta had felt deeply the fact that she had not been allowed to nurse Mavis herself.

Sir Lucius, never very choice in his language, had remarked he did not intend to exchange his wife for a cow, and he had engaged excellent nurses. Fortunately for Marta they really were excellent, and Tippy, as the children called the head nurse, quite sided with Marta, so the nurseries were always open to her, and Marta and Tippy were the dearest of friends rather than the orthodox nurse and her mistress. When I heard of Marta last, Tippy was resisting fiercely the idea of a German or French nursery governess. She knew enough to teach such mites their letters, and more they could not want. No "nasty furriners" should come into her nurseries, not if she knew it, and just at that moment Sir Lucius was obliged to give way. Even the under-nurse, Jeannette, Tippy's niece, declared she would not stay if a "for-leen" or "mamseel" stuck her nose into the place, and, of course, Marta was dead against it, for she and the children were absolutely content.

Sir Lucius was never at Branscombe, except in the shooting season. Fortunately, he was content to show Marta now and again in town, at some of the best houses. If he went abroad, he went to shoot big game, and she returned to Branscombe jubilant, especially as Christobel was always there, growing up fast, learning at the Manse with the Scottish minister's girls, and becoming every day more like Marta, and more useful and charming even than she had been.

When Dr. Ebers spoke, I could not for some few minutes think of what he meant. Of course,

I had heard of Long Ridge, and I had more than once been to see that melancholy spot, for I happened at one time to know one of the doctors there. The one I knew had left. He had had "words" with the head doctor and the committee, and there had been a considerable breeze about the asylum, at any rate in medical circles, over the manner of his going, and the revelations that had been made about the management of the place. But it was that most dreary of all spots, a County Asylum, though, naturally, it had a block where paying patients were taken, but not such patients as Dr. Ebers had, nor were there any comforts; nothing was allowed but the barest of bare necessities. What did it all mean?

Then it appeared that Marta had had a third child, a second boy, and Sir Lucius had put his foot down, as he expressed it, and was absolutely determined the children should be brought up in his way, and that the mother should not interfere in the least. A second son made him feel the succession was all right; he did not trouble about Marta, and all his energies were turned now on the two elder infants, who should be brought up entirely on his own lines, and no one should be allowed to interfere. Really, if anyone were mad, I think Sir Lucius was; but, at any rate, no one could prevent his carrying out his plan of education, which might possibly be right enough, but which was cruelty simply as regards his gentle, most orthodox wife. In the first place, Sir Lucius flatly refused to have the children christened or vaccinated, and, moreover, he was determined that religion should not enter into the plan of education at all. The minister represented to him that baptism, in any case, could not hurt

the children, and that as it was the custom of most European countries, he was making them absurdly conspicuous by his refusal to have them christened.

The doctor was violent on the subject of vaccination. It was compulsory then, for no set of ignorant fanatics had made it optional, as it is now, but Sir Lucius was too great a man at Branscombe to resist. The doctor depended on his good word for his practice. He could only protest, and there the matter ended. Marta had been brought up from her earliest days in the most orthodox atmosphere possible, and to her parents and, indeed, to her, the finger of Providence was a very real thing, and, moreover, she had the good, old-fashioned belief that "hell was paved with the soul of infants a span long," and that if a child died unbaptised, it was utterly lost. I do not know how she reconciled these cheering ideas with her belief in an all-loving, all-powerful God, but nothing would shake her faith. During one of Sir Lucius' absences she had all three children christened, and, moreover, had them vaccinated also.

Unfortunately, Mavis and Jocelyn were too old to keep the matter to themselves, and they had, moreover, bitterly opposed both ceremonies. The moment their father came back they told him of the indignities they had suffered, and then even the servants had protested against the dreadful manner in which he spoke to his wife. Tippy and Jeannette were only saved from instant dismissal by the cries and screams of the bigger children, but Marta had to bear the lash of his tongue, and, moreover, was confined to her own rooms until Sir Lucius had actually had a second staircase made, up which the children passed to their nur-

series and schoolrooms, and so never met or saw their distracted mother at all.

I do not know why Sir Lucius treated his wife as he did, except that he was determined to have his own way about the children, and hated the very name of religion, and treated all doctors as if they were thieves. Unless a surgeon were required to set a bone or perform an operation, he would have none of them. "Medicine was mere guesswork, and he knew quite as much as any ordinary saw-bones."

If Marta had been able to manage her husband, I do not think she would have had the trouble she had, but she was far too gentle and quiet to cope with such a man, and in or out of season she persisted in praying aloud for the children, and for him, until he was worked up almost to a state of frenzy in the matter. Sir Lucius was quite convinced that the whole system of religious instruction was wrong, and he intended to work out his ideas on the children, if on no one else. On the subject of vaccination and vivisection, he was equally rabid. Indeed, I do not know a fad he did not possess and was not able to talk about at any minute one gave him a chance in which to do so. He was most undoubtedly in the right, too, about many things, and if Marta had laughed at him instead of praying for him, or even let the subject alone, things would never have come to a head. But she was literally obsessed by the idea that outward forms of religion were vital, and that a knowledge of the Church Catechism and formal prayer should be begun in the nursery. She had been born in the gentle atmosphere of the country vicarage, where prayer and reliance on God were the daily food of the

household, as much as bread and butter, and it was dreadful to her to see her children mere heathen healthy creatures, romping and playing in the garden, or rushing about the long corridors, without the least idea that Heaven and Hell existed at all, with no ideas on the subject of prayer, and, indeed, living much as animals would, as far as their spiritual lives were concerned.

It was an evil moment when Marta came across a story in a magazine, in which a mother placed in much such a position as her own shut herself up in her room with a child suffering from violent diphtheria, and allowed him to die, because his father was an agnostic, and refused to allow her to bring up the boy in any form of faith whatever. Better a thousand times that the child should die in his innocence than that he should be allowed to grow up to become a scoffer at truth, or what she looked upon as truth, and eventually become a man condemned for ever to burn in hell! Such was the charming story that found a responsive echo in Marta's breast. Sir Lucius was undoubtedly a hard, disagreeable man, but Marta had married him with her eyes wide open. There are always two sides to every question. A little common-sense would have enabled her to manage her husband, but as she did not possess this, she became even worse than she had been before she went to Little Heather, and came under the calm and beneficent care of Dr. Ebers. She was simply possessed by the idea that the children must be saved from growing up to mock at God and disbelieve in anything except what they could see and touch, and by degrees she learned to be silent and quiet, and so wary that Sir Lucius' vigilance relaxed, and she was allowed

to see the children at stated times, in the presence of the nurses at any rate, and often enough in that of Sir Lucius himself.

Then came the climax. They were together, having a picnic tea by the lake at Branscombe, when all of a sudden she grasped the two elder children, and threw them into the water, and, with the infant in her arms, jumped in after them. Neither Tippy nor Jeannette could swim; but their screams brought someone to the rescue. The lake, too, was a mere shallow piece of water, made for ornament, and for winter skating. Jocelyn and Mavis thought it was some delicious joke. They jumped about in the water, shaking it from them as some big dog does, while their mother and the baby were taken up to the house, warmed, dried, and fed, until Sir Lucius came home, and made up his mind that nothing of the sort must occur again.

He had kicked against the terms at Little Heather when he had no children, naturally he was not going to pay such sums now the title was safe. No one would ever know that Lady Branscombe was not at home. She was out of her mind truly, but her insanity was more that of a weak and baffled nature than real madness. It should not be made public; it should be concealed. No one should be able to say the children's mother was mad. He managed it all very cleverly, and, having heard of Long Ridge, and that the payments there were small in comparison to what they would be at Little Heather, he handed his wife over to the doctors and nurses, and did not even trouble to see her installed, or even to know what rooms she would have,

or what the routine of the place was in the smallest degree.

The mere sight of the building was quite enough to daunt the stoutest heart. It was a vast conglomeration of blocks of buildings, reached from the right-hand by a most forbidding-looking porter's lodge, and surrounded by a high, hideous, and prison-like wall. When the carriage stopped at the gate, a long business of unlocking and unbarring went on. The nurses and the porter exchanged ideas about Lady Branscombe's case just as if she were not there, while at the moment a party of pauper lunatics returned from their walk outside in the charge of a couple of attendants, and, as all were really mad, uncontrollably so, they mopped and mowed at Marta, laughing aloud at her distress, and becoming more and more unruly when they saw how much she was alarmed at their antics. Neither was her introduction to the head of the asylum reassuring. He discussed Marta's case with the younger doctors and the attendants, and, remarking that religious maniacs were always the most dangerous and the worst to look after, suggested an observation chamber and the attendance of a couple of the nurses, who would, he felt sure, stand no nonsense from Lady Branscombe at all. All this was gone into before my unfortunate friend, who was seated on a hard kitchen chair, an attendant on each side, and the young doctor close by her, in case she had a sudden access of mania. Marta told me afterwards that even had her mind been absolutely clear, her experience then would have been quite enough to send her off her balance at once! She was treated as if she did not exist, as a mere nonentity, and

as utterly incapable of knowing what was said, or having an opinion on any subject under the sun.

But there was worse to follow. She had to change from her own dainty charming underwear into what was called the "county linen," coarse raiment, striped and harsh, and made in a peculiar way; but before donning this delightful garb her nurses gave her a bath, as if she were an infant, and, indeed, not with the gentleness an infant would have inspired, and, wife and mother as she was, she had no privacy, and was rubbed down as a horse is by a couple of rough, vulgar women, who threatened to call the doctor if she refused the "county linen," and who told her she was highly favoured to be allowed to wear her own dresses over the abominable garments that marked her out at once as a lunatic in charge of the asylum authorities.

Marta was such a gentle, shrinking creature, too, and perfectly detested being watched at any minute of the day and night, and above all was it torture to her to have to share a dormitory with ten or eleven other women, all more or less raving mad, and all watched all night by a rough and selfish nurse. Not that all nurses are rough and selfish, far from it; but she is, indeed, a *rara avis* who in the rough-and-tumble atmosphere of a county asylum preserves her nice manner and her kind and sympathetic ways, for all too often she has far too many patients to look after. She has the doctors and the committee to satisfy, and, above all, has to study the idiosyncrasies of the other nurses, who would soon resent any deviation from the ordinary routine, and take care that no favouritism is shown to any one of their unhappy patients.

Marta's tiny title was dropped by consent, and, indeed, she was known to the inmates of Long Ridge by her maiden name only, though, of course, she was called Mrs. and not Miss Prescott; yet somehow her story had got about, and she was tormented by questions first about her husband and then about her children, and, above all, about the manner in which she had tried to end her unhappy days and take the poor little creatures with her.

The then surroundings and so-called appointments of the place were something terrible to a refined nature, and, indeed, to anyone accustomed, as Marta had been now for some years, at any rate, to luxurious surroundings. Instead of her charming bedroom, with its exquisite hangings, and the beautiful silver-laden toilet-table, with its tortoiseshell brushes and combs encrusted with gold, she had a narrow iron bedstead, with blankets and sheets of the coarsest description, and marked plainly with the name of the place she was in. She had to brush her own hair, and perform her scanty toilet in public, while the food, though far too ample, was of the roughest, and served in a manner that would take away the stoutest appetite.

Marta had, of course, been used in her girlhood to simple food and simple ways, but she and one of her beloved sisters had shared one dainty room which they had embellished with choice bits of finery and broidery, and was a lady's room; above all, it was Marta's own room. Even the mother knocked before she entered. She was a great believer in privacy, and in treating her daughters as if they had a right to them-

selves, and she would never have taken a liberty with them any more than they would have with her.

The meals at the dear old Vicarage were plain, often scanty, but there was always enough, and whatever it was it was served with decency and taste. The spoons and forks were old and thin, but they were of silver, and beautifully kept; the glass and china were delicate, and as all were washed by the girls and their mother, all lasted. At Long Ridge the china could have been thrown from one end of the room to the other and remained unhurt, and, in justice to Long Ridge, let me say that it often was! The cloths were rough, horrid, and often stained, while the food was dreadful. Great chunks of bread and butter and stewed tea out of gigantic urns for breakfast and tea; and for dinner an endless routine of beef, stews, fish twice a week, supplemented by enormous tarts of apple or rhubarb, or else gigantic suet puddings helped in such a way that anyone unaccustomed to such fare must turn sickened away from the unappetising meal. Tea was at half-past four, and nothing more was to be had until the next morning, while even in the "paying patient" ward all had to be in bed at latest at eight. Can you imagine such a *régime* for grown-up women, for ladies accustomed to come and go as they liked, to be deftly waited on by superior maids, to have a good well-cooked meal at night, and to retire to bed when they chose?

If you can, you will understand the effect all this had on Marta Branscombe and on such other unfortunates who were not violent, but who were not at the same time capable of being trusted not to do wrong, or even foolish things if left to them-

selves? I am convinced, too, that the mental nurses even in a county asylum should be either ladies specially adapted for the work and, moreover, constantly changed (that is to say, given change of work), or else very superior ladies' maids, who have been accustomed to wait on ladies and treat them with a certain amount of deference, and that they should never be the heavy-handed, rough-and-ready nurses who all too often take up this work. The two who were in charge of Lady Branscombe's dormitory were specially bad specimens of the tribe, and would, I am sure, have driven me mad had I ever come under their care. However badly a patient slept, and according to the night nurse no patient ever did sleep badly, the unfortunate creature was roused and made to rise at the same time as the rest; she might dislike a draught, or pine for fresh air; in either case she dared not complain, for if she did all she received was either a contemptuous sneer or a rude remark. Petty indignities, too small to chronicle, were showered on the patients, while the dreadful forced walks either in the so-called grounds or on the roads were torture. The ladies might wear their own dresses, but the attendants were in uniform, and were, moreover, known to everyone in the adjacent village. Small children fled before the "loonies"; older ones gathered together and gaped at the unfortunates, while men and women who should have known better either laughed or foolishly smiled as they passed, or else turned away in such an obvious manner that not even the maddest of the tribe could fail to see how she was regarded by the world outside those awful walls.

Nearly all the ladies, moreover, were either childish,

feebly insane, or more as venerable children than dangerously mad. To be among them for any period was to become demoralised oneself. Marta, slowly climbing back even in this hideous atmosphere to her normal condition, began to feel that she, too, would be content to sleep her life away if she could do it quickly, and once more meet her dearly loved parents in another world. Yet then she recollected her children, and an access of misery would often cause her to spring out of bed and pace with naked feet the cold, uncarpeted floor of the dormitory. But should she do so the night nurse was at her heels in a minute; she would be roughly hauled back and tucked tightly into her bed, she would be promised a strap across her, even a straight-waistcoat, but this, of course, could not be used without the doctor's consent, and it was ill to rouse him for a case the nurse could manage. So she found threats generally enough, and she did not spare them, or violent pushes or ignoble handlings if her mere words to any of the patients were not enough to ensure obedience. Her eating in the dormitory always aroused Marta, as did the visits to them of the head nurse, who would come round with her self-registering clock, and her loud remarks twice or three times during the night, while often enough one of the other patients would suddenly become violent and have a horrible fit. Then the dormitory was in an uproar; nurses flew hither and thither, the doctors were summoned, and all attempts at peace were gone for that night at any rate.

Is this the manner, I ask, to treat any sick creature, a mentally sick creature above all? Naturally there is neither time nor money to discriminate, but where there is both, the relations should be forced by

law to supply decent retreats for such sad women. Contrast their work at Long Ridge with the treatment and results at Little Heather, and then surely we shall in time learn that no sick person either of body or mind can be turned into a machine, for if she or he is capable of recovering, the chances of recovery are minimised a thousand-fold.

The day-room in which I was allowed at last to see Marta had a spurious air of comfort and gaiety about it. It had a hideous mid-Victorian green carpet covered with great cabbage roses, and green curtains that made even me feel ill, so vivid and garish was the colour, and the walls were all of a uniform hue of green paint; a few "occasional" tables and chairs were set primly about, there was a sofa, also three or four armchairs were dotted here and there, and a piano was supplied. The windows were barred, and the fire was likewise enclosed in a huge cage, while the books that lay about were not cheerful, and being the property of individual members of Block Z, were sacred to their owners, who fiercely resented anyone else looking inside the covers. Those who could bought each her own chair, footstool, and work-table or desk, but those who had neither the means nor the desire would hurriedly possess themselves of any chair they fancied. Then the nurses had to be called in constantly to eject the intruder; but the worst thing of all was the piano. It went all day, portioned out to each would-be pianist for an hour at a time, and while one lady played well, another would insist on practising her scales. It was all take and no give in that room, and one gathered a very shrewd idea of what life would be were we all unrestrained by the

common rules of society, and one and all pleased ourselves without the smallest ideas of what others liked or disliked with whom we had to live.

Naturally Marta was never among the belligerents, and I will say that for her special attendant in the day-room that she took care that Marta's possessions were kept for her own use; no one sat in her chair, or took her books or work unrebuked, but even the nurse could not make such a life bearable. Meals were in the room these ladies sat in; they were obliged to remain together whether they liked it or not; they could not go out into the garden, even into the passages, without the nurse or without her permission, and when I saw my old friend she was seated by the window looking out on the dreary exercise ground, where nothing grew save a few starved trees, amidst a vast space of asphalt more like a prison than anything else, and where the high walls obscured even a glimpse of the road, along which people passed, and to watch whom might have been some slight distraction.

Marta was absolutely still, absolutely colourless; she knew me quite well, but I could see she was afraid to speak lest she should lose her self-control, and indeed I myself was not far from tears. All the other ladies gathered round us too, chattering like magpies; they handled my dress, touched my hat and my hair, and finally possessed themselves of my gloves and parasol, and investigated them much as you may see a cageful of monkeys investigate any strange substance thrown to them at the Zoo. However, their joy was short lived; the nurses arrived on the scene, they were all taken out

for a walk, and I was left with Marta, one nurse only in attendance, and she sat at some little distance knitting vigorously, but at the same time listening quite as vigorously to all we were saying, or, I should say, to all that I said, for Marta merely replied to my remarks in monosyllables, and I could obtain no news from her at all, or about her health, or about her wishes and wants. Warned by the doctor, I did not mention her children, but I did tell her about Little Heather, and about Frau von Mácoczy, and that she was now on her way home to Hungary. I also mentioned Phœbe and her sad story, but this did not rouse her, except that she did say that God's laws once broken, punishment was sure.

I did not argue about the matter, God's or man's laws were all one just then, and breaking either had the same effect, I thought; but I could see that religion was a subject one must keep away from. However, she seemed to brighten up as I talked, and finally begged me to see if she could not go home, or else to some quiet place where she would not be surrounded with mad folk, and where she could live her own life and not by line and rule.

She had never cared very much for food, but I could see her Spartan *régime* irked her immensely, and I was glad that the fruit and cakes I had brought her were not forbidden, and that even her own tea was allowed if anyone cared to let her have it. Her own china and silver could not be permitted; it would cause endless jealousy, so said the nurse; albeit I could see small difference between this and her own armchair; but the nurse was in authority, and I, of course, could say no

more. I had brought some flowers, and these also were allowed, albeit a hideous tumbler was all that could be found for their reception. Still, it was better than nothing, and the nurse said she wished all the ladies' friends would come, and come with full hands, but all too often no one visited the poor things from year's end to year's end. "If the bills are paid punctually, they think their duty's done," she said, "and indeed many of my poor ladies have no one save a lawyer or a very distant cousin to look to, and once here they are dead to the world. It's no one's business to look after them; indeed, in some cases the family is glad to have them here and all responsibility taken off their shoulders. Once pronounced mad, one might be a mad dog, or better, they'd shoot the dog, poor thing, and put it out of its misery, but the ladies must live." I looked at the nurse; she at least was human; all the same, I know she had a short way with troublesome cases. Perhaps I should have had the same had I been in her place and condemned to spend my life among such gruesome people and in such a frightful place.

When my time with Marta was up, I had a few minutes' talk with the doctor, and he was quite of my opinion that she had no business whatever to be among such people and in such a place. He had not seen the smallest trace of violence about her, and apart from her one mad attempt had evidently no suicidal mania; and he strongly advised me to see Sir Lucius, and, failing him, the Commissioners, and represent to them one and all how much better she would be with some lady who could look after her entirely in a house,

and above all with a garden where she could be supervised and yet have a certain amount of freedom. If someone she liked would only take care of her! I fancy the good man imagined I would undertake the task; naturally I told him that that was out of the question, but that I thought I could find someone who would. Sir Lucius had plenty of money, had plenty of places he could put at Marta's disposal. There was a beautiful old cottage-house in Kent I had once stayed at, too far from Scotland or even London for the children to be interfered with; but who would take upon themselves the duty, and, moreover, be prepared to fulfil the many conditions under which such a case is taken over from the Commissioners in Lunacy?

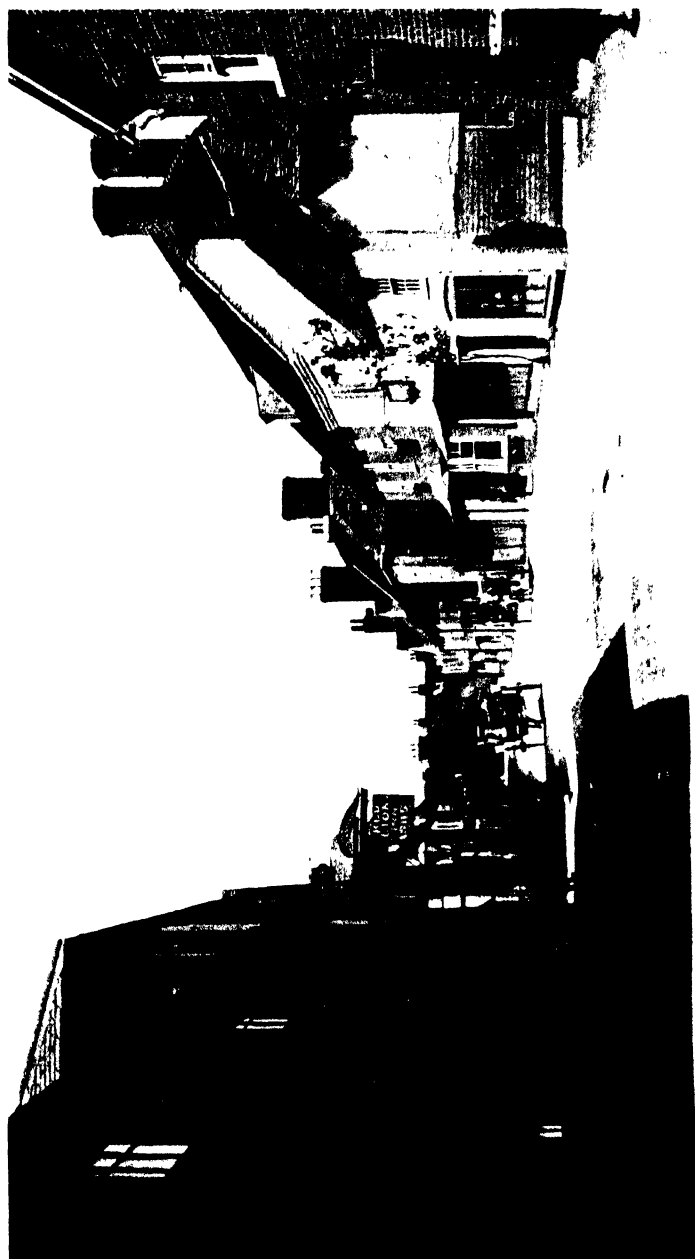
I had all at once an idea, but it was only an idea. I must think it out; and much encouraged by the doctor's view of Marta's case, I went away from Long Ridge, and as the horrible great gate clanged behind me, and the many locks and bolts were fastened, I made a promise to myself that Marta at any rate should leave all that behind, the while I felt profoundly depressed to think of the many who can never leave, and whose friends care for nothing save the fact that they are in safe keeping and cannot trouble the outside world any more.

Perhaps some day when we have done pampering our criminal classes, one or other of our lawgivers may turn his attention to the paupers in the workhouses or the sick in the lunatic asylums. I can assure them in both places there is a great, a very great, opening for any amount of reforms.

CHAPTER XI

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL

I MUST own that I dreaded seeing Phœbe when I heard that she had parted with Herr von Mácoczy and was once more on her way to England; and, moreover, I really did not know how I ought to act in the matter. At that moment we were living about ten miles from London—at Shortlands, in Kent—and as the people in those days were of the friendliest, and we all were more as one large family than mere friends, I could not see how I was to have Phœbe to stay with me, even if I had thought that it was right to do so. If either she or I had condescended to deceive our friends, matters would have been quite easy; but though I own with a certain amount of shame that I should not have hesitated to do so, I knew Phœbe would have at once repudiated the idea of widowhood, or even allow that she was temporarily separated from a distant spouse. Truth makes life very difficult indeed; indeed, if one always told the plain truth life would be impossible, and it is a great mercy that one can keep silence now and then when it would be inconvenient to say all one thinks, and I wished heartily that I could have resorted to silence about Phœbe; but the presence of Jock had to be accounted for, though, had she consented, the con-



High Street, Goosetown.

venient name he gave his mother might have allowed the position to pass muster—at any rate, in a crowd.

Then the moral question had to be tackled. How often have men sinned far, far more deeply than ever had Phœbe, and yet how were they received? Just as usual, no questions were asked, nothing happened to them. Now and again, perhaps, a particularly shameless divorce case would shake Society to its foundations, and the newspapers reaped an ungodly harvest, but in six or eight months something else would occur, the parties in the case would marry, and all would go on much as it had done before.

I am not for one moment defending Phœbe, or even defending the idea that a woman should be placed on the same plane as regards morality as a man is. I know that that is an impossible, most Utopian idea, but I am merely wondering why things are as they are. Naturally I could not have Phœbe and Jock to stay with us, but I found myself very much in a cleft stick. I should always love her and do my best for her, but that would be but a poor best, I feared, as long as we lived in the world and had children growing up around us to consider in the matter, and I was very undecided in my mind as to my course of action, when I received a letter from my old friend saying that she and her boy had arrived in London, and would be very grateful if I would go and see her. We had rather a heated argument on the subject at breakfast, I am afraid, but at last common sense triumphed, and we agreed that I should go and at all events hear what plans Phœbe had made for the future, or, indeed, if she had made any at all.

I found her in some delightful rooms in a charming old square in Kensington, from where she could watch Jock and "Mouton" and Jock's nurse in the square the while she sat at the window and tried to work or read. I found Jock's nurse was a new possession, and I wondered at her presence, and then I was told that Phœbe meant to find work of some kind or other, and that though Jock's education and future were to be his father's care as far as money was concerned, Phœbe meant to keep herself. She would not live on Herr von Mácozy for one moment after the time in which she could earn for herself. Thirty years ago it was still difficult for women to earn much, except as a governess, and that, of course, Phœbe could not be, unless she undertook daily work, and that was badly paid. Her command of foreign languages would help her, of course, but then she was determined never to sail under false colours, and meant to tell her story to anyone who would give her work to do.

I was prepared to find Phœbe broken down in health and spirits and sad and worn, but, to my great astonishment, she was quite her old self. She had had the almost superhuman strength to close the door on her past; she had had some years of splendid happiness, and she was content with the remembrance. Franz would never now become wearied of her, never now long to get away from her; and he would always regret her, of that she was convinced. She had made him happy and comfortable, but he had new duties to his girls and his estates, and he had written to say that his wife was all he could wish now, and that she had been rejoiced to return to him and to her well-beloved

country home. To me the whole situation was a tragedy, but apparently Phœbe did not look upon it in that light. She was passionately attached to Jock, and his future was her one care. I think Phœbe was one of those women who are more mothers than wives : even her undoubted love for Franz von Mácoczy was more the protective love of a mother than anything else. He was unhappy, wretched, unloved. Phœbe mothered him and cared for him; now he did not require her, she was content to step aside and, in his turn, give to Jock the adoring affection she had lavished on his father.

I know that at times a wild longing to hear Franz' voice and to feel his touch came over her, that the long evenings when Jock was in bed were often enough hard to endure; but Phœbe was too strong to allow those ideas to conquer her, and she meant to face the world with and for Jock. He at any rate should have the best that could be procured for him while she was alive to get it for him. He was a splendid little fellow, too, so strong, so healthy, so altogether charming, that one could see he had foreign blood in his veins, and had not been always in the nursery or in England. His manners were delightful, and while he openly said he wanted to see Tio and to have his pony and the big garden at home to play in, he had been so often moved from one hotel to another that he really only meant a big hotel when he said home, and he missed the space and the comforts to be had there more than anything else. I had had an idea in my head about Phœbe's future that I wanted to tell her of. I had been in communication

with Sir Lucius Branscombe on the subject of Marta, and he had taken my plan into consideration. If Phœbe would undertake to superintend the case he would pay for a nurse, give them all house room at Gorsecombe, and pay Phœbe a certain sum besides the household expenses, which were to be kept down to the lowest possible figure, and, indeed, were to be limited to so much every week. I told Phœbe all about Marta, and how convinced I was that she had only to be made as happy as she could be away from her children, to be scarcely any responsibility at all. There were, of course, some tedious restrictions to be taken into account, but these did not trouble Phœbe. She knew and liked Lady Branscombe, but what would Lady Branscombe say to Jock? And, moreover, to Phœbe, who had been what Lady Branscombe would undoubtedly call "living in sin." I was sure that Marta would look upon Phœbe's present state as a token that she had repented ("But I have not!" ejaculated Phœbe), and that therefore she was quite a proper person to live with. Her passionate love for children would be gratified by Jock's presence, and the mere idea of leaving Long Ridge would, I was sure, cause her to look over anything she might otherwise object to, the while she would promise faithfully to look to Phœbe for advice, and would never try to leave Gorsecombe until she was quite well and had Sir Lucius's permission to rejoin him and her children once more.

We talked the matter over from all points of view, and finally we arranged to go down to Gorsecombe and look at the place and see how all could be

managed there. Fortunately it was a beautiful day when we arrived at the little station, for we had four miles to travel, and as far as we could make out there was not a fly to be had for love or money. The station was apparently built by a lunatic, for there was no house near—not even a public-house—and the station-master and one melancholy porter were the only living creatures visible, if I except a few agitated and draggled hens which scuttled across the line just in front of the leisurely little train, and only just got out of its way in time. The moment it had gone, the porter disappeared into space and the station-master cast off his uniform coat and returned to his gardening, which I should think was much more in his line than any other occupation could ever be! He gazed at us with much amazement when we asked him about a possible fly. People came from Gorsecombe, and but seldom went to it: if they did, they used another station on a more important line. He didn't know why there was a station here, except that the folk at the big house found it useful. It had been put here for them, there were only two trains in and two out, and more than enough, too, he found them. It was a dead-alive spot, but it was very good garden ground, and that was all that mattered to him.

Fortunately we were both good walkers in those days, and we set out on our walk in excellent spirits. The road was a straight one, too, between hedges full of "old man's beard" and hips and haws, and with ditches full of the wild iris and the many little lovely flowers one wonders that no one takes in hand and makes something better of them.

I could study the lush verbiage of a reedy ditch for hours, the while I watched the multitudinous tiny insects which swarm there, Heaven alone knows why! If it is "fiddling work making flies," as the small child remarked when told that God made them, it must be far more "fiddling" to call these tiny creatures into being for what seems to me no earthly purpose.

Oh! how little we know of the world after all! How little we see even of the things that are just underneath our feet!

One would not tread knowingly upon a worm; yet how many tiny lives must one put an end to as one tramps through thick undergrowth, or climbs into the hedges to drag down and carry away some of the exquisite flower-branches I never see without longing to possess. I wonder, I wonder, as Phœbe and I plod along the dusty highway, if we and our puny affairs are as uninteresting to the great Creator as these atoms of beetles and creeping things generally are to us? Is there, can there, be any plan in the matter, or is it all blind chance? I daresay our walk that day caused death to a dozen insects; I know we disturbed and dispersed quite a flourishing colony of ants. How about the human walk through life's ways? Does God look on carelessly too, while some unbridled power destroys us, our hopes, our loves, our lives, finally destroying ourselves who have no say in the matter, and just have to take whatever comes in the day's march?

Phœbe is of opinion that there is no God at all, and that all one can do is to make the best of what comes, and march straight on, but straight always, no crooked ways allowed; she knew she went out of the beaten track with Franz; she can never get back, but she is

content. There is Jock and his future, and now, too, hers seems to be fairly safe. I am sure in my own mind that there is some guiding hand somewhere, but I am confused and not certain of anything, save that whatever one has in this world must be paid for, and one never gets more or less than one has earned; and to ensure this there must be someone beyond our ken who keeps a hand on the helm. Phœbe considered that she had paid by leaving Franz. I could but think she had Jock yet to reckon with, and I had to ask her what she intended to do with him; he was now eight years old, old enough to go to a preparatory school at any rate. What did she mean to tell him about their relationship? Apparently that had never troubled Jock up to this minute; he was content to belong to her and had never asked questions; but then he had never been much with other children, and had but the smallest notion of ordinary human relationships, and Phœbe could not see why he should increase his knowledge, at any rate at present.

Once settled at Gorsecombe, she meant him to have a tutor, some good, healthy-minded Oxford or Cambridge lad who meant to be a master in a school later on, and in the meantime would undertake Jock out of term time. Money was no object where Jock was concerned: the ordinary preparatory school was odious in Phœbe's eyes. She had heard from her brothers what other boys could be to small creatures fresh from the nursery or their sisters' schoolrooms. Jock, too, was much too much of a foreigner to be let loose among English boys; he knew French and German much better than his very funny English. No, the tutor was her idea, and

she had not the least fear of not being able to find just the man she required. By this time we began to think we should never reach Gorsecombe, but fortunately just at the minute when we felt we should have to sit down by the wayside and give up our quest, a turn in the road showed us the green, crouching, almost hidden village, climbing up a stony, narrow street to the hill, on which stood as its crown a beautiful little old steepled church.

We paused for a few minutes and looked about us; there was absolutely no one in sight; it was just the midday dinner hour, and children and grown-ups alike were no doubt absorbed in the principal event of their day. Fortunately a creaking sign with a very battered Red Lion on it drew our attention to the inn; at any rate here would be refreshment for man and beast, and we could hear whereabouts Sir Lucius's house was, and if we could hire anything to get us to any station before nightfall. How is it that the ordinary village inn in England is such a truly horrible place? Even in the present day, when bicycles first and motors afterwards have made them more necessary than ever, they are never able to rise to the occasion.

In France or Germany we should have had a good meal; here tea and eggs or the remains of the raw cold Sunday beef and a hunk of cheese, which apparently had been hacked by any knife that came handy, were all we had to choose from. Yet there were plenty of materials for salad, omelettes and fruit tarts in the garden; no one appeared able to grapple with the problem of gathering them and making them into a decent luncheon, so we chose the eggs and tea, and felt

how much better we could have managed the place had we only been in charge thereof.

Fortunately the weather was warm, but how well I recollect stopping at a similar inn in the winter after a meet. The village, too, was one where meets often took place, and the innkeeper should have been prepared, but he was not; there was no fire in the beer-smelling parlour; it was tea and eggs once more, though I saw through the bar window the family seated round a large meat-pie which it would surely have paid the man to let us share. As it was, I paid about 1s. 6d. for the tea and eggs, and vowed I would never again depend on the English village public-house for anything in the way of food if I could possibly avoid doing so.

In Gorsecombe, too, we found the landlord most dismally surly; he apparently only woke up when the day's work in the village was done and the men came into the bar for their informal club and gossip. He was a butcher, I think, in private life, anyhow he did not care about us. His missus was laid up "with another kid," as he expressed it, while the other members of the family looked as if they had not been washed since "the other kid" arrived, and the one red-armed, untidy servant skirmished with them, all the time she tried to boil the kettle and our eggs over a fire that wanted most evidently to go out at the first possible opportunity. However, we scrambled through the uncomfortable meal, and engaged the cab and man to take us later on to the bigger station only two miles away, and then we obtained the loan of the eldest boy to show us to the Manor House, or else I am quite certain we should never have discovered it, so hidden was it

amidst a labyrinth of lanes and trees, and so out of the way did it appear.

When we got there we found the keys had to be fetched from the Vicarage, and to get them either Phoebe or I must go there. The Vicar had "a down on boys," and the Vicaress was worse. She "'unted 'em orf with a whip"; the Vicar contented himself apparently with throwing anything that came to his hand at them, and there was, moreover, a dog, an awful dog; nothing would take the lad up the hill to the church, not if he knew it, so perforce I had to go! I left Phoebe in the really exquisite little porch, where there were stone seats one on each side, and toiled up the steep approach to the Vicarage, wondering what the dog would do, or if I should have something cast at my head.

But I was greeted by a charming red setter, with whom I at once made friends, while the ferocious Vicar and Vicaress turned out to be merely very ordinary people, though perhaps a little cross-grained and eccentric, and more than a little devoured by curiosity. The Vicar, moreover, made a fetish of his lawn and his orchard, and the Mrs. Vicar one of her flowers, and her hens, and the thousand and one trifles which occupy the minds of the ordinary vicarage folk in a village and prevent them from quite going out of the small amount of senses they must possess. No wonder boys were dreaded in that prim and most pleasant place! Sunday, instead of being a day of peace, was often one of the wildest warfare; not only was Grip, the red setter, left at large, but more than once the Vicar had made a wild rush from the pulpit

to the orchard. He could see it from his vantage ground, and boys were stealing the apples in a way boys have, but that the Vicar would never stand for one instant.

Fortunately Grip had earned a character for ferocity by once seizing a lad by his baggy breeches and holding him until his master came. The boy's yells roused the parish, and his garments were torn, but no other harm was done. He had no business there, and Grip had; worse would follow, said the Vicar, if the boy were found again, for Grip never forgot, and if his warning were not taken, next time he would most undoubtedly bite, and "Beware of the dog" was painted up on an enormous sign, and served as a deterrent to tramps as well as boys.

Grip fortunately made no objection to me. I rang at the bell, or rather I should say I tried to ring, for the bell was evidently broken, and hung out in a limp and listless way from the socket, over which, moreover, a cobweb was twined, and denoted that visitors to the Vicarage were few and far between. In about five minutes a gaunt woman, clad in a light blue dress with a crape bonnet on her head, sauntered across the lane and looked at me as if a human being were about the last thing she expected to see. I had hardly got over the shock of the contrast between her brilliant garments and her mourning head-gear when she came up to me and shook me warmly by the hand. I had a vague dread that she was another lunatic, but she reassured me by saying, "Of course, you want to see the church; no one comes here for any other purpose. If you'll come in I'll

send for the Vicar; he is getting up the potatoes in the field." I told her that, much as I should like to see both church and vicar at another time, now all I wanted was the key of the Manor House. Mrs. Curtis, as I soon found out she was called, would not let me off with a mere key. I was ushered into the most desolate-looking drawing-room I ever saw, where the hideous black and gold piano was open and an ancient "piece" displayed thereon, as if Mrs. Curtis had just risen from playing it. I knew the Curtises afterwards for many years, as they both entertained me more than I can say, and I soon discovered that every day at 2 p.m. the piano was opened and the "piece" arranged, giving place on Sundays to Hymns Ancient and Modern, which in their turn never evoked a note of music from the wayworn and weary "instrument" that had been one of the Curtises' first purchases when they arrived at the dignity of a vicarage of their own.

I sat down on a broken-sprunged cretonne-covered easy chair, while Mrs. Curtis despatched someone for the Vicar, or rather, as I know now, while she went into the study and hung out the flag that denoted that his presence was required in the house.

The stipend attached to Gorsecombe was ridiculous, not £100 a year, so, of course, there was no servant, and apparently any work that was done was done by Mrs. Curtis herself, while the ample garden and poultry yard allowed them to live, which otherwise I am perfectly certain that they never could have done. The Vicar took some time to notice the signals, and in the meantime Mrs. Curtis cross-examined me most skilfully and pertinaciously about Phœbe and Sir Lucius, and why

we wanted to see the Manor House. I was lucky enough to be able to turn the conversation on to herself, and, after asking her if she practised much, and hearing that she had no time for accomplishments, I discovered that she was secretly pining to become an authoress, and, moreover, had made several attempts to get a confiding publisher to produce a work she called "Buried in Scarlet," and that had apparently a plot as lurid as the title itself. I was constrained to tell her, more to keep her off the subject of Phœbe than for any other reason, that I had dealings with the world of letters, and, in consequence, she at once produced an enormous pile of MSS. which she begged me to "cast an eye" over, and at once give her my candid opinion as to the chances the masterpiece had of bursting on an astonished world. Long, long years afterwards I read its counterpart, presented to me first in an article in *Black and White*, by Barry Pain, and afterwards in "Mr. Ingleside," where a whole chapter was devoted to just such another book. Poor dear Mrs. Curtis! The world was not ripe for her twenty-five years ago. Now, in these maniac days of what is called "post impressionism" she would have had a frantic success, for nothing madder, more violent, more remarkable ever gushed more remorselessly from a female pen. I was relieved to find that I could hardly read a page of the MSS., for the violence I discovered afterwards, when I had time to peruse it, was shown also in the writing. Her paper was scored with dashes and underlining; it was peppered with notes of exclamation and wild dots and bars, while the names of the villains (and the characters were all more or less candidates for Portland) were

printed in red ink. She must have passed many gay and festive hours over that manuscript, I am sure, and I felt certain that my suggestion that it should be copied out on one side of the paper would meet with approval. Further embellishments would be as much a delight to her as new ribands and furbelows are to the mother of a new and lusty babe.

Then Mrs. Curtis proceeded to tell me of her many woes, and more especially of those connected with the parish, the inhabitants of which were to form the subject of her next book, if, that is to say, "Buried in Scarlet" ever saw the light, and, indeed, from her account, I should say Gorsecombe would have made an excellent subject for anyone hard up for copy.

The Vicar had solemnly cursed the public-house from the pulpit, and, in consequence, not only did the entire family of the publican never enter the church (and he was "related to half the village"), but the butcher-publican declined to sell the Vicarage as much as a chop. Fortunately they were both content with what the garden supplied, and the poultry, also, was a great standby; but the attendance at church was often too depressing; the smallest shower kept the people indoors, and here was Mr. Curtis, who knew seven languages, and was a most eloquent preacher, reduced to talk to four or five girls and boys and the old men and women at the almshouse, who were one and all as "deaf as forty posts." He had no time for visiting, even if he cared to visit such people, but he could always be seen by anyone who chose to take the trouble to come up the hill, and he would always pay a "sick call." He would bury, marry, or christen anyone who wanted either ceremony performed, but he was not going out of his way to see such

clodhoppers, who, after all, were mostly thieves, and all of them no better than they should be.

Mrs. Curtis was proceeding to give me some most lurid details about the domestic arrangements of Gorsecombe, when I noticed the Vicar struggling into his clerical coat, as he came across the garden, carefully avoiding his beloved lawn, and stepping with the greatest tenderness over its gravelled walks. He was a tall, gaunt man, with a scholar's stoop, and short-sighted eyes, and his coat had evidently seen better days, even now a good application of some cleansing fluid would have made it more presentable. But it bore evidences of many a meal on the front, and, moreover, was so tight that I expected it would burst open the moment he moved. I began to be rather impatient now, and wondered what Phœbe would be thinking of me, for get that man to produce the key I could not. Mr. and Mrs. Curtis had first an animated discussion as to its whereabouts, and, finally, a wild search among the most terrible collection of odds and ends I ever saw, which were contained, apparently, not only in every drawer in the place, but in the Vicar's writing-bureau, which was full of candle-ends, samples of corn, of potatoes, of flower-seeds; indeed, I should not like to say what the drawers did not hold. Everything in it appeared save the long-wanted key. At last the splendid idea struck Mrs. Curtis that if the house were locked up—which she doubted—she could open the drawing-room window in a burglarious style with a knife, and, this notion likewise appealing to the Vicar, we proceeded down the hill to Phœbe, who was, we discovered, fast asleep in the porch, surrounded by a crowd of small boys and girls, which dispersed hurriedly at our

approach, though Grip was not present, and had been left behind to look after the Vicarage. We tried our hardest to be allowed to inspect the house by ourselves, but most certainly the Curtises were determined we should do nothing of the kind. They were really kind, really most anxious to help in every way they could, but leave us to our own devices was more than they could be persuaded to do. We were surprised to discover that the house was furnished in a simple, solid manner, and that, in consequence, we should have little to buy to make it habitable, and I could not help saying I was astonished that in such a village of thieves as Mrs. Curtis said Gorsecombe was, it had been left unpilaged. But she immediately told us that Sir Lucius owned most of the village, and, moreover, had such powers that no one would dare to lay a finger on anything that belonged to him. Besides that—and here Mrs. Curtis became even more mysterious than usual—the Manor House had not a good name. Very funny people were sent there by Sir Lucius, not always quite respectable she was afraid, and in all the years the Curtises had been at Gorsecombe there had never been anyone who was really what might be called an addition to the place. Mr. Curtis vaguely suggested that the house had a ghost story attached to it, and it had once been the Vicarage, but since the death of the last vicar but one, the new house on the hill had been promoted to that office.

When he at last opened the front door and showed us the large, square, oak-lined hall, he informed us that the last resident vicar, being a bachelor, had used the place exactly as he pleased, and the hall had been,

in a manner, his wine-cellar. "That is to say," he explained, "in each corner of the hall he kept a butt of port wine: he began at the corner behind the door; when that butt was empty, he had it immediately refilled, then by the time he had done the same to Nos. 2 and 3 and 4, No. 1 was fit to drink, and in that way he passed his days. The church was very dirty and very neglected, and he was finally found dead close to one of the port wine butts! He didn't come up to church one Sunday, as usual, and the clerk came down to see what was the matter, and, of course, there was no service that day at any rate."

We were not surprised to hear it; neither were we astonished to hear that the next vicar, having a delicate wife and small family, preferred the new house that Sir Lucius' father had erected, as he had a fancy to hand on the Manor House to his mother; but she utterly refused to remain there. The place was dark and dull, the water supply horrible, and, since the Curtises had had the living, no less than eight different sets of people had tried the house, but not one of them remained more than one week at the most. We were longing to explore the house, but the Curtises appeared to have a different anecdote for each room: the drawing-room was rather depressing; all the same Mrs. Curtis need not have told us that no one could sit there at any rate. Rats ran up and down the walls, and there were the grimmest shadows on the floor! Indeed, one of the most interesting chapters in "Buried in Scarlet" had been suggested to her by an appearance of a sudden crimson stain on the oak floor when she had been having tea with the last poor lady. It had

frightened her so that she had dropped and smashed her teacup—"priceless china; modern Dresden, you know, too!" she added, "and as Lady Féodore saw the shadow also, she only stayed a week after that, and then the house was closed. Sir Lucius sends his agents once a month to look after the place, and the gardener's wife airs it, if it be aired; but I always say she burns the coal and the house airs itself. I see coal come here, but none ever goes to the lodge, and yet her chimney is one large smoke. There's nothing I don't see from the hill, and it's not easy to deceive me, I can tell you."

So Mrs. Curtis; but the Vicar fidgeted, and tried to stem her flow of eloquence, the while he pointed out from the window what an excellent lawn he could have made, and how very profitable the garden might become if properly managed and looked after. We had not had up to that moment the least chance of examining the kitchens or the bedrooms, or, indeed, anything really, and time was getting on, and at last I suggested that we should be left to talk matters over together, but this idea grieved the good old couple so much that we were obliged to listen to their running comment on each separate place. I suggested that the kitchen would account for many ghosts, as no one could possibly cook at the enormous open range, which had, moreover, an extraordinary arrangement of spits and jacks for roasting. All the same, Phœbe appeared to think a new range well within the region of practical politics, and that the house already felt to her all a home should. I could see the Curtises had looked furtively at Phœbe's ungloved hands, where no wedding-ring had

a place, albeit the broad band of diamonds, her one valuable gift from Franz, might possibly conceal one, and at last they blurted out quite suddenly the enquiry of whom the family was to consist.

Sir Lucius had made no restriction on the subject of his wife's personality being concealed, and I told them that she had been ill, and that a great quiet and freedom from worry had been ordered for her. Phœbe was going to nurse her, with help, of course, until she was able to return once more to her children. This, apparently, relieved the good couple considerably, but when Phœbe was examining the bedrooms and counting them, she mentioned both Jock and the probable tutor, and this naturally set them off once more, and when Phœbe went up by herself to look at the attics, I found it would be better to let the Curtises know at once how matters really stood.

I was perfectly astounded to find that, far from being shocked and disgusted, in the orthodox manner, the Curtises were prepared to stand by Phœbe to the last drop of their blood. They were rather disturbed that she flatly refused to call herself Mrs. Summers : things would be so much easier, and no one harmed ; but I explained how much Phœbe hated any appearance of deceit, and how she refused to live over a volcano that at any moment might flare up and destroy her utterly. Now no one could say she was sailing under false colours, and no one need know her if they did not choose. I could now understand "Buried in Scarlet" more than at first seemed possible. The Vicar's wife was longing to live in a romantic world of her own : her drab, everyday existence would have been

unbearable could she not escape from it now and again, mentally, at any rate, and I ceased to wonder not only at her own extraordinary book, but at the ridiculous novelettes consumed in secret in back kitchens and, indeed, often enough in the front parlours of girls and women who ought to have known better. All the same, if one cannot have fine clothes, sparkling jewels, and great adventures, one may read about them, and escape from the everlasting treadmill where so many lower middle-class wives and daughters drag out their sameful existences. Mr. Curtis spoke to me most feelingly about Hagar and Ishmael, to whom he compared Phœbe and Jock. In other days and in the East, he said, Phœbe's position would not have been considered strange. He could not make his religion a mere matter of climate. He thought she had acted a noble, unselfish part in life. Mrs. Curtis rather shook her head at this; but, of course, Phœbe was very good-looking, and men were foolish she knew.

I felt it would not be wise for the Vicar to take too unorthodox a view of the position, or there might be ructions at the Vicarage before long. Mr. Curtis hastened to qualify his remarks by saying that, of course, the fact that Phœbe was alone made all the difference. She had sinned, but no doubt she had suffered; at the moment he could not recall what happened to Hagar and Ishmael, but he would look it up as soon as he got home: as a rule he preached about things of the day and simple matters; he was afraid he neglected his Bible sometimes. However, he should do all he could to help Miss Summers, and perhaps even he might undertake Jock's first

lessons himself. At any rate, he could teach him to read and write and garden, and they could, no doubt, keep up their French and German together. I fancy Mr. Curtis had forgotten what boys were like, and I told him so; not even Jock would treat his garden with reverence, I felt sure, and the lessons he must talk over with Phœbe. The great thing was that stones were not to be thrown at her, for a vicarage is all too often the place from whence missiles are the first to come.

Long, long afterwards I found that the Curtises had enough cause to withhold any such rocks. Their one daughter had fallen by the way. Driven to evil by the dulness of her life, she had gone away into darkness, and the poor father and mother were always waiting for her return, ready to forgive, ready to do their utmost for her and hers should she ever come back to the paternal nest.

How pathetic and awful are these starved, undeveloped existences, these people who yearn to be, see, and do, and never have a chance of anything in all their days! The Curtises had never really been quite happy; he had been a half-starved curate, she an underpaid, under-educated governess. He would have been absolutely happy as a farmer in a new country; she would have been happy for life if she had been perfectly educated and allowed a glimpse of the world outside her narrow home and the tiny schoolroom whence Mr. Curtis had rescued her.

But both came of "genteel" families. Every nerve had been strained to fit Mr. Curtis for orders; every atom of pride in her family would have been outraged had she qualified for an educational post in a Board school, or else *au pair* in some school abroad. "Be genteel or

die" was the motto of the families who produce the Curtises and their kind, and, in her turn, their girl, who ran off with a rascally younger son of one of the county families, and was now either dead, or ashamed to return to the home where she would have been so gladly welcomed back had she only known it. When at last Phœbe and I had finished our exploration of the Manor House, and were being roughly jolted along the road to the station in the abominable wagonette which was the village carriage, we thought ourselves lucky at having found such a place at Gorsecombe. Evidently there would be no "callers" to explain things to. The Vicarage people, at any rate, were out of the common run, and I could see Phœbe correcting "Buried in Scarlet," and even assisting at its birth.

But Phœbe was inclined to take the position more seriously than I had been. Whether such curious people as the Curtises would be good for Marta was one thing, and another was the vexed question of Jock's education. She certainly did not intend him to get into slovenly ways, and she felt and saw that the Vicar's garden would always come before anything else. However, there was ample time to think of that; the house had to be made fit to live in; Sir Lucius must tell his agent about the range and divers other matters, and there was Marta also to see and get accustomed to Phœbe, and to her new surroundings.

It was almost early spring before Phœbe moved out of the Square rooms and found herself at Gorsecombe with Marta, her nurse, and a couple of good, strong, country servants, and then she told me her heart for the first time began to fail her. She had found London intensely interesting, and though May

would have little to do with her, and, most illogically, nothing at all to do with Jock, she did not feel the lack of society in London. Streets, shops, plays, pictures, were all of the most absorbing nature; it was a large, constantly-changing panorama ever before her eyes. She loved to walk in the Park with Jock, or even in the Zoo, where he adored the wild animals, and the keepers and he were soon on most intimate terms, and she was constantly finding out the million free entertainments so richly provided by the beloved city for those who can walk about, and, moreover, keep their eyes open all the time. There was never a picture or procession that Jock and his "Tia" did not patronise. They loved to see the changing of the guard at St. James's, the Tower taught Jock more history than any book, and he learned to appreciate the strength of England when a steamer took him down the river through the Pool, while yet another would take him up to Kew or Hampton Court, or Richmond.

I always say it is much cheaper to live in London than in the country, because one has so many free amusements, and can see so much. If one is poor, and yet loves fine clothes and jewels, one can see them so comfortably on other people; the very hoardings are amusing and instructive, too, while the never-ceasing *va et vient* of the big city is in itself the vision splendid if we have only eyes large enough to take it in.

I cannot help, either, the fancy that Phœbe came to share, I mean the one that suggests that invisible waves of thought *vibrate* in the air, and that even if one sees no one, one shares in some mysterious manner in the ideas and fancies that are for ever being exchanged among great and clever men and women. Phœbe had had the

fancy when she was quite a young girl, years and years before the Marconi waves had ever been heard of, and she mentioned it more than once after she was at Gorsecombe, and even then no one had ever thought of wireless telegraphy.

Her notion was more telepathic than telegraphic, but she declared the country dulled every sense she possessed, and that had she not Marta to look after, and Jock's education to think out, she would have turned her back on the Manor House altogether, and gone back to London, where every inch of her seemed to be alive. She had not felt the same isolation at Winterslowe, but then, naturally, her relations with Herr von Mácozy had enthralled her, and she had had, moreover, the care and interest of the comings and goings of a large and well-trained household. At Gorsecombe the country servants were maddening, and, moreover, were first frightened away when they heard that Lady Branscombe was "not all there," as they expressed it, and, finally, were seized with a frantic fright lest their characters should suffer when they discovered that Phœbe was an unmarried mother, and, moreover, was not ashamed of the fact.

Housekeeping was not easy at Gorsecombe, and perhaps it was as well it was not, it gave Phœbe enough work, and kept her from dwelling too much on the past. How did I know, I wonder, that never a day passed by without a pang, without a wild longing for Franz and all Franz meant to her? The countless kindnesses were missed, the clever talk, the way in which he always understood all she thought, and her different moods and feelings had meant more, far more, than she realised, and she also missed the mere presence of a man in the

house. There was no one, save the Vicar or the agent, to appeal to if pipes became blocked, or tiles flew off the house, or even if an exorbitant bill had to be "edited" and reduced. Oh! people may talk about love and passion, and rave over a thousand delights which are at best but for a few months, a few years; as long as women and men grow old, they are the wisest who grow old together, and gather their roses in a garden they have planted, watered, and cultivated, and inhabit a home where the homely matters of pipes and flues are as much to the one as to the other. But it is the fashion, I know, to bang and lock the door, and leave one's readers quivering with sentiment outside on the doorstep once Love has arrived on the scene! A certain amount of decent time may elapse, nay, must, before the public is admitted once more, but the door must open again sometime. Lucky are those lovers who are friends; friendship is the best side of love. Love has wings; friendship has none, as we know from the old French proverb; and I always wonder what passionate fleeting Love leaves behind when it dies, as die it must, and the valued friendship of a long married life does not take its place. None of the young authors tell us; they cannot. They shut the motor-door on the eloping couple, or the front door, any door: who is bold enough to tell us the end? Phœbe's case was not the usual one. She left no adoring spouse, she left no woman's home desolate. It was Hagar and Ishmael over again. Sarah had returned, the wilderness was Phœbe's portion. That she tramped bravely past storm and torrent I know, as I know, and will tell, how she paid for the few years of real happiness that had been hers in all her life!

CHAPTER XII

PHŒBE'S SON

I CONFESS always to a deep attachment to small boys, and I may as well own that Phœbe's son made me his complete slave from the moment I saw him at Roncevalle-les-Bains, until I parted with him for the last time on the quay at Southampton. I have always had a curious shrinking from children and people who are born on what old people used to call the "wrong side of the blanket," but somehow or other I never remembered that Jock was one of those most unfortunate of creatures, a nameless, fatherless child, at whom the world points the finger of scorn in the most senseless manner possible. I wish I could draw him as he stood at the gate at Gorsecombe Manor House, the first time I went there after Phœbe was settled in; but I never could draw a straight line, let alone a picture, and all I can do is just to recollect how he looked on that occasion, with the great shaggy "Mouton" by his side, holding open the gate with one hand and with the other keeping Mouton fast by the collar for fear he should leap up and send me prostrate on the ground. Jock was now eight years old, very strong, very straight, very fearless, very, very handsome, with splendid dark eyes and hair, and the round healthy face of a real cherub. I do not think I am wrong when I say that that youth never stopped asking me questions from the moment

I arrived at Gorsecombe until I left, always leaving out the hours when he was asleep or having his few lessons with the Vicar on the top of the hill. He was already puzzled about the absence of "Tio" and all the luxuries he had been accustomed to, and he resented Lady Branscombe's presence in the house. He was not afraid of her in the least. I do not know what would have alarmed him, but she worried him. She was not one of the family and above all she had to be entertained by his mother when he required his mother's society, and had the habit of suddenly seizing him and kissing him when she recollected her own boys and longed to have them with her again.

The Vicar had vainly tried to make Jock take some interest in the garden, but he could not succeed in so doing. He would make any amount of forts out of the potato field and fight bloodless battles among the shrubberies with his army of leaden soldiers, and he had wonderful adventures with the village lads, who one and all simply worshipped him. Unfortunately they all wanted to be his men, he could not raise another army, a hostile army, until he discovered that one of the bigger houses round had boys in it. He frightened Phœbe nearly to death one day by disappearing entirely for at least six hours, during which he had made his way to Gorse Abbey, had rung at the door, asked for the young Verrikers and demanded that they should raise a force and attack the Gorsecombe army without any more ado.

Paul and Francis Verriker were some years older than Jock, and were immensely amused by his cool challenge, and they were arranging terms of battle when their mother came in and wanted to know what was happen-

ing. Mrs. Verriker had never seen Jock, but naturally she had heard of the new arrivals at the Manor House, though she did not know exactly of whom the family consisted. She was never a good person to make calls, no one asked her to call, there was, she knew, something queer about Lady Branscombe; but at the sight of Jock her conscience pricked her, and she offered to drive him home, and at the same time make the acquaintance of his mother.

Incidentally she asked Jock his mother's name, but he had not the least idea that she answered to anything save "Tia." I do not think he had ever heard her name, or else had taken it for granted that it was von Mácozy, but as that had almost been forgotten now and at all times was rather more than he could manage to pronounce, Mrs. Verriker was, therefore, rather in a difficulty for whom to ask. But Phœbe saved her the trouble by meeting her half way to the Abbey in a wild search for Jock, and though she thanked Mrs. Verriker profusely for returning her small son, made no suggestion that she should continue her drive or enter the Manor House when Mrs. Verriker insisted on taking her and the truant to the gates. When Phœbe, at any rate, showed distinct signs of being unwilling to ask her to come in, Mrs. Verriker said a few civil words about her laziness having prevented her from calling; and then Phœbe told Jock smilingly to run in and get ready for his tea, when she and Mrs. Verriker walked up and down the little drive, and Phœbe told her at once the whole story. Very simply she remarked that naturally Jock neither knew nor would he be able to understand her position; that she meant to let him know all about his parentage the moment it was

necessary; that the Vicar knew, but that they would not visit anyone round, even if they were acquainted with and did not mind her tragic history, for naturally she knew she must pay for her position and that she had entered it with her eyes wide open.

Phœbe never would and never did spare herself, and never thought for an instant that Jock would ever call her to account. He was such a splendid child, so happy, so healthy, so clever; surely he could only thank her for bringing him into the world that was full of pleasure for him every day he lived. Why! every morning seemed to bring him some fresh and delightful sensation; the strange lovely English flowers captivated him, and the birds and squirrels were his joy, and more than all did he love English boys who were not afraid of spoiling their clothes (indeed it would have been hard to spoil the village lads' apparel) or catching cold, or annoying their parents in the way all the many French and German boys had been afraid.

Moreover, Jock had at present no idea of any difference in social standing; to him Paul and Francis Verriker were much the same as the boot-boy at the Vicarage, and the other lads who were his bosom friends. They looked different and spoke in a clearer manner, but Jock's own mixture of French, German and English was still curious, and in consequence he had not arrived at the idea that educated folk do not speak as his village friends invariably did. Moreover, since he had Jock to deal with the Vicar took curious pains with the village boys' speech, and in consequence they were not as rough as village lads all too often are; they were still dreadfully

afraid of him, of Grip and of Mrs. Curtis, but once the apple season was over hostilities were suspended for a while, and he made the boys speak properly when he had a chance of talking with them, and ever since Jock's advent he had been obliged to see more of the boys. Jock must have playmates, the Vicar must see they did not teach him things he ought not to know.

Of course, at first their dialect and Jock's own polyglot tongue had helped the Vicar; now the Verrikers were coming on the scene it would be a different matter. But were the Verrikers coming? Mrs. Verriker was absolutely astonished by the calm manner in which Phœbe stated what most women would have died rather than tell. Indeed, she felt impatient with Phœbe for what she considered her most unnecessary candour. It would have been so easy to wear a wedding ring, call herself Mrs. instead of Miss and pose as a widow. Then all would have been plain sailing. Now she was sure Mr. Verriker would not allow her to know Phœbe, indeed, she was not at all sure that she would like to know her, and there were the boys. Well, she must take her husband's opinion about them. After all, they were older than Jock, yet much too young to learn any harm from Phœbe. She would let Phœbe hear and she went home to ask Mr. Verriker. Mr. Verriker, who saw no harm in a second "establishment" in London and who had never had an innocent thought since he left Eton at the age of eighteen or, indeed, long before that time, naturally objected.

Phœbe was tabooed entirely by the Verrikers, but Paul and Francis were allowed to make friends, and speedily the rival armies grew in size and strategy. The war game lasted for years: it was long before the days of

boy scouts, but all the elements of warfare were practised by the two armies, and all three of the leaders took violently to the study of tactics, to the formation of fortresses and the rights and wrongs of international war. Not so very long ago I turned out from an old desk some of Jock's "despatches from the seat of war." He never wrote me letters in the ordinary sense of the word, but all his short life he sent me despatches, those he sent home last were no better than the vivid descriptions of the fights that raged between Gorsecombe and Gorse Abbey, and which I gave to his mother when she and I met for the last time.

I wonder why in this pleasant English land of ours all children start the war game by expecting Red Indians? They one and all do; girls as well as boys, at least, all I have ever had to deal with have this notion. It used to be the French in my father's time, and the Russians were our own favourite terror, but since then Red Indians have been the expected foes, although, poor things, they are rapidly disappearing from the face of the globe.

From eight to twelve were Jock's happiest days, I think, indeed I am not at all sure that they are not the happiest years for all of us. True there are the detestable lessons, the inflexible bed-time, the sense that one is not in any way one's own master, but how delightful it is to think there is nothing wrong in the world; no pain, no suffering, no sorrow, no perplexing questions of right or wrong one must answer for oneself! Then in those halcyon days one can always refer one's difficulties to the higher powers; the moment one has to decide these matters for oneself the mistakes, the miseries, the sins all too often begin!

Mrs. Curtis had taken a violent fancy to Lady Branscombe, and in consequence she saw Jock out of school hours, while the Vicar kept an eye on him at lesson-time, and both were profoundly interested in the child. Mrs. Curtis even began to try to write stories for Jock, but he was never fond of books. In the winter he would lie at full length on the floor in front of the fire studying any pictures he could find that illustrated fights; the old *Graphics* and *Illustrated London News* were his joy, and fortunately the Vicar had them all. I fancy they were a legacy from some of his relatives, and they have been more to Jock than any mere boys' book could have been. He would read anything he could on this subject of real war, or of the ever fascinating Red Indians, but the usual adventure book disgusted him. He was "ever a fighter," a born one, and anything else did not appeal to him in the very least.

He had also the most curious power of being able to find his way about the country that would have made him a most remarkable scout. If he had been once on a road, he knew it again. He could go from point to point unerringly with his force streaming behind him. Where strategy was concerned the Verrikers were nowhere, their army was taken at a disadvantage a thousand times and so disheartened that they soon gave up the game. Both Paul and Francis were now public-school boys, and playing at soldiers was stupid; all the same Jock was a valuable help at hare and hounds, or in following the beagles. He knew every turn and twist of the lanes and fields, and he, at any rate, was always in at the death.

When did the "shadow of the prison house begin to

close" about the boy? I fancy when he was about fourteen, and on the brink of going to a public school. Phœbe had told me that she had often caught him looking at her as if he did not quite comprehend her position. Lady Branscombe was now quite well, but Sir Lucius never suggested her returning home; all the same she was always talking about her husband and her children, and Phœbe fancied Jock had some idea that husbands and wives sometimes did not live together, and that satisfied him at first. Then he began to ask questions about the past; the places he seemed to remember, and above all did he want to ask what had become of "Tio." Mr. Curtis very soon had given him to understand that this was a painful subject to Tia.

I fear he had not always been as strictly truthful as he ought to have been, for he more than hinted there were sad circumstances connected with his father, and Jock had begun to believe that he was long since dead. Herr von Mácozy had never really been fond of Jock, or if he were his affection had taken a very curious form. He never cared to see him, or play with him, he almost resented Phœbe's devotion to him, and I think had Jock grown up in their united household, he would soon have found out what was the matter and resented the position with all his might. Even now he realised that his mother was not quite the same as other mothers, and he was not always perfectly sure either that Phœbe was his mother. The old name clung to her—she was always "Tia" to him, and as she was Miss Summers to the Vicarage folk and the village matrons, Jock began to think like Topsy "he must have growed," so little was ever said to him about his birth and parentage.

There had been a long debate as to which school he should go to, and moreover, Jock's determination to become a soldier had rather narrowed the outlook. Eton appeared out of the question; there was then no special army class at Harrow; Wellington seemed to be the most suitable place. The Vicar had taken on himself to see the head-master and arrange matters; no one need know that Jock's lineage was not a stainless one, his Hungarian father need never be spoken of, he could take the name of his mother which was the only one he was entitled to, and anything irregular about him could be accounted for by his long residence abroad.

All the same Jock had managed to feel that there was something untoward in the air, and he used to sit gazing at his mother and almost broke the silence between them once and for all, but somehow he never did. Phoebe could not think that it was necessary at present to let him hear the truth; she lived quietly and made both ends more than meet on what Sir Lucius paid, but she made her own simple clothes and spent scarcely anything at all on herself.

Books and music came from Sir Lucius, and as for Jock he wanted for nothing except a pony (which he could not have, for the Manor House had no stabling) and boys of his own rank in life to play with. This was out of the question for they were all at school, and it was only in holiday time that he had the luxury of other lads to associate with, for very soon the village boys failed him. At fourteen they were in steady work and could no longer perform their parts in the Gorsecombe army. I noticed very great changes in Jock from time to time, and especially did I notice how he altered in his relations with his

mother and Lady Branscombe. The dislike he had had for the latter disappeared altogether, and he assumed a tender, almost son-like, devotion towards her, and afterwards I learned he had had some wild idea that he was her son, and that he had had something to do with Sir Lucius's refusal to live under the same roof with her again. He was impelled to confess this to me one afternoon when we had gone for one of our long strolls together through the hop-gardens, then at their best, before the horde of East End ragamuffins descended on them and made the country for a couple of months round Gorsecombe taboo until the members of that horde once more departed.

However, Gorsecombe itself was luckily out of the way, and as long as we remained in or close to the village we were safe. But we were paying a last visit to the hops when Jock broached his astounding idea to me. I remember far too much of my own feelings as a child to ever laugh at any young creature, but I did not know that laughter would not be the most satisfactory manner in which to treat this whim of the boy's. All the same, I deemed it better to ask him quietly what had put such an idea into his head. Then it all came out. He was different from other boys. He was sure of that—how, he could not quite tell. "Tia" seemed to have been his mother in another life, she did not appear to be that any more. Then who was, who had been his father; he never knew, never remembered a father; and he had noticed, too, that "Tia" did not wear a wedding ring or call herself by a married title; if she were not married, and Lady Branscombe was, was it not more than probable that he was her son? I reassured him on that point at once, and now he was

older I told him Marta's sad story, and how her mind had not been strong enough to bear the separation from her children that Sir Lucius had deemed necessary for their welfare. I explained how some creatures resemble flowers and cannot bloom unless they have constant sunshine; that bitter winds and chilling rain are as fatal to timid spirits as they are to delicate blossoms, and that Marta's nature had been such that she had had to be removed from Sir Lucius' untender care, and allowed to recover herself in the sunshine and rest of "Tia's" presence. But Jock need not worry himself about her or even about his own parentage. All would be explained to him in due time. It was quite true that it was not the usual easy-going English matter-of-fact business; his father had been a Hungarian magnate of an extremely good and very proud family; "Tia" was his mother. I had known her long before Jock's birth, and I had known his father also. I, too, did not mind suggesting that he was dead; I did not say so; but I hinted that the subject was a very painful one to his mother, and that until she began it I should not advise Jock to enter on the matter at all.

Boys of fourteen do not as a rule trouble themselves at all about their parentage, and Jock appeared relieved at all I said; I do not suppose he had ever heard the word illegitimate in his life, and he went off to school in the very best of spirits. I had told him that his Hungarian name was dropped at Wellington, first because it was difficult for English tongues to speak it, and secondly because a foreigner always had a bad time at first among English lads. He would not care either to be called "Froggy" or "Frenchy" (and all foreigners are French to the average school-

boy), neither would he care to live in a constant state of warfare. He was not so sure about that! He dearly loved a fight; all the same, he understood that what I said was true, and in the enthralling occupation of getting ready for school he forgot for the time any doubts he might have about his position in the world, and departed without the least regret, and only knew that he was in for what he termed a "jolly good time." The Vicar placed on his own shoulders the father's part for once, and Phœbe took the first farewell of her son in her private room. She shared with me a great dislike for public farewells or greetings, and, wiser than most mothers, she had spoken plainly to Jock about some of the horrors that might await him at school. She had even drawn a fancy picture of a bride he might some day win, and to whom he must go as a stainless knight without a smirch—self made—on his shield. She had told him, in Henley's fine words, that a man is "Captain of his soul and Master of his fate," and had pointed out that he started on an absolutely clear path which might lead him anywhere he chose if only he fought himself, as he loved to fight the imaginary armies at Gorsecombe. "All life is one long fight," she said, looking straight out of the window past her boy, "a long series of waves; one surmounts one, then comes another; that has to be breasted, and so it goes on, until the bold swimmer reaches the haven where he would be, or the bold soldier gains the laurel wreath that should be his sole reward." She then described that one can only fight fairly with a clean weapon; can only swim boldly if one has a strong, healthy frame, and that she considered the "haven

where one would be" depended on the individual, on the ambition he or she cherished. "You mean to be a soldier," she went on. "Your motto must be 'For England!'; and you must put your country first, and do all you can for her honour. Never think of yourself, always look out to help the weak and poor, and maintain the right."

Jock received some sharp lessons at first, as all boys do when they are plunged into the world of school, especially when they go as he did from home, with only a tutor and the old Vicar to teach him, and without the smallest idea of what a large mixture of boys can really be.

I wonder when we shall find out that our entire system of education is all wrong, has been wrong for more generations than I can say? He would be a bold soul that would try to sail against the current, but that it is wrong I am certain, as certain as I am that boys can be fiends to each other, and make the years that should be among the happiest of a lad's life often enough resemble hell itself. Jock received much knowledge and many hard knocks, but, luckily, he inherited some of Phoebe's Spartan-like nature, and won his way onwards. He was singularly strong and well-made, his excellent out-of-door life and simple good food had made him superior in strength to most, he was good at games, and, besides that, soon started a war game, on a more scientific footing than the old Gorsecombe fights. This the boys, who were, as a rule, soldiers' sons, or to be soldiers, took up heartily, and it very soon became the rage.

I was very, very sorry all this time for Phoebe, for

every term that passed appeared to take her boy farther and farther away from her. He stayed with some of his particular friends, but never asked them back. His mother lived, he said, in a small house, and was too busy for entertaining much, and there was nothing to do at Gorsecombe, no tennis, no cricket, only the beagles in winter, for hunting without a horse was, naturally, impossible; then, should the winter be hard, there was no water to freeze, and there could be no skating. Of course, he always came home, his garments had to be overhauled, and Phœbe, naturally, must see her boy, but her attitude towards him was always the same. She was there whenever he wanted her, he could come to her whenever he liked, relying on her love, her help, her unvarying affection, but he had a right to his own life. If he liked to be with his school friends rather than at home, he could be with them; if he wished to travel, his old tutor was at his service. She even once thought of leaving Marta and going with him. But then she recollected she was paid to see after Lady Branscombe, though she most certainly now required very little supervision. Sir Lucius had taken to coming down unexpectedly to see his wife, and had even allowed the children to come and stay, on their solemn promise that neither Phœbe nor Marta should talk to them about religion or allow the smallest interference with the rules he had laid down for their upbringing.

Fortunately, under Phœbe's sensible supervision, Marta had not only learned self-control, but she had discovered that the religion she had learned at her parents' knees, and that was all in all to her, could help her, even when she thought her unfortunate children

were being doomed to endless fire and torment. Phœbe naturally had never had such a hideous idea, but in very simple language she suggested to Marta that she could protect her children by praying for them, and that Sir Lucius, and not the innocent children, would be called to account, if account there were at all. By degrees Marta had come to see the reason for holding a much kinder, nobler idea of God than the bad old one she had possessed, in which he appeared as a fiend always ready to pounce on his unfortunate creatures and punish them violently for their mistakes or sins, which were committed before they had the least idea they were either the one or the other.

Marta would always look up to her own particular Trinity, and would be all the better for being able to do so, but Phœbe kept her in a broader road to that walked in by the old Vicarage people, and, in consequence, she was happy as she had never been before. The three children were very delightful, frank, open, healthy, good, and afraid of no one and nothing. Marta could not help recollecting the days and nights of horror she had had as a child, first in expecting the rapid arrival of the Day of Judgment, then lest the Devil or evil spirits should visit her at night, and, finally, as a crowning horror, lest she had committed the one unforgivable sin, that against the Holy Ghost. She recollected the awful silence that had fallen when one of her brothers declared he did not believe in a Holy Ghost at all. Then he was allowed to explain that as we had always laughed at the idea of ghosts, and stated such apparitions were frauds, he had thought it his duty to deny the Holy Ghost, for if ghosts did not exist how could there be a holy one? After the silence the father

fortunately allowed himself to explain the difference between ghost and spirit. All the same, all the children had had an uneasy sense that their brother was doomed, and that the family must in a manner share his fate, and it was some time before they regained their usual store of good spirits.

When the children were out of the way Marta used to tell Phœbe of the horrible ways at Long Ridge, and declared that if ever she had the power she would endow some home where cases similar to hers could be taken and managed as Phœbe had managed her. Of course, Little Heather was perfect, but how many people could afford to keep their insane relations in such luxury? It was impossible, and it would be impossible, too, to obtain such surroundings without an equal outlay; surely there could be some medium between that and the squalid misery of the paying block of the County Asylum! There were, of course, private homes taking two or three patients, but even these were all too often maintained by the wrong sort of matrons and doctors. I had more than once inspected similar homes, and I could agree with Marta, and added, moreover, that until there were female inspectors or Commissioners of Lunacy the wretched so-called lunatics would never have a chance of regaining their senses any more.

Do I not remember one special home where I at one time thought of locating a connection who wanted skilled nursing, but who was no more mad than I am? I was not unexpected, curiously enough, but I was shown into a room in which on each side of a fire sat an old and imbecile woman, mopping and mowing, and making horrible noises, varied now and

then by a shrill scream. No windows were open; indeed, I think they were screwed down at the bottom by order of the Commissioners, to whom it had not been suggested that wide open windows are far more necessary for health than anything else, and that proper precaution against accident could have been ensured by iron guards, similar to those usual for the fire; and the heat and odours were dreadful. It was quite evident mutton and greens recently graced the board in the same room, while there was not a flower, not one bright or charming thing to look at, and the matron was a depressed creature in sordid garments, who had "seen better days," that had not, I felt convinced, included the smallest amount of training in a mental home.

The next case I saw had been handed over to a couple of women, mother and daughter, who would have been out of place as prison matrons. True, the unfortunate victim could not pay much; I think, however, she did pay £2 2s. a week; and she was not only inhumanly treated, but shamed mentally and bodily. The women had most cunningly aroused her anger against her own relations, who were anxious, they said, to send her to an asylum; so she would not speak to them or take any notice of anyone, and these fiends in human form did as they liked with her. There was no small humiliation they could inflict that they would not inflict; she was made to come in at the back door, and keep out of the way if visitors arrived, and, moreover, though they were not allowed to do so, put the poor creature into her bed every night, in such a way that she could hardly move and must have suffered endless tortures. All that case required was sufficient

belief in her own people to confide in them; after ten years she did so, and they took her away, and she remained for the rest of her life a respectable and presentable member of a small society, where she had tiny pleasures, a garden and flowers, and was made to feel she could be of use in the world, and, moreover, be a pleasure if she would to the few remaining relatives that she possessed.

Of course, there are not too many women who have sufficient strength of mind and are, indeed, sufficiently unselfish to become mental nurses, and, moreover, all those I have seen have depended more on brute force than on anything else. The exceptions to the rule have refused to remain in county asylums, or are else in splendid homes such as Little Heather. Marta, Phœbe, and I were more interested in such cases as was Marta's own than in violent ones; still Frau von Máoczy's had appealed to us, although hers was infinitely worse than Marta's, and required and had supreme care and management. The more Marta talked about the home she would like to start, the better it appeared to be for her; but at last the summons came from Sir Lucius to join him at once; the Manor House was to be given up, and the Gorsecombe establishment scattered to the four winds.

But for once the long arm of coincidence helped us all to a solution of Phœbe's difficulties. Sir Lucius was killed suddenly, horribly; Marta had her settlements and her widow's thirds as her husband died without a will; the children were her property; indeed, all was in her hands. There were no relatives to interfere. Matters of probate were carried through by Sir Lucius' solicitors in Marta's favour, and Marta was

able to settle Phœbe for some years in the Manor House, and allow her enough to keep it going as a home for such cases as had been Marta's own.

Phœbe and Marta had been nine or ten years together at Gorsecombe before this happened, and Jock was now eighteen and at Woolwich. He did not at all like the idea of the Home, but we one and all explained that his mother could and would save many, many unhappy women from a fate that was often enough too terrible to think of; but all the same, Jock could not bear that his mother should do anything for her living, while he had money enough and to spare and was going in for the most expensive profession in the world. Rather would he enlist and take his chance.

But Phœbe put matters before him in her straightforward way, and explained that she could not live unless she felt she were of some use in the world; that Jock was her only real tie to life; that he would most probably spend most of his life far away from her, and that she must have an occupation, even if she did not require the money, which she most undoubtedly did. She then explained that she considered she had a gift for managing these unhappy ladies, that they rested on her mental strength, and that she could help them to rebuild their lives for themselves. She would carefully select and supervise her nurses, who should be well paid and well treated, and, moreover, she would have a young doctor in the house, too young to stand in any other relationship to her than that of a son, yet old enough to know his work and to come to her rescue in an emergency. Jock was not satisfied, of course, but he was content to keep quiet, especially as he obtained a promise that

the summer holidays should be given over to him, and that he and she should go over some of the old ground he travelled as a child. She must get out of an "atmosphere of looneys," he said, or she would become one herself.

I was rather inclined to agree with Jock at first, for Phœbe began to be rather tired, and, I fancied, had lost some of her old spring and calm courage, but I soon saw that she was right. The Manor House held four patients and three nurses, who were not above keeping the rooms nice and doing fine cooking at times, while they all sewed most beautifully, read charmingly, and could on occasion play or sing quietly and sympathetically and without any undue noise or display. I began to think that the idea of a cradle-song could be applied to these weary creatures, and Nurse Lily, who had a voice similar to that of a little bird or a young choir-boy (I do not know myself which is the better of the two) fell in with my whim. She used to sing sweetly just before bedtime, tears would sometimes gather in the wildest eyes, lines would be smoothed out, and the poor ladies would be all the better for their last good-night hymn. I found that all these women had been taken from Long Ridge, by the excellent head doctor's advice. He knew as well as anyone what the evils of the paying block at Long Ridge were; he knew the tricks of the nurses, their small tyrannies, and their mean cheats. But what could he do? He was one among many. There was the committee to consider, and the endless red tape inseparable from any institution bound him also. He could not pick out separate cases from Block Z; if he did he had nowhere to put them, and no means of

treating them otherwise than as part of a whole. To him the idea of Gorsecombe came as an inspiration; he at once rescued his four cureable patients, and Phœbe, her nurses, and I waited to see how it would all work.

I must own I was thankful I was not Phœbe when I saw the arrival. One of two of the staff nurses had been sent with them, and they were naturally feeling incensed by the idea that their cases would do better in Phœbe's hands than in theirs; but this rage culminated when they recognised in Phœbe's head nurse a woman who had received her training at Long Ridge, and had refused to stay over her three years, because she had declared that no case could ever recover treated as they were obliged to treat it in every county asylum. That Nurse Monroe would starve was what they prophesied for her, and here she was, dressed, if you please, in a pretty, cool, charming blue dress, with a smart muslin apron, and, crowning insult, "not a ghost of a cap," and apparently settled, too, in luxury for the rest of her life! No wonder the unfortunate patients were prodded and pushed out of the wagonette, and begged to behave, if they could, like Christians, the while their supposed biographies were beginning to be told before them, to Phœbe! It was all the revenge the nurses could take on those who were now going out of their hands.

But Phœbe had a short way even with mental nurses, and after signing the official documents and allowing the nurses to rest and refresh themselves in the dining-room, the doctor quietly inspected each lady alone in her own room, in the presence of Nurse Monroe. There was a necessity, of course, to see if she were physically all

right, and even (alas! that one should write it) clean in every way. This once determined, Nurse Monroe set each nurse to work to unpack and bring tea. These ladies were treated as guests would be, and Phœbe and Nurse Monroe scarcely ever found sharper discipline necessary than an occasional sojourn in her own room, or a walk instead of a drive, while the reason for any treatment was carefully explained, even if the doctor and Phœbe thought that there was small chance of the patient really comprehending what was being said.

But this hardly ever occurred; even very bad cases which had come to Gorsecombe had told the doctor they understood all that had been done and said to and before them. Some day, perhaps, a mental sufferer will be treated as a physical sufferer is, and her word be taken even if a mental nurse declare she has not the least idea of speaking the truth. There is an immense amount of selfishness and lack of sense of responsibility in this world, and in all the cases of mental illness I have seen, the one idea of the relatives is to get rid of the patient at any cost. Sometimes, of course, skilful care is more than necessary, and then lucky is that patient who can afford Little Heather, for he will recover there better than anywhere else, and must recover if it is possible to do so, but the ordinary patient in a paying block of a big asylum has no chance, unless his or her people are determined on recovery and know the ins and outs of the place. But even then the herding together in the bedrooms and day rooms, and the endless little indignities women at any rate suffer, can never be forgotten, and embitter whatever life may remain after leaving the asylum

walls. When will our Government do something for the sick who leave our asylums or hospitals "cured," I wonder? All the present-day cult is the criminal one. Out or in prison he is to be pampered, petted, shepherded (indeed, when one thinks of the Dartmoor hero, this is the best word of the lot); but our maimed and halt, our poor old people, our sick, they may die or fade out of life as best they can! Private charity, such as "The Lady Branscombe Home," at Gorsecombe, does help a few; I know of other homes, of one or two convalescent homes, all run by private charity, but what has the State to give? The loathsome workhouse, where the master and matron should be a lady and gentleman, but never are; or the wretched old age pension of 5s. a week at seventy! How Phœbe and I have raged over this! Let the prison be a real punishment, or cease to exist; let the workhouse be at least as comfortable as a prison, where a gentleman is the governor, and where the food is decent and properly served; and, above all, let Government tackle the ever-increasing problem of unbalanced minds, of distraught brains. I vow when I think of Gorsecombe and Phœbe, I feel glad she did what she did with her life. If she had not she would never have met Marta, never started on her life's work, and, above all, would never have been the mother of Jock. Jock, who had been waiting all this time, because he had been hard at work at Woolwich, had passed all his examinations, and had returned home to wait for his commission, and was now ready to start out on his way through the world.

CHAPTER XIII

“THE SINS OF THE FATHERS”

WHEN Jock had passed out of Woolwich he came home for some few weeks before being gazetted and departing out into the world as a young man and a soldier. As a rule these weeks are rather trying to an ordinary household, but for Phœbe and Jock they were pure joy, though unfortunately almost at the last Phœbe had a new case sent her from Long Ridge, and it was one that required an immense amount of personal supervision. The patient seemed quite incapable of trusting anyone at all; she resembled an animal at bay rather than a human being; but Phœbe had been told her story, and had not only infinite compassion but infinite patience for the poor ill-treated woman, who, indeed, was almost unable to believe that Phœbe had not some sinister intention of making her suffer even when she was in her kindest mood.

Mrs. Porter was the wife of a man who had made a decent fortune in a grocer's shop, and had been helped by his wife in every possible way to make a success of his establishment. They had two daughters, handsome, ambitious, strong, dark-browed girls, too, they were, and Mr. and Mrs. Porter had strained every nerve to educate them and fit them for a place in the

world that neither their father nor mother hoped or, indeed, would have cared to share.

The whole lives of the parents had had but this one object, and when their girls returned from their last year abroad, which finished an education which had comprised an excellent school and then a college course at Lady Margaret Hall, they found the shop closed, a charming house taken close to London, and the parents retired and looking forward to a happy time at last, when they could have their girls entirely to themselves.

Unfortunately the excellent education had not enlarged their hearts, and the girls heartily depised their parents. The poor mother, bereft of her occupations in the house and shop, and unable to occupy her mind with books or work, or even in gossip, so afraid were her girls of her talking about the Towerbery shop, soon became silent and then melancholy, and poor Mr. Porter, overawed by his daughters and their friends, seemed unable to do anything but rub his hands disconsolately, garden a little, and furtively talk to his wife about the good old days when they were behind the counter together, and doing their best to get forward in the world.

Mrs. Porter had the curious habit of silence that so many of her rank possess, if they are not voluble scolds or bad-tempered, and day by day she became quieter and quieter. Then suddenly she appeared to rouse herself, and asserted herself in her own drawing-room, where she talked and behaved so rashly that her daughters were seriously alarmed and sent for the doctor. Very soon she was confined to her own room with a mental nurse. Heaven only knows what that

woman said or did, but one night poor Mrs. Porter was found in the streets declaiming her miseries aloud, and it was but a short step from that to the paying block at Long Ridge.

Of course, the asylum was never mentioned by her daughters, and old Mr. Porter, dominated by the masterful couple at home, paid a surreptitious visit to his lawyer, who told him to keep a tight hold on the purse-strings and to let his daughters know that if they did not treat him with respect it would be the worse for them as far as money was concerned, at all events. He did his best, but he was not only afraid of Enid and Gwyneth, but genuinely proud of them. They were very clever, well educated, and accomplished, Enid wrote cleverly, Gwyneth was musical; they had a large circle of friends glad enough to run down for tennis or music or to meet the half-and-half celebrities Enid collected at her club and through the newspaper folks with whom she was connected. Whelford was more than usually suburban; it pined to know and speak of people whose names were now and then in the cheaper papers, and, moreover, it had endless fads. Besides that, it was divided into endless cliques, in all of which, however, the Porter girls were always welcome. They had played hockey for the college at Lady Margaret's, they were not above cricket, they adored golf and skating, and, above all, they were intellectual. Whelford hardly knew itself since the Porters came, saw, and conquered, and even the fastidious youths thereof, who hardly looked at a Whelford girl as a rule, went down bodily before them and were one and all their slaves.

No one missed Mrs. Porter except her poor old husband, and, indeed, folk soon forgot she lived at all, and indeed she would have ceased to do so had not the good doctor sent her to Phœbe, where at first she could hardly be left day or night.

I happened to be at Gorsecombe when Mrs. Porter arrived, and I soon saw how very bad she was, and I wanted Jock to come home with me for a week or two, but he refused and said he would rather be on the spot. He did not share his mother's taste for lunatics, but he could help Dr. Rogers if the "old girl" were violent, and somehow he felt he wanted to be at home if only for a short while longer. He had rooms apart from the patients, of course, and never saw them if he did not wish, and he had resumed his old tramps about the country, and would talk to anyone he met and obtain any information possible on any subject whatever.

He was constantly astounded by the sheer ignorance possessed by one set of villagers of the existence of the next lot, or even of the whereabouts of many of the objects of interest of which Kent is full. I recollect being with him one day when we tried to find Ightham Mote. I had been there myself more than once, but had reached it by another road than the one from Gorsecombe, and we applied for directions at a cottage not ten minutes' walk from the place. The woman (a mother of what looked to us as a tribe of fourteen children, so small and numerous were they) had never seen it; she "heard tell it was round the corner, but there, she never went out." However, we went round the corner and found the delightful place, heard all about the ghost, and thoroughly

enjoyed our day, especially as the then house-keeper replied to me when I asked if a certain portrait were a "Sir Joshua," "No, indeed! It's one of the family," which answer was a joy to us for ever, and became one of our stock quotations. The ignorance of the ordinary countryman of his immediate neighbourhood seemed to Jock's soldierly mind as a very real danger, more especially as I told him that I knew of villagers in Dorsetshire divided by a range of hills who had never seen what lay on the other side to the one they lived on. I think he would have started classes in home geography illustrated by long tramps had he had the time, but he knew that the ordinary villagers' routine left small time for such walks. Those who worked on the land did not want to see any more of it than they could help once their work was done, and those who had enquiring minds had long since left the village. Probably they were slaving and miserable in some town, but it was far more difficult to get back than to get away. Getting back, too, meant open failure openly confessed; there was always a chance of a "job" in town. There is none for the lad who has left the country and forgotten all his country lore and country ways.

One evening Jock returned home from one of his long days out, in what was for him a very excited mood. Fortunately Phœbe was in good spirits; Mrs. Porter was improving fast, her old husband had taken rooms in the village and had been to see her and, moreover, Mrs. Curtis had taken a great fancy to the old couple and was already weaving one of her irresponsible and remarkable stories about them both. No one ever got

as much pure joy out of an ink-pot and a quire or two of paper as did Mrs. Curtis, and naturally the constant excitements at the Manor House had given fresh impetus to her always prolific pen. Poor dear Mrs. Curtis! What has become, I wonder, of those piles of manuscript? "Buried in Scarlet" was followed by "Christened in Black," "Sops to Satan" soon eclipsed them in her affection, and "A modern Lear" was, I believe, twisted in some way to describe the Misses Porter's attitude to their parents, though how it was managed I quite forget. Unlike most writers the mere act of writing was sufficient for the Vicar's wife. Fortunately each book took her some years to complete, then the MSS. was submitted to me, and finally put on the shelf with the others, until she had concluded the one she had in her head, when she would have time to go over and make the corrections I suggested in the one I had just most religiously read. As a rule, if one wants to make an enemy for life one should read and pronounce judgment on a friend's book or manuscript. The first is not so fatal, it is a book, someone has found it worthy of print; we may be, nay are most likely utterly wrong, but in manuscript, of course, it is only jealousy when we state in a hesitating manner that it is unlikely to find a publisher; but Mrs. Curtis had none of these ideas. She was positively obliged to me for my hints, and really her books were not as bad as many I have read of late years. I can only think the time was not ripe for them, otherwise some of them must have seen the light.

But this is a digression and takes me away from Jock and his mother on that special evening when he re-

turned with a long description of a most extraordinary house and owner he had discovered quite by accident. For once Jock had lost his way, he had taken the train out to an almost unknown point of Kent, meaning to make his way home with the aid of his map and a pocket compass : but somehow he was brought to a dead stand-still by the absence of a path which was plainly marked as such on his map. Instead of a path there was a moss-grown wall, in which, moreover, there was not the smallest sign of an opening anywhere. But Jock was not to be daunted ; with one of his mighty springs he was soon on the top of the wall, and then seeing vestiges of the path he expected, boldly followed it until he found himself confronted by a tall and very irate old man.

At first he would not allow Jock to say a word, and all he could do was to hold out the map and point to the place thereon where the path most undoubtedly should be. Something in Jock's undaunted attitude appealed to the old gentleman, he saw that he was no curious or heedless intruder on his privacy, and he very soon heard all about Jock, his hopes, his future and his intended career. Jock's early foreign training and his later life had made him singularly easy to get on with, he had none of the false shame or the stupid "side" of the ordinary English youth. He was genuinely interested in everything new or strange, and Mr. Orbiton, who had not been outside his gates for years, and had never spoken to any one if he could help it, found himself in his turn talking to Jock and even asking him into his gaunt old house to have some food and to continue the talk.

Jock described the place as being more as the palace of the Sleeping Beauty was than an ordinary nineteenth-century house. The front door was evidently never opened for briar roses grew all over it, the steps were moss-grown, creepers hung about all the windows, which had most certainly never been cleaned for years, and grass came up to the walls where once walks may have been, but where now there was not a smallest vestige of a path of any kind. Mr. Orbiton walked on through the grass past the house first, and taking a key out of his velvet coat pushed open a low green door at the side. The passage was dark at mid-day, but Jock could see it was almost filled with great packages of all sorts and kinds. Some appeared to be cases for pictures and statuary, others might have held books, linen, silver, anything.

But once out of this passage, which appeared to run the whole length of the house, Mr. Orbiton took Jock into a most charming little study or sitting-room. Though it was summer a bright wood fire was burning on the hearth, while the windows there, at any rate, were not only clean but wide open, and Jock could see apparently for miles, over park-like country, with great trees waving in the breeze, but not a human being, not one animal was in sight. As Mr. Orbiton opened the study door, another door in the corner, so arranged as to appear as if the books were continued all around the room, opened slowly and a middle-aged lady came in. At the sight of Jock she sprang back with her hand on her heart. Evidently a stranger was a rare spectacle at the Orbitons'.

But Mr. Orbiton called her in and introducing her to Jock as his daughter, he asked her to see that there was

sufficient lunch for the three of them. Miss Orbiton was singularly handsome and was also very well dressed, not in the prevailing fashion of the moment, but in a long sweeping garment which fell in beautiful purple folds round her, and she, at any rate, did not share the dilapidated appearance either of her father or of the house. As to Mr. Orbiton, no self-respecting scarecrow would have worn his clothes, but apparently that did not affect him; they were whole in places and I suppose comfortable, but they were only a covering, and that is all one can say on the matter.

The dining-room was as clean, fresh and comfortable as the study, and the food was ample and excellent. No servant appeared on the scene, and the intense quiet all about the place was remarkable. Jock declared that the birds even did not chirrup, let alone sing; it was, of course, late July or August and few birds do sing then; all the same one would have expected a cock to crow, or a dog to bark, or to hear some sound, but none whatever came through the open window, while Miss Orbiton never spoke and the conversation was carried on entirely between her father and his visitor.

Though Mr. Orbiton repeatedly said that he never went outside his park gates, he knew every single thing that was going on in the world beyond them, and he had very strong opinions on most subjects. It was before the days of flying machines, and motors were only just coming into sight, but Mr. Orbiton had models not only of mechanical carriages but of things which would now be recognised as aeroplanes. He was, moreover, intensely interested in the idea that these things could be used in warfare to such an extent that war would become impossible, very much on the lines of the

celebrated combat between the Kilkenny cats. Jock had the greatest difficulty in getting away in time to catch a train that would take him back to Gorsecombe at a reasonable hour, and he promised to come over again one day in the following week to investigate Mr. Orbiton's treasures, some of which Mr. Orbiton told him had not yet seen the light.

We were both very much interested to hear of the house and its mysterious owner, and had not the Vicar come in and enlightened us somewhat, I do not think Phœbe would have liked the idea that Jock was going over there again. But the Vicar told us that about forty years ago the house had been one of the most hospitable ones for miles round; that it had been crammed with art treasures of all sorts and kinds, and that when the last owner died no one quite knew who would inherit it. He was a widower with one son, but the son had not turned out well at all and was supposed to be drinking himself steadily to death, and that his father would have nothing to do with him any more. All the same he turned up at the funeral with a son of his own, a lad about twenty; the property was his, and although his habits were well-known and there was no lady of the house, all the county came to call. He must, of course, be a widower, and the Orbitons were enormously rich and as such were to be encouraged whether they drank or not.

The late Mr. Orbiton must have had a sense of sardonic humour, if he possessed nothing else, for he did not return a single call. Yet he issued gorgeous invitations to a great fête on a certain day, and for weeks before everyone in and around the neighbourhood talked and thought of little else. The staidest

of dowagers, if they had daughters to marry, agreed that if a bachelor (and a widower might be considered in that light for the moment) did entertain he always managed better than anyone else. Hints of the vastness of the preparations percolated from the servants' hall to the mistress's boudoirs. Someone said the entertainment was to take the form of an old English fair, and that roundabouts, cocoa-nut-shies and shooting for splendid prizes were to be in the park itself. A wonderful orchestra was to perform in the ball-room, and greatest surprise of all, a French company was to be imported for the afternoon, returning to Paris at once when the performance was over. One or two of the least enterprising among the county folk had definitely declined Mr. Orbiton's invitation, for they had the idea then prevalent that a certain code of etiquette should be maintained. Their calls should have been returned in due course and the first entertaining should have been done by them and not by the new-comers. All the same, though they almost repented when they heard of the many rumours that were going round, they stuck to their colours and were most truly delighted they had when they found what had actually occurred.

Mr. Orbiton was really a Bohemian of the worst kind, and had no mind to be "entertained" in the orthodox manner of the husband-hunting chaperons of the place. He was quite aware that his character was known to everyone for miles round, and that he was utterly disgusted at the mothers who would have handed over any one of their daughters to him as a wife merely because he was a very rich man—indeed a far richer man than even they knew—and the entertainment to

which they flocked in such numbers was specially arranged to ensure that they would never come again. The fair was in full swing, the orchestra was playing gaily, drink and food of all kinds was lavishly supplied, but the host never troubled even to welcome his guests. Carriage load after carriage load of finely dressed women and girls was deposited on the front terrace, but no one could see Mr. Orbiton, until at last he was discovered on one of the roundabouts, the other seats therein being filled by members of the chorus of a well-known theatre, who were all in the garments they wore on the stage. They were sketchy enough at night and in the theatre, in broad daylight the effect was inconceivable. Moreover some of the youngest and slightest of the chorus ladies were ensconced in trees, and as the county grandees passed by, a long pink, blue or yellow leg would suddenly appear, and the headgear of the lady was either displaced in a most unbecoming manner, or else entirely rent from her unfortunate head. The few men who were present, for the gentlemen had nearly all arranged to follow their womenkind in time for the French play, stamped about and puffed and grunted like so many turkey-cocks; one or two old Lords and Generals demanded to know what Mr. Orbiton meant, and all prepared to leave at once. But leaving was not so easy as it appeared to be. The carriages had been ordered at nine, many had gone back to their own stables, and none were at the Park, it was almost impossible for many of the women to walk two or three or even four miles home in a "party" dress, thin slippers and under a blazing sun. All the same, after holding an indignation meeting on the terrace, they one and all cleared out of the place,

leaving it and the entertainment to Mr. Orbiton and the chorus ladies, which was really just what they all wished and expected. For as the afternoon went on, there were several large and peculiar reinforcements, and it was dawn of another day before the entertainers were allowed to stop, when report had it that most of the company slept where they fell, and that at least three cart-loads of empty champagne bottles were sent away, when the Park was once more cleared up and quiet.

When Mr. Orbiton was asked for an explanation, he either did not reply or stated the truth, that if they did not care for the company of chorus ladies he did, and that he should do as he liked in his own house. Naturally, from that day on he was left severely alone, and even his son, the present Mr. Orbiton, was never seen near the Park again. He was often heard about, for he was entirely different from his vagabond sire, and had evidently harked back to some unknown ancestor. He had taken high honours at Cambridge, and had begun to make a great name for himself in the world of chemistry and, moreover, in mechanics, when his father died. He had returned home to the Park for the funeral, but after that he had given strict orders that the house should be closed entirely, as Jock had seen, that everything should be left to take care of itself in the gardens, and he had absolutely disappeared from the face of the known globe.

The papers had made some reference to the irreparable loss he had been to the world of science, as he had given up all his appointments and investigations when he succeeded to his father's wealth, but there was little personal gossip in the newspapers in those

days. Science, too, is only of interest to the scientist. Mr. Orbiton, junior, was forgotten, and Mr. Curtis was profoundly astonished to hear that he was at the Park, and that, moreover, he possessed a daughter who looked elderly, for no one had ever heard of his marriage, and indeed anything at all about him since his father's death so many, many years ago. Mr. Orbiton must now be well over sixty, and, of course, the daughter could be any age up to forty; all the same it was curious that no one had ever heard of their arrival at the Park!

There were two lodges to the place, and in each lodge were a couple of men and a reputedly savage dog. Huge dogs were supposed to range the place, the villages near were divided between dread of the dogs, men, and even of meeting ghosts. At last the house itself was forgotten, for it stood at least two miles from any road, and the hedges and trees were very close and thick, and never trimmed. It was extraordinary that any man should live there, still more extraordinary that any woman should.

Indeed, Mrs. Curtis was almost constrained to leave off "A Modern Lear," and begin another book to be called "The Park Mystery," but she was at a most entrancing point of her story, where the triumphant return of Lear and Mrs. Lear put to flight and utterly dumbfounded the daughters and their suitors; and she thought she would rather wait to hear if Jock found out anything more about the extraordinary couple he had so unexpectedly unearthed. Indeed, she was so frantically curious on the subject that Jock declared he would not go again, but one day he received a note from Mr. Orbiton signed with a mysterious monogram, begging him to spend a

day or two with him if he could be spared, as he was sure Jock's training as an engineer would help him in completing one of his models, which he could not help thinking would also be of assistance to Jock if he could interest the War Office on the subject.

True to her principle of non-interference, Phœbe made no objection to Jock's going to the Park, but she confessed to me that she felt uneasy on the subject. Could the man be either a candidate for Long Ridge or Little Heather or else an anarchist of the deepest dye? The Park sounded to me, I must confess, more like anarchism than lunacy, or perhaps it might be a mixture of both; but, all the same, I felt that Jock was quite able to look after himself. The “middle-aged” daughter was not likely to ensnare his youthful affections, and, indeed, he had remained so far as we knew singularly heart-whole, as men attached greatly to their profession often are, while Jock's six feet of strong and splendid manhood would account for Mr. Orbiton even if he were assisted by the fierce dogs and the lodge keepers of whom we had heard from the Vicar, but which Jock had neither seen nor heard. He had fully described the absolute soundlessness of the place; if great dogs were about he must have had some token of their presence. Moreover, he had left the Park by one of the lodges, and that was as neglected, as deserted, as creeper-covered, as was ever the front of the great house itself.

Phœbe, used to the ways of unbalanced folk, begged Jock to slip his little revolver into his pocket, and although he laughed at her fears he did so. After all, the dogs and keepers might be about at night, and no harm could be done by being armed, but as to Mr.

Orbiton being unbalanced that was absurd. He had seldom met a man with a stronger intellect. He had never met one who knew more on almost every subject on which they had touched. When we had parted with Jock at the bend of the road which led to the station, both Phœbe and I confessed that we felt a little depressed and more than a little anxious. Some premonition of evil may have been sent us; I cannot say, as I have so often had these premonitions. Sometimes the evil has happened, but more often it has not, and both Phœbe, and I refused to entertain the smallest approach to superstition.

All the same, we both felt decidedly uncomfortable, and I determined to go and inspect Mrs. Curtis's last chapter, while Phœbe returned to her patients with a bunch of autumnal grasses and hedge flowers for Mrs. Porter, who was simply entranced now by the smallest personal attention and began to show what a dear, kind, good woman she really was. Mr. Porter would, I know, stroll up for tea, plans would soon have to be made for their future; for they had quite determined to give their daughters an allowance and let them live away, if they could not treat their parents properly. Phœbe had instilled some of her strong common sense into the good old couple, and had told them that if they had done their best for their daughters that was no reason why the rest of their lives should be ruined. If the daughters would not be happy at home they must leave Whelford and go elsewhere, and the old Porters even threatened to open another shop and keep it themselves unless there was peace.

I found Mrs. Curtis deeply stained in ink and sur-

rounded by piles of manuscript, and in a most excited condition. She had actually sent a spasmodic and most sentimental story to *Whittington's Bells*, and had received the proof sheets and a cheque for £5, and had not the least idea what to do with the former, albeit she had mentally spent the latter at least ten times over. Good Mrs. Curtis! To buy anything for herself had never entered her head, and she hovered between the idea of a new lectern for the church as a thank-offering for her success, a new lawn-mower for the Vicar, or an elaborate present for Jock, so that he might be reminded of the vicarage when he was "away at the wars."

Her Sunday black silk was more years old than I can say; it had been turned and re-turned, cleaned with every remedy she had ever heard of for dirt and shininess, and finally re-dipped in a mysterious fluid she called a home-made dye; but no thought of a new costume entered her head, and she and I spent hours over those proofs, the while she talked about her "next book," and felt certain that Jock's visit to the Park would give her the fresh ideas for which she had begun to languish. She even thought of submitting "The Modern Lear" to the editor, but that was not yet finished, while "Buried in Scarlet" had an old-fashioned air which she fancied would perhaps militate against its success.

When the Vicar came in and saw the cheque, he proposed to frame it and hang it in his study, but this idea was received with the scorn it merited. Long, long afterwards I found out it went in agonising advertisements addressed to the long-lost daughter. Alas! that she never replied, though when

I knew about them and was shown them, I must confess that they were so worded that the daughter could not have understood them, and might even have translated them into a command to keep away, so mysteriously did Mrs. Curtis arrange the affair, and so involved was the wording of the appeal to the wanderer to return.

Jock came and went many times between Gorsecombe and the Park during the next few weeks, and each time I saw him I was sure something untoward had happened, but what it was I could not make out. I had been at home some little time when one day Jock came in to see me, and I noticed at once that he was not his usual calm and placid self. At last it all came out. He had become very intimate indeed with Mr. Orbiton, and the model had not only been completed, but had been examined at the War Office by a man who for a wonder knew his business, hated red tape, and saw at once what a new and powerful engine of warfare he held in his hands.

Jock had been entreated to undertake the matter, and had vainly begged Mr. Orbiton to accompany him to town and explain more fully than he could just how the thing worked, how it should be made, and, moreover, what Mr. Orbiton required for the patent. There had evidently been a vast struggle in Mr. Orbiton's mind, and with many pauses and great hesitation he had confided in Jock that he had had two most severe blows in his young manhood, and these had determined him to flee from the world and utterly decline to face the public any more. Then he told Jock that as a youth and a lad he had been most inordinately proud of his lineage, the Orbitons had been settled in Kent for hundreds

of years, and his mother had been of an equally good family. She had, he believed, married his father very young; then all at once he discovered at his father's death, and when she had been long dead of a broken heart, that the marriage had never taken place at all. The girl had run away with his father because her parents had highly disapproved of his ways, and he had taken the horrible revenge on them for their treatment of his offer by taking away their daughter and absolutely refusing to legitimise their union.

Poor Mrs. Orbiton, as she was always called, had tried to make him fulfil his promise, but he never would, and at last she had given up urging him to do so; her son was born, she was never likely to have any more children, and she gradually faded out of life, leaving the present Mr. Orbiton a boy of six, impressed by her even then with the necessity of making a name for himself, although naturally he did not comprehend for one moment what she meant by it.

At his father's death the first blow fell suddenly and with enormous force, he was in the public eye very much at the moment; he was spoken of as the son of his mother and father, but his mother's people frankly and immediately repudiated him, and his father's lawyers had to tell him the true facts of the case. Mr. Orbiton told Jock that he knew quite well that his father had been a wastrel, but he had always put it down to the fact that he had worshipped his mother, and that her early death had utterly broken him down. Of course, he knew that only a weak man fell into bad ways because he was unhappy, but all the same he had made up his mind, as soon as he had a mind to make up, that he would restore the Orbiton name, and shed

renewed lustre on what had always been a stainless shield.

Before his father's death he had married into a family as old as his own and quite as proud as ever he was, and his wife after the first shock had told him that it made no difference to her love for him. But he was thin-skinned, hypersensitive; he imagined she was pitying him and did not love him; he gave up all his work and fled abroad, where he wandered aimlessly for years, leaving the Park to look after itself, and his business matters entirely to his solicitors and agents, who, fortunately enough for him, were as honest as the day was long. Then Mrs. Orbiton died and left him with one daughter of just eighteen; and the wildness of her grandfather's blood seemed inherited by her. There was no stupid trick she would not play; she would be lost for days and turn up, ragged and tired out; finally she took to drink and became the victim of some man who disappeared, and who Mr. Orbiton had never been able to trace. The shock of finding herself an unmarried mother with a dead child sobered her once and for all; she gave up all her wild and wayward ways, and she begged her father to return to the Park and once more take up his work, in which she would do her utmost to help him. But neither father nor daughter would enter society again; they were both bent—almost broken—beneath their burden of shame. All they could do was to live alone together, working together, and doing their utmost to aid science secretly, while Miss Orbiton, through the agent, saw that the people on the estate were looked after, and though they never saw her, she saw them,

and knew her orders, and those which her father could be induced to give, were carried out. The agent lived in a country town about six miles off, and had far too good a berth to dare to speak about it. Even his wife had never heard of the Orbitons or the Park; if she had been told, Mr. Anstruther's place would have been forfeited at once. The dear lady not only possessed an immense circle of friends, but a tongue to match; someone would have found his way into the Park, and, indeed, at first Mr. Orbiton had put down Jock's appearance to something of the kind, but the sight of the ordnance map had appeased him at once. People who know their way do not walk about with maps. Then the servant question was solved by engaging a couple of Germans, a man and his wife getting on in life, who had travelled with the Orbitons for the last twenty years, and were glad to be at rest. They kept the few rooms used in order, but Mr. Orbiton had never allowed even them to unpack the many things he had bought on his travels, for before the misfortune with his daughter had happened, he meant some day to return to the Park. As he grew older he felt the stain of illegitimacy less. He was an Orbiton and a Huxlees; nothing could alter the fact that on both sides he inherited the bluest of blue blood; his mother had been a victim, his father a rogue. Well! he would live his own life and care for no one. Then came the final blow. After that he felt he could never face the world again; fate had been too much for him; he would still return home, but the front of the Park should be left desolate and uncared for, though no one would know if he were there or not, for his long

absence from England ensured that no one would know him even by sight.

Still, if he went about he might meet some of his many former foreign friends, so it was safer to remain at home and bury their shame where no one could ever taunt them with it. It certainly was a most extraordinary story, and accounted entirely for Miss Orbiton's silence and her father's ways. Miss Orbiton had vowed to devote herself entirely to him; and he had been goodness and sweetness itself to her in all her sins, all her trouble. I began to think that Phœbe's ways with mental invalids were the ways one should approach all sinners with. If Mr. Orbiton had stormed at his daughter and turned her out of his house, or even sent her to an institute, which at one time he most certainly felt inclined to do, she would most certainly have punished him in one way or the other. But instead of that he mingled his tears with hers, obtained the help of two most excellent ladies who looked after her until all was well over, and finally suggested the move to the Park, where they could regain their mental balance and their health at the same time.

Now and then father and daughter would go up to town and see what was going on in the way of theatres and music and pictures, but as the years passed on they cared less and less to leave the safety of their own house. Once Rhoda had had a horrible fright when she was waiting for a cab at the theatre door. The man to whom she owed her downfall passed her; fortunately he was engrossed by his partner, a tall, beautiful woman covered with jewels, and did not see her, but the shock was dreadful. When her father returned to her side

she was white to the lips and trembling; he asked no questions; after all these years he did not intend even to exact the confidence that was his due; but Rhoda begged him to leave London, and she had never accompanied him again in his visits, which now had in their turn entirely ceased. Newspapers and books were fetched from the station by Hans, who never learned a word of English and never would; the supply of food also was managed in the same way. The station-master, as we knew, only cared about his garden, and was far too stupid to wonder at the German manservant. The German scare was still in the far future, else perhaps someone might have investigated Hans' presence in Kent. Really, when I recollect the freedom from scares and from prying reporters on the look out for "copy" that existed twenty years ago, I am almost converted to the idea of the "good old times," albeit I do not believe in what is generally meant by that expression.

Jock was evidently much impressed by the whole history, and I could not help seeing that he was uneasily looking back at his own past and wondering if, after all, Mr. Orbiton and he had not much in common. Mr. Orbiton's flat refusal to let his name appear in connection with the model had depressed Jock extremely, more especially as he had remarked that if his name became familiar all the world would drag out his unhappy history into the light of day, and he would never survive the disgrace of having to declare he did not possess a legal name. His mysterious signature was a monogram composed of the letters of his Christian name and his mother's and father's names.

Of course, a man can call himself by any name he likes and can even assume it permanently and legally by deed-poll if he cared to do so, but Mr. Orbiton would never do that.

There was no need; he was the last of his line, and he and his daughter had arranged that when they died the house and property should be devoted to charitable ends. They had shown much interest in Jock's mother's work, and they also had some scheme that should provide for children born under the same unhappy circumstances that Mr. Orbiton had been, though he confessed he could not bear the thought of such children, and he had talked to Jock about the Japanese idea of the worship of ancestors, and declared that the only thing that kept men straight and women pure was the idea of a stainless ancestry, and that he would give all he possessed to remove the bend sinister from his shield.

As Jock told me the long story, I could see quite well that it had deeply touched and impressed him, and he ended by asking me what I thought about the matter. Personally I quite agreed with Mr. Orbiton, but I did not want to say so, and I hesitated. He—or she—who hesitates is lost. Jock started to his feet. "You do agree with him; and yet who and what am I?" he said. "That is a question you must answer for yourself and ask your mother," I replied; "you are a dear, good lad, Jock; you love and reverence your splendid mother. What more can you want or ask?" Jock did not speak for some time, then he told me that the question of his birth had never troubled him until lately. He knew

that his father was Hungarian, and he even knew his name, and that painful circumstances had separated his parents; but he had never suspected what he now felt must be the truth. A dense black pall seemed to cover the earth; there was nothing further to live for, if his mother were what she must be, no woman could be worth speaking to; he could never marry, he was a fraud. I cannot put down all the wild and whirring things he said. Fortunately he could not reach home for another day or two; we were the other side of London in those days to the one where Phœbe lived, and, moreover, Jock was engaged out for the two nights he was with us. I had some difficulty in making him go; he was not fit, he said, to associate with decent men and women; he would be ashamed to be received under false pretences by our friends. I told him frankly that his birth had never made the least difference to me, and that he was making mountains out of molehills. But Phœbe's education of her son now recoiled on her own head. She had taught him the lines of the late Poet Laureate:—

“Who loved one maiden only and who claved to her.”

She had immersed him in chivalric lore, she had implored him to keep himself unspotted from the world. She—she was his mother truly, but she was not, never had been, a wife. Jock's world fell about his ears with a crash, and for the time he felt nothing but acute and blinding misery. I was certain that Phœbe should tell him what she thought fit herself, and I declined to discuss the matter farther except to repeat that he had nothing to be ashamed of personally, and

that I looked upon his mother as one of the best women I had ever known. Her sin had set her apart from the world, but to my mind she had nobly expiated it; she could have lived in the greatest luxury; she could have called herself a widow, and she could have gone into society and brought Jock up to be of no use at all. Instead of that she had lived simply, earned her own living, and, moreover, by devoting herself as she had done to the sad and suffering she had been of far more use in the world than half the women whose names were ostensibly stainless, even were so, no doubt, in the fullest sense of the word, but were not real mothers prepared to sacrifice everything in the world for their children's future, and whose flirtations—to use a mild term—made them the bye-word of two continents.

But alas! alas! Jock's mother had been his idol, his model of what a wife should be; he had believed in her as he believed in duty, in God. All I could say did not help him. I could not say I did not think she had not been wrong, for I had always maintained that she was inexcusably so; but I could say that she had redeemed the past, and it was not for Jock to turn and rend her now, at any rate.

I had to leave him to himself for an hour or two, and I just sent a line to his mother. She was wiser than I, after all; she knew her son better than I did; she would know how to treat him; so all I wrote was that "Jock knew and was taking the shock badly," but I confess I was glad to see him go home, although I trembled to think what would be the outcome of the next few days!

CHAPTER XIV

NEMESIS

Two or three weeks passed by, and not one word did I hear either from Phœbe or Jock, and I was beginning to feel very uneasy indeed about both mother and son, when, to my astonishment, Mr. Curtis walked into my writing-room one day, and I could see at once that something most untoward must have occurred. In the first place, I knew that the good Vicar never left Gorsecombe from one year's end to the other, and in the second he was palpably disturbed and unhappy, and could not even sit down quietly, but roved from chair to chair and from chair to sofa, until I felt constrained to beg him to remain stationary and to tell me at once what had happened.

But that unfortunately was just what he appeared quite unable to do, and I had to wait until he was comparatively at ease before I heard that Phœbe had broken down entirely, and that Jock had thrown up his commission and had disappeared altogether from his home. He had returned to Gorsecombe and had at once asked his mother for the particulars of his birth which I had denied him, and had behaved more as a heathen ruffian than the gentle, lovable, easily managed Jock whom we all thought we knew so well. Even the household

had been frightened, and he had dashed away from the Manor House, leaving Phœbe in a dead faint on the floor, whence she was only roused to take to her bed, where she lay in the darkened room and refused to speak to or be spoken to by anyone at all. Mrs. Curtis was with her, and the nurses and Dr. Rogers were doing their best for the patients, but naturally the atmosphere was charged with mystery, and all were suffering from the sudden breakdown of the mainstay of the house.

Even the patients knew that matters were not right, and there had been one or two noisy outbreaks which threatened seriously to harm the good that Gorsecombe had done; and even Mrs. Porter was crying sadly, and feeling as if she would once more become the miserable creature she was when she came under Phœbe's fostering care.

I knew Phœbe too well to believe for one moment that she would remain broken or even inert, and I felt that she would soon recognise that others depended on her and that she must rouse herself, no matter what had occurred between her son and herself. There was Jock to find, at any rate, and, if possible, to persuade that resigning his commission was about the maddest thing he could do. All his education had been to one end. He was a soldier to the bone. What would become of him if he refused to benefit from the training he had had, and turned in desperation to some other walk in life? But Mr. Curtis had absolutely gone on his own initiative to the War Office, and had discovered that Jock's papers had been sent in at once, and that as far as that was concerned his military career was at

an end. A dignified official had even expressed his regret, but he had no information to give the poor Vicar, and no one knew exactly what steps to take next in the matter. Mr. Curtis asked me to return with him to Gorsecombe and see what we could do, first with Phœbe, and then to find Jock, and after a little hesitation I arranged to follow him down in a couple of days.

It was well-nigh impossible for me to return with him, but unless anything else happened I would be at Gorsecombe for what we were now beginning to call the "week end," and see what I could do to help in the matter. It was quite early spring, and I was glad to be once more in the real country, albeit Kent is too close to the great city to please me entirely. Still, even there the snowdrops and primroses were coming out, the twin grey-green leaves of the honey-suckle were unfolding, and every tiny stream seemed let loose and was rushing brown and foam-edged across the lanes and down the sides of the road from the station to the house. I had purposely taken the long road, for I felt if I had the quiet four miles' walk to Gorsecombe by myself I should be able to think over matters before I met my old friend. A post-card from the Vicar with "recovering" on it had given me hope that I should find her better, but I was not prepared to be met on the doorstep of the station itself by Phœbe with the pony-cart for my modest bag, the while she proposed the boy should drive and we should walk, as we had done the first time we had come on our voyage of discovery to the dear little village.

Phœbe appeared to me just as she always did; all

the same, I could see she was in what we used to call in jest one of her "marble moods." She was encased in an armour of reserve, and would only speak of the weather, the roads, the garden—anything save the one subject which we both knew quite well engrossed all our thoughts. But Phœbe could never speak out as so many people can, about things that either hurt or please them greatly. I recollect that my mother never could, and as for myself I share the same peculiarity.

People say that North Country folk are dumb compared with the denizens of the south, and we all have North Country blood in our veins, and I personally have and do suffer horribly from this inheritance. Therefore I knew I must wait until Phœbe spoke, otherwise my visit might as well have not taken place at all.

It is astonishing how many things we found to speak about as we wandered along the delightful lane, which I compared rather to its disadvantage, I fear, with my best-beloved lane in far distant Dorsetshire, which, however, Phœbe had forgotten, she said, or never seen, I forget which.

Winterslowe truly was on the other side of the hills, but that anyone could be in the neighbourhood and not learn Holme Lane by heart was incomprehensible to me, and the description of its mosses, its tiny river, its red-capped fungi, and its branching trees, and great rhododendron clumps carried us along until we were almost half way to the Manor House. Then I had to hear a good deal about the patients, one of whom had turned out to be an expert gardener when she chose, but as her ideas of gardening were at times the



reverse of sane, she had to be given a patch all to herself, where she could plant and replant as the fit took her, the better part of the real garden being attended to by her only when she was amenable to suggestions, and would allow Mr. Curtis to superintend her, as he was always willing to do.

Unfortunately, this particular woman had wild desires for the most expensive bulbs and seeds, and had to be watched continually, for she would send extensive orders by post, and until matters were explained, the seedsmen had despatched tremendous parcels, all of which had to be first fetched from the station and then sent back once more. Finally, all the nurserymen for miles round were written to, and told to say that such and such goods were all sold out, or else the letters were stopped; but Phœbe found she could manage best when a small greenhouse was given over to her patient, where she grew seeds and tended bulbs indoors, albeit she did not like her open air ideas to be interfered with.

Imagine such talk as this when we were both longing to break the ice and speak of the matter which had brought me through London to Gorsecombe! At last I felt rather tired, and suggested we should rest a few minutes on the stile by which we reached a short cut to the Manor House. The faint brown flush that speaks of waking life was on the willows in the hollow; the silver-grey palms were out, and so were the yellow catkins, and a gorgeous lark had sprung up into the clear evening sky and was singing at his very, very best. At last Phœbe said: "I could have borne it better in autumn."

I know that feeling well. Trouble, an outrage always, is unbearable when the world awakes to life, and all around us is happy and gay, and we in our turn ought to be happy too. Alas! if flowers return with the spring, so do our sorrows. If flowers bloom once more, so do our wounds open and bleed. Oh! it is hard to have one's heart broken to pieces in the spring; in autumn, in winter, we could bear it better, but to have spring spoiled for evermore, and summer turned into a gloomy shadow, nothing, nothing on earth can ever compensate us for that! I took Phœbe's hand in mine and pressed it in silence. "Do you recollect," she asked me, "how someone in the old days said I had nailed myself to my self-made cross?" I nodded. "Well!" she went on, "it is true. I did, but Jock—Jock! I did think he loved his life and was happy. I cannot tell you all he said if I would; I don't think he knew himself all he said, but he declared he would never see me again, and that I was to him as if I had never been." Of course, I asked her very gently and quietly what had really happened, and it appeared that Jock had suddenly rushed down to Gorsecombe and immediately demanded a full account of his parentage. Phœbe had really forgotten what it might mean to her son, for for so many years she had lived out of the world immersed in her work and secure in the friendship of those who knew her story, that she had not cared for anything else, save Jock's future as a soldier, and his many successes as he passed through school first and Woolwich afterwards. She had vainly tried to explain the matter in the old foolish manner to Jock, but he would not listen. "Love was disgusting," he said, "another name for lust."

He was very plain spoken, poor lad, and he had dashed away from Gorsecombe, swearing he would never see his mother again, or anyone else he had ever known, until he had made a name for himself, and one he would take care no one should recognise who had known him as Jock Summers. If Phœbe had cried I could have perhaps borne all this better, but she never shed a tear, only told me all that had happened in an even tone of voice, with scarcely any expression. She had clasped my hand very tightly in hers, otherwise I should have imagined she was telling someone else's tragedy, certainly not her own. But when she went on to say that she could bear it all if Jock were found, if he would only communicate with someone, she did shed one or two difficult tears, and I was at my wits' end to know what to advise her for the best.

It was awful, hideous, to take up the paper and not know what she might see there. Jock was reckless; he might get run over, fall into a river, anything. I suggested a visit or at least a letter to the Orbitons, but Mr. Curtis had already written, and Mr. Orbiton had replied that Jock was in the right to leave his mother to herself, and that a woman who could knowingly inflict such a wrong on a human being as Phœbe had done on her son had no sympathy from him. All the same, she could rest secure that Jock was well, and that he would never communicate with her again until he could either forgive her in a measure, he never could or would do so fully, or else bring back a name he had made entirely for himself. He had about £80 left, Mr. Orbiton said, and he should keep that, but he would never take another shilling from his

father, and the sooner Herr von Mácoczy was informed of his resolution and its cause the better.

I knew how time softens such blows as Jock had received, and how foolish anyone is who allows himself to suffer agonies for another's fault, and I felt certain that the boy would sooner or later discover this for himself, and start out to make his own way in life. It is absolutely horrible to have relations who do disgraceful things—parents who are not all they should be, even brothers and sisters who break the laws either of the social or moral code. But if one is innocent oneself, what does it matter?

I never could dislike or despise anyone because of what their connections are or did; one likes or dislikes the person, not the acts or doings of those to whom they are related; and no doubt Jock would in time learn this fact, and being glad, as he always had been, that he was alive, would regain his balance, and once more feel that his mother had done her utmost for him in every way since she had had anything to do with him at all. Phœbe did not blame her son for his cruel words, indeed she never blamed anyone save herself. From the first she had recognised that there was the danger ahead. Would it have been wiser had Jock known the truth from his boyhood? I said no, that if he had known, as at one time it was meant he should, he would never have faced life as he had done, worked as he had, and made as many friends as he had, and that whatever happened now, he had twenty happy years to look back on, which would enable him later to recover his balance and become a happy, useful member of society.

That he had thrown up his commission was a great pity. I felt sure if he had only talked matters over with me first, he never would have been so rash and foolish, and I put down a great deal of his agony to his friend, Mr. Orbiton. Had he never met that embittered old man, he would have most likely listened to reason and understood that no one need know the real circumstances of his birth, and then he could have joined his regiment and finally carved out a plan of life all his own in congenial surroundings. Mr. Orbiton had cast his own future to the winds rather than become celebrated under a name that was not legitimately his own, and Jock had done the same.

Neither his mother nor I could think what his idea was for the future, and we talked about him until the fading light suggested that it would be wise to make our way to the Manor House before it became too dark to find the path. I could see that Phoebe was in a dreadful state of suppressed alarm, although a stranger would have thought her singularly quiet and impassive. Every letter that reached the house was seized by her and carefully scrutinised. She sprang to the window at every strange footstep on the gravel walk, and when not occupied with her patients she sat at her window looking out until I dragged her away for a walk, and insisted on her recognising the fact that Jock was not likely to communicate with any of us yet, and that if she continued to live in a state of terror she would be of no use to herself or anyone else for the matter of that.

I had had all sorts of wild ideas myself of advertising, or of making inquiries through an accredited agent, but

finally I made up my mind to beard Mr. Orbiton in his den and see if he would not tell me something that would prevent Jock's mother from becoming seriously ill. I felt sure that Mr. Orbiton knew more than we did, and I even broke down part of the encircling hedge and made my way to the side door and walked in on Mr. Orbiton in his study before he had the least idea that anyone so impertinent and daring as myself had penetrated to his lair.

I found the dragon a very mild and pleasant specimen of his race, and I had no difficulty in squeezing out of him the fact that he had heard from Jock, that he was quite well, and that he had actually enlisted as a private in the Engineers, and was now going through the shops in the usual manner at Chatham. Jock's all-round training had stood him in good stead, he could use his hands, he had at least two trades at his fingers' ends, and he was liking his work, albeit, of course, the men were rough, and were apt to be suspicious, as were his officers, of his superior ways of speaking and bearing himself. Naturally, Mr. Orbiton told me all this under the seal of absolute secrecy as far as locality or Jock's whereabouts were concerned. He also promised that he would tell me at any time I wished all he heard from the boy, but always under the understanding that his mother should only hear he was well, happy, and working hard, and that under no circumstances should I give Jock away, not even if he were ill, unless the lad wished it himself. Then Mr. Orbiton would communicate direct with Phœbe, so that no time should be lost. I found Mr. Orbiton a very delightful companion, and I was equally pleased

with his grim old house and garden, more especially as he was beginning to contemplate setting both in order, in case he died and his daughter did not feel equal to the heavy task.

I think Jock had aroused Mr. Orbiton to a sense of the foolish manner in which he was wasting his life, and that of his daughter too, and their sorrows and sins were so old now that they had ceased to pain. Was it right to live among dust and ashes, and allow the beautiful things they had collected to lie in the dark, for the house to moulder and spoil, and the garden to be untended, when so many unhappy creatures in London would be thankful to come down to the rest and quiet of the sweet country peace?

I found Mr. Orbiton shared my ideas on the subject of what I may call, for lack of a better name, the orthodox poor. He had no intention of seeking the people he wished to benefit in the slums; he felt as I do that they were amply looked after; but he was sorry for the poor gentle-folk, who are never reached by the longest arm Charity ever made, for the hundreds of men and women and young people who ought to have money and pleasures, and who have been scurvily treated by fate; and if he opened his house it would be to those, and not to people who would not appreciate his treasures, or even understand the manner in which he meant them to live.

I thought of Marta's numerous brothers and sisters, happy enough now she was untrammelled by Sir Lucius, but once such miserable, uncared for, almost forgotten waifs and strays. I recollected the widow of a doctor I had once known, who was left with six

little delicate children to educate and bring up with scarcely a penny to call her own, and who had to labour all day teaching them and some other infants until her health broke down, and she died because she could not have the food, let alone the rest and care, that would have allowed her to grow into a happy and healthy old woman.

Institutions swallowed the children, those terrible make-shifts of homes for the gently-born; then the boys emigrated, and the girls became drudges. All this need not have happened had there been someone at hand who knew and understood what she really wanted to be able to live. Then there were the many, many women who were brought up in good, even luxurious homes. Something happened to the parents before sufficient provision was made for their old age, extravagance maybe, imprudence certainly, the girls did not marry, and at fifty a penniless woman has a hard time anyhow. Now, if Mr. Orbiton could save even a dozen women from destitution he would feel he had earned a right to bear any name he liked, while that of benefactor would be his noblest title, look at the circumstances in any way he would.

Jock had certainly aroused Mr. Orbiton, and if in his turn Mr. Orbiton had sent Jock away from Gorsecombe, I fancied the older man was now anxious to do the most he could for the lad, albeit he would hear nothing about Jock's mother, and would only say whatever happened to her most certainly served her right. It was only when I told him plainly that Phœbe's life had been one long sacrifice that he would say nothing more against her; he owned there were extenuating

circumstances after a while, but all the same it would most undoubtedly be better for Jock that he should carve his own way in the world, and be given time to recover from the shock he had received, and to learn to recognise that he was as much an individual as part of the social whole. So I could only tell Phœbe that there was no need to worry, that Mr. Orbiton knew where Jock was, that he was well and busy, and that no doubt in time matters would adjust themselves and mother and son would be once more united.

I sent Jock a letter through Mr. Orbiton, telling him all that was happening at Gorsecombe, and begging him to write to me direct. I would neither advise nor scold him, he must find his own way through the maze, but I was ready for his mother's sake as well as his own to help him in any way I could. Fortunately he wrote back to me direct, and quite as he always did. He did not speak of Phœbe or even of Gorsecombe, but told me all he was doing, that he really enjoyed the life, and that both officers and men were disposed to like him, more especially as they found he did not put on "side" or pretend to anything more than the rest of the privates had or were. He was rather inclined to wish that soldiers resembled the police and could have their separate rooms and homes, but the food was good, the work interesting, and, above all, there were stealthy rumours abroad that there might soon be a chance of war.

It was the early spring and summer before the disastrous and wicked Boer war, but outsiders such as we were had not the least idea of what was impending. I recollected afterwards that, on our way to Aix that

summer, some men in the train spoke heedlessly of being sent out to buy mules in Africa, for a great many were likely to be wanted; and Jock's letter certainly would have "given the show away" to anyone who had the least idea of the hideous calamity that was hanging over England. But I was abroad until late August, and even when we returned we had not the least idea that a real fight was imminent.

I remember speaking of it to a soldier who was returning to India that month; he pooh-poohed the whole business. It would not come to anything, it could not, and even if we had to resort to blows, just a few would soon despatch the Boer farmers. In any case nothing could happen until the following spring, when the grass would have grown and there would be something for the horses to live on, for at the moment the veld was as dry as a bone. I fancy my friend the Colonel was not acquainted with Africa. Anyhow, we know what happened and how the war started, and there is no need to recapitulate a thrice-told tale. Yet I solemnly believe the war need never have happened at all, and how well I recollect how I was assailed by my friends with all sorts and kinds of arguments on the subject when I stated boldly how I regarded it. "It would cost us nothing." "It was such a rich country we should be pounds and pounds better off as a nation once the war was over than we had ever been before." "There would be new openings for all our sons and even for our daughters; the Boers required a lesson."

I have not had an opportunity of asking the most cock-sure of those women what she thinks now. Her

only son lies dead at Magersfontein, her husband did not shine brilliantly at Spion Kop, though he came home safely enough himself, and none of the people I know are a penny better off, while we personally are paying war taxes now, and I suppose shall do so for the rest of our natural lives! No one who ever lived through the last three months of 1899 and the whole of 1900 will ever forget that time. I was at Brighton where I heard the newsboys calling out the fact that the first guns had been fired, and coming out of a London theatre a few weeks later I saw that our first General had been killed. After that there were no more theatres or amusements for months, for all was far too black and dreadful. Boys I had known in their schooldays were swept away in swathes, men returned shattered in nerves and health, indeed, some returned shattered in nerves only. There was something about the new warfare they could not stand, the creeping, stealthy stalking of the men as if they were deer in Scotland, the fact that there was no hand-to-hand fighting, and the smokeless powder, all combined to make the warfare dreadful, and unmanned those who otherwise would have fought no doubt with the best.

We had private anxieties of our own during that hideous time, but what was the good of worrying about them? A lad may be killed in the streets of London, or may catch a disease at home. I never could snatch at the papers to look with strained and agonised glance at the casualty list, as did so many other mothers during the war. If a man dies doing his duty one can but feel glad and proud; other losses

are a thousand times worse; so we hoped for the best, and the war went on, and after the ghastly week in December all I personally longed for was revenge for those black days, and had I been a man I would have gone out somehow, in some capacity, and struck as many blows as I could at the treacherous and often unseen foe!

I never knew what bitter, burning shame was until the winter of 1899-1900. I felt as if I could cheerfully have buried my head in a sack and ceased to see or know anything. To live to be ashamed of one's country is awful! I was ashamed then, I whose proudest boast always was that I was English, and whose love of her nationality was a real, burning, and actual thing.

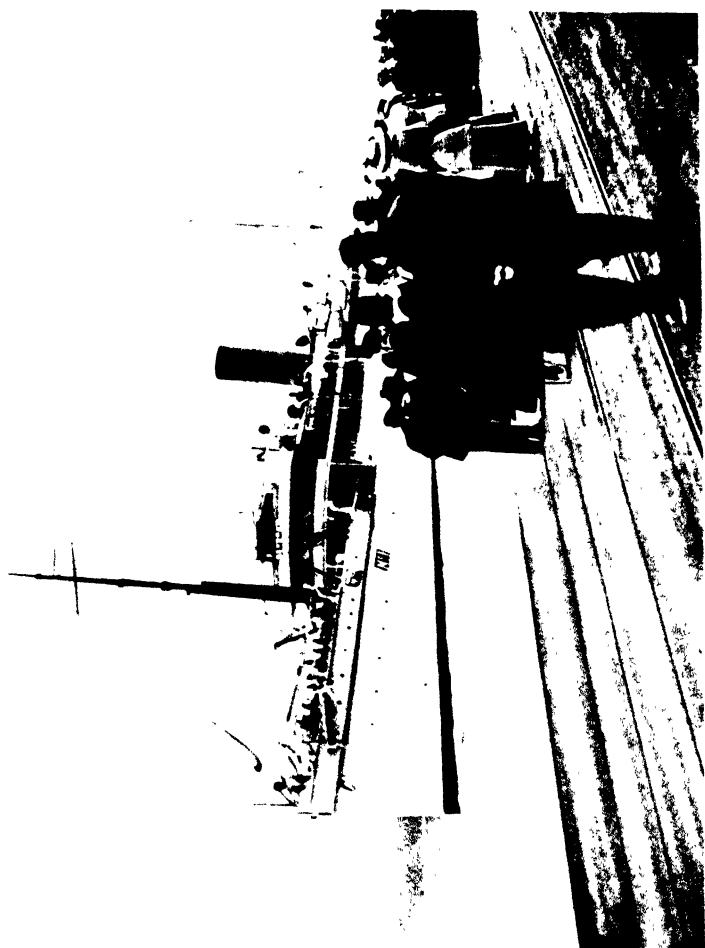
I was not surprised to have a letter from Jock written in much the same spirit, albeit he was so much happier than I was in that he was a man, a soldier, and was about to go out to South Africa to look after the lines of communication and the bridges and rails. He was to sail from Southampton; he knew I hated public farewells, for the matter of that so did he; but he felt he must say good-bye to someone, and, moreover, he could take out anything I might like to send to my special soldier, who had sailed the month before in the *Majestic*. I did not want to go, but I felt I must, and, moreover, I begged Jock when I wrote to send a line to his mother, or at least to allow me to tell her what was about to happen. But he sternly refused permission for one thing or the other. He could not yet forget what had happened. We talked the matter over together at home, and on my own account I went once more to Gorsecombe and told Phoebe that Jock was

going to the seat of war, and that he had asked me to see him off at Southampton one day in the next week. I think it was a Saturday, but now I almost forget, and I have burned all my diaries, for life nowadays is at a full-stop for me.

Phœbe listened quite quietly to all I said, then she made up her mind to see Jock go. I said it was unwise, she could never bear it; I even was feeling rather unhappy at the mere idea. I hate emotion, bands playing, flags waving, steamers full of cheering men, going no doubt many of them to their horrid, nameless graves on the dry and arid veld, and I knew I should have that ghastly creepy feeling down my spine that similar emotions always give me. I might even cry in public—a thing I would sooner die than do. As to Phœbe, could she stand aside, a veiled, unknown figure, and see her boy kiss me good-bye, and know that she, his mother, was outside it all, and that he was going away unforgiving and even uncaring for her feelings in the matter? Phœbe looked at me and said nothing at all, except that she had made her arrangements. Dr. Rogers had sent for a friend to be with him in case he had any trouble, so the patients would be quite safe. I was not to know she was at Southampton. Jock would never know; she had made up her mind. She would rather not tell me her plans in detail, but we could meet at the hotel close to the docks afterwards and go back to London at any rate together.

It was a horrible March day when we went down the familiar line, a line I never travel on nowadays without re-living over and over again that especial time

of misery. The tears shed at Southampton would float many and many a ship if they could be collected into one enormous pool, but I am glad to say I did not add to the record. The ship Jock went out on was coming round from London and was late. We stood shivering under the sparse shelter of some sheds; there was news of fresh disasters in the early evening papers, more "regrettable occurrences"; the cold rain and wind made us wretched, even the officers looked angry and uncomfortable; the privates—poor Jock!—were all huddled up together. One big ship was leaving before theirs came into the dock; then all was hurry. There were no flags or bands. Some two or three feeble cheers were attempted, but there was no thrill, no emotion. I did just kiss the dear boy, but only just, and then he was hurried away. The fussy little aggravating tugs fluttered about the ships, and men appeared to be falling over each other round the docks. It was hateful! Never again will I see a ship off, never again go to Southampton Docks on any occasion whatever if I can possibly help it. There were other women hanging about, some of the officers' wives, I suppose. I do not know, but I was certain that Phoebe was as close to Jock as I had been myself; she was thickly veiled, of course, and as she was one of the crowd he never saw her; and, indeed, I had only time for the one kiss and to say God-speed and farewell. I did not know the name he went by, not even at the last; he would not tell me; he would write if he could, but I knew letters were uncertain, and, of course, he had not the least idea where he would be sent. Then he was on board, and the great steamer started away.



SAILING OF JACK'S SHIP.

The bitter wind blew up a flurry of snow, I could not see him even as he went away, and I never saw him again; I think I knew I never should, and I went to the hotel to Phoebe feeling as if I had been walking for a while in the valley of the shadow of death.

It was a relief to meet Jock's mother and to see how calm and composed she was; somehow I know that she felt whatever happened now the worst was over, and that some day her boy would be her own once more. He had plunged from the shelter of home into real life; he would understand out there on the open veld; or among the kopjes which we in England were only now learning how to call by their own name; while the splendid stars would teach him more than we could, and the terrible facts of war would reopen his closed and aching heart. All the same, the next few days, indeed, the next few weeks, were horrible. To me the sailing of any ship is so like a death; it goes out silently into the wide ocean, it passes away, away towards an unknown land! Of course, wireless telegraphy makes this less deathlike nowadays, but the messages are short and ghostlike at best; and even the hasty letters, unstamped and marked posted "On active service" seemed unreal.

Our soldier, too, was short and sharp in his communications, others had got into trouble because heedless relatives had sent their letters to the press; he would not run any risks, but I was thankful to hear he and Jock had met: and Jock was obliged to let him know the name he went by, especially as he was one of the detachment told off to help our captain, and in consequence could not but tell him how he was known by

his own companions and officers. Then letters from Jock began to come in, and oh ! how they reminded me of the old, old days and the " despatches from the seat of war " at Gorsecombe. At present he had more time to write than anyone else, for the Engineers were guarding the lines with the Militia, ready to mend anything at an emergency, and actually longing to be up and fighting. Occasionally, too, they had quite amusing adventures, and once when Jock went into a small town to see one of his old school-mates left in charge of the place, he found him in the study gazing moodily around him, while an enterprising friend tapped and sounded every board in the floor and wainscoting. Somewhere the Predikant had hidden bank-notes for £1,000; where could they be? Jock and some of the Engineers volunteered to help in the search, but they were no more successful than Gerald had been. A few days after, the Predikant had permission to visit his house to " put away the relics of his poor dear dead wife and to lock up her room so that it should not be defiled by the Rooiniks."

The moment he entered the house he went into the study, which was lined with great books in the Dutch language, most of them Bibles, and which had all been carefully moved out and replaced in the hunt. " Search the Scriptures, young men," said the Predikant in very guttural English, and to their annoyance the officers saw him shake out a forest of bank notes from the Bibles; they had been placed between the leaves and had been absolutely there all the time before their very eyes.

Then Jock sent me several letters he had picked up in a Boer laager they had been sent to clear out, after

the first inmates had been moved away, and I much wish I could have kept and printed them.

Many were in English and twitted the men with the way in which they lay and watched Ladysmith and did not rush down and exterminate the place : many were written to and by men who had been at Cambridge and Oxford and who knew Englishmen at home. I know it is the right thing to pretend to love the Dutch and pretend, too, that both nations are brothers and are living in amity together in South Africa. Glad am I I do not live there. I recollect those letters and the war, and though I have never altered my opinion that the war was an outrage, and we were in the wrong all through, I hate the treachery that was the worst feature of the Boer war, and I always shall say "My country whether right or wrong." We were wrong, we paid in blood and tears, but we were not sneaks : and were I a prophet I should say that both Dutch and English will rue that war always, and will some day be swept into the sea by a native rising that is almost too horrible a thing even to think of, let alone write about in cold blood, but at any rate, the Dutch will deserve every single thing they get in the way of trouble.

Someone says that the Boer Bibles were looted and sent home, and so many of them were, but they were all returned when the war was over. I saw one, and a queer document it was. On the first page was the family pedigree from the time the owners trekked from Cape Town until they turned Johannesburg into a mining camp, and besides that there were ferocious curses put down solemnly. Curses on divers members of the family, on the English, and on the miners; the

while one looked on in vain for a kindly word for friend or foe.

The Bible is back now in its old place once more. I wonder if fresh curses have been added to the long and horrid list, and if our name bears an unkind mention on its old and stained pages.

We gathered together and sent out an enormous collection of all sorts and kinds of odds and ends to one of the big hospitals, and Jock told me he almost wept when he came across some of the books he had known as a lad in our house, and felt inclined to beg for some of the shirts and socks that were most familiar to him. He knew who had made them quite well, and above all he craved for the delicious oil of verbena which kept away the disgusting hordes of flies, and made life better for the sick and wounded than it would otherwise have been. Not that Jock was in the hospital as a patient, but he had gone to see a comrade, and to him he entrusted the letters and Bible that when they reached us I, for one, could hardly bear to look at for many a long day. So the war dragged on and on, day after day, with no hope of peace, no hope of the cessation of the miserable, futile thing. Phœbe grew perceptibly older during the terrible time: white streaks came in her splendid hair, lines were deeply cut round her eyes and mouth and on her forehead. She was always calm and collected now; sometimes she even cried a little sadly and quietly to herself. Then she would appear to become mistress of herself once more completely. A troublesome patient would require her more than usual, and above all, at last the Curtises' erring daughter had been discovered, and that by no other

hand than that of Jock himself. He had been called suddenly to the hospital to see a friend who had taken a turn for the worse, and the nurse, after helping him all through the last long hours with the dying man, had taken him into her room for rest and refreshment after the terrible day and night. Over the tiny bed hung a picture of Gorsecombe. A few questions elicited the truth; a few more words told Nurse Hayes that her old father and mother were only pining to see her once more. When the war was over she would return, in the meantime she would write; after all she had only been foolish and headstrong; the man she left home with had married her; he had been cast off by his family, and had come out in the first days of the diamond rush to South Africa, but had never got much farther than Cape Town. Nurse Hayes said nothing against him, but she had had hard times. He died; and then some doctor, seeing how well she nursed her husband, helped her to become a regular nurse. She had always been able to keep herself, but she had never dared to write home; her mother and father might be dead for all she knew, and they had been very harsh, very unforgiving.

Well! all that was over now; and Jock was able even to make her laugh over her mother's love of writing, and, moreover, sent for and gave her the stories that by now were creeping one after the other into some of the rapidly increasing papers and magazines of the day. How the invalids loved those simple stories to be sure! how they revelled in the cheap papers and periodicals that were sent out wholesale to the wounded! Really, when one is apt to blame the undoubted decadence of the newspaper world of the present time, one ceases to

do so when one realises what the cheap books and papers meant in the Boer war, what they mean even now to the denizens of small country villages, and above all, to the exiled sons and daughters of England in our many distant colonial homes! I know boys and girls in Canada, in New Zealand, in South Africa, in British Columbia who almost jump for joy over their weekly packets of *Daily Mails*, *Mirrors* and *Graphics*, and I know that they go from hand to hand until they are worn to rags. Indeed, a special paper should be used for those colonial editions, so far do they travel and so enormously are they read. Nurse Hayes had no time, she said, to read papers, else she must have seen some of her mother's advertisements of which she heard from Jock while the tears ran down her face. That such a hardly earned sum had been spent to try and find her meant so much, for she had not forgotten the fireless grates, the sparse food, and the shabby garments at the Vicarage. Now she could send money home, she could write, and when the war was over she would return. She had sufficient knowledge of nursing to keep herself, for great surgeons had seen her work during the war, and would recommend her themselves the minute it was over, and they were back in England.

It seemed to Phœbe quite worth while for Jock to be out in South Africa now he had found Mina Hayes, and discovered, moreover, that she was well, useful and happy, at least as happy as she could be away from her own people and alone in the world. Jock talked to her a great deal. She had all dear Mrs Curtis's great sympathy with none of her flighty absurdities, and really the qualities her mother had, a

it were, disposed of in a liberal use of pen and ink, were those that Mina had inherited, and caused her to run away from home on the first opportunity, and that had made Jim Hayes marry her, although he certainly had not done so until long after the wedding should have taken place. Somehow Mina Hayes made Jock see that he was not the only person in the world who had a grievance against his people and the world in general, but she could not get him, try as she would, to write to his mother in the old affectionate way. Even my "despatches" were despatches more than letters. No messages were sent; no questions asked; but I always mentioned Gorsecombe matters and spoke of his mother naturally, and later Nurse Hayes told me that these hints struck home, and produced the few lines that made life for Phœbe possible, nay even glorious, when the end came and she had nothing more to dread or fear for the whole of her life, at least for all that has been lived since the blow fell.

CHAPTER XV

“ LOVE IS THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW ”

WHY does any great sorrow fall as a bolt straight out of a blue sky? It may not for most people, but it most certainly does for us, and it most certainly did for Phœbe at the end. It was such a magnificent sorrow, too, that I hardly know how to describe it, or to tell how it all occurred, more especially as in the written official accounts of that gruesome time Jock's name does not occur, and the hero went nameless to his honoured grave. Nameless, that is to say, as far as the world is concerned, but not nameless to those who matter and who recollect the splendid valour of the deed that saved a regiment and that won for Jock the one reward he would have gladly died to gain, the Victoria Cross. He did die to gain it, God knows, and it lies in a glass case on a cushion by his mother's pillow, beside the many portraits which illustrate his passage from the long clothes stage to his splendid young manhood. There is a brass in Gorsecombe Church; and that and the Cross are all that remain to tell of our boy's gallant life and death. We had read the story in the papers told in a hundred different ways, but neither Phœbe nor I thought of Jock. A private's name is generally spelt wrongly, and, indeed,

though my son knew the name he went by, he had never told it to me, and I had sent my letters through him also. We had wondered about the magnificent heroism that had made the man ride all through the night, wounded and spent, to warn the detachment of what awaited it if it pursued its foolhardy course, and we had burned with patriotism when we read how the soldier had saved his officer's life and galloped back with him to safety, falling dead as he did so at his superior's feet. "Love is the fulfilling of the law," were the words one enthusiastic correspondent sent home as the last Jock uttered. I question if he did; all the same, they are on the brass in the church, and seem to me more appropriate than the well-worn "*Dulce et decorum*" that one sees on so many mementoes to our bravest and best!

We were hoping to hear of peace at Gorsecombe one evening when the fatal telegram from the War Office came. Jock's Colonel knew the story and sent the news of his death home; there were reasons why the public should not hear what had happened exactly, indeed, there were many gallant and splendid deeds done in that war that were never publicly acknowledged, for had they been, men in high places might have been more uncomfortable than they were, for even those who were sent home could have told much if they would. Jock's was one of these, and though the wire told us of his death (died gallantly indeed were the words) we knew no more for some few weeks, when a kindly old man came down to Gorsecombe, bringing the Cross, a letter from the King, and such words of comfort as he could speak to Phœbe herself. The messenger

evidently took us for Jock's aunts, and addressed himself to me more than to Phœbe. I question if she could have spoken at all; she sat in her plain black dress with her hands folded on her knees and her face set in hard lines and listened to all that was said. The young Captain Jock had saved had written most warmly and eloquently to those in authority. He had touched on the fact that Jock had evidently passed out of Woolwich, and should have been in a far better position than he was, that there was some mystery about him, and that he had only my address to refer to in case of death. I had been written to of course at home, but having said that Phœbe had the best right to the details and the Cross, we were together when the courtly messenger arrived and did his utmost for us both at the same time. The General was evidently puzzled at first by the situation, but he was as evidently a man of the world and had his own thoughts about Phœbe's relationship. Jock's latest photograph was produced and shown to him, as he said the King was anxious to have a copy. I knew where it was, and fetched it. I am sure Phœbe could not have stirred from her chair to save her life. How she sat and bore it all I do not know, but then she always endured everything all through her life as no one else I know ever did.

"Four-square to all the winds of Heaven that blow," says the poet: all the winds of Heaven blew on Phœbe, but none wrecked her. She stood four-square boldly and did her work in the world as no other woman ever did: of that I, for one, am perfectly sure. When the General's visit was over I walked with him towards

strength," he said; "but his confidence was in God, and if Phœbe could look up to God she at any rate would have help in her ghastly sorrow." I did not think it necessary to say that the ordinary idea of God was not Phœbe's or mine; after all, that would have been ridiculous and absurd, and the General, being many years older than I was, might be supposed to know more than I did, so I merely murmured my polite assent. At the same time I did say that I thought she had been more than fortunate to have given such a son to his country, and that she must always look back at that with joy and pride. I could see that the General was rather unhappy, then he appeared to remember that the woman has always—as she most undoubtedly should have—the hardest part to bear of the sin, and he asked if the lad's father knew anything at all about him. Once more the story was told of Jock's agony, of his sending in his papers and renouncing the money his father had always allowed him most liberally, and that he had gone off without one word of forgiveness to his mother on that last fatal voyage. But the fly-driver was becoming impatient; he reminded the General that trains were few and the distance great; so we parted, and I returned to Phœbe, although I was almost certain she would not mention the General to me again, at least for some time to come.

I saw that the night had brought counsel to her, for as soon as her household was set going for the day she came into the garden to me, and I felt that she meant to speak. We looked at the daffodils nodding in the wind and all the fresh spring verdure around;

there were the faithful Scillas, which Jock always called "Fairies' eyes" because they were so blue; there were the crocuses that he always called Ronceval-lais, albeit the autumn crocuses were the only ones found in that God-forsaken spot, and there, above all, was the grave of the faithful, long-dead Mouton, with Jock's boyish inscription of "Left for the Dog-star in April, 1886," and "We shall meet again" cut out in black letters on the white stone. This inscription had very much tried the village stone-mason, who was not accustomed to make head-stones for dogs, or to put such words on any tomb that bore his imprint, but the Vicar had only laughed. "There may be worse spots than the Dog-star for all we know about it," he said, "and at any rate I will absolve you from any sin you may think you are committing in pleasing Master Jock." The idea of absolution was even more terrifying than Jock's inscription, so old Brown went back to his workshop, and was not sure whether Jock or the Vicar were the greatest sinner of the two.

Phœbe never spoke as we wandered up and down the dear familiar garden, but I think we both felt as if a third something wandered there with us too. In her case I should have left the place at once; I cannot endure seeing things that dead eyes have seen, or going on in the same routine once shared by one I have loved, and do still love the same as ever I did, but Phœbe is quite different. Even now she loves to see Mouton's grave is bright with flowers. Jock's old garden and forts are kept as they were when he was away at school, his books and pictures are in their places; but his room is now Phœbe's; her head rests

on his pillow, his eiderdown covers her. I could not bear this; she does not only bear it, but treasures everything he touched, and every single thing that he has ever handled is sacred indeed to her eyes!

When we had walked all through the garden, still with the invisible third by our side, Phœbe sat down on Jock's "look-out" seat, from whence he and the Gorsecombe army used to watch for the approach of the Gorse Abbey boys. Even now there were traces of the old times; a mound of turf and mould still stood with steps cut by the gallant band; a store of moss-covered stones for ammunition, sternly forbidden by the higher powers to be used for fear of gore and murder, but still very terrifying to those expected to assault, was yet in position. Beside these relics there yet remained sundry cabalistic letters cut on the trees, and all spoke of those long dead days! Phœbe looked at them one after the other, and then at last she spoke. I saw she held the King's letter and the Cross against her heart, and presently she said, "I ought to let his father know."

The words appeared to ease her, and then she went on rapidly to talk of Jock's delightful boyhood and childhood, and of all he had ever been to her in her silent heart. She could not see that she had been wrong. She had given her life first to make Franz von Mácozy happy, and then to Jock. "He knows now," she said, lifting her head, and looking straight before her as if she saw him, "that I have added a jewel to England's crown. I am not sorry he has died as he did. He is a hero, a nameless hero truly, one never to have his name in the written records of heroes; but

I know, he knew, his country knew, and so my reward is almost greater than I can bear."

If she had only broken down and cried I should have been happier, I think; but tears and Phœbe were never near together, and, moreover, now all was over she felt she had nothing more to dread. How was she to let his father know? I told her to wait for the General's letter, then, if possible, I would send it to Hungary to say that the lad was the one he was interested in so many years ago.

But, after all, I was spared this task, for Jock's father knew more about him than we had the least idea at the time, and from the moment he heard what had occurred, that Jock had thrown up his commission and gone out as a private to the war, he had followed his career step by step, and, moreover, was now on his way to South Africa to see if among the many nameless graves on the veld he could in any way identify the one that held his son. By this time the war was over, and everyone who could was now coming home. Mina Hayes was among the first, and, assured of a welcome, she came at once to Gorsecombe, and her mother's cup of joy seemed filled to overflowing, the more so as Mrs. Curtis had a real novel in the press, a truly charming love-story, a very different production from the lurid romances that had been her delight in the earlier years.

It is astonishing to look back at Gorsecombe as we found it first, and then survey it as it is at present, for I believe firmly that had Phœbe never settled at the Manor House matters would not have improved in that secluded spot in the mar-

vellous way they did. I recollected the black crape bonnet and the blue dress, the Vicar's dirty coat, and the feuds waged with the boys, and now I saw Mrs. Curtis quietly apparelled, the Vicar's garments cleaned and repaired, and the village boys a thousand times less savage than their forbears had been nearly twenty years before. I do not think Phœbe had ever said one word on either subject; quiet example does a thousand times more than wild denunciation. Suitable garments were worn by Phœbe and copied by Mrs. Curtis; Jock's garments were always spotless; and, moreover, his friendships in the village had shown Mr. Curtis that, though boys will be boys, they need not be destructive fiends, and the spirit fostered by Jock's army had penetrated to the Vicarage, and the Vicar's patriotic sermons had gratified the parents, who saw in their turn that the Vicar's orchard was respected, and the incessant quarrels between the Vicarage and the village were not only at an end, but forgotten, as if they had never been.

It was to this very different world that Mina Hayes returned in her nurse's dress, and with her badge of merit pinned to her cloak. We all knew she was a widow, we all knew she had worked hard and well; but we did not know that (crowning blessing of all) she bore a note for Phœbe which Jock had given her in case he never returned home, telling his mother how he really loved her after all, that love was the fulfilling of the law, and that he was glad he had lived, even if he died for the sake of his country. The whole matter has no moral at all, what life history has except for those most concerned in the matter? but I think

Phœbe's life, at any rate, shows that one can raise very excellent fruit from even an unclean soil. Blow after blow had been dealt her from her girlhood until Jock's death. She bore all unflinchingly, only determined to rise from the dust and go on intent on her work, and determined as well that the world should be better because she, and Jock too, had lived in it. Naturally it would have been more satisfactory to Mrs. Grundy and her followers had Phœbe been ostracised entirely, or had even starved in some garret, while Jock went hopelessly to the bad and, moreover, arrived at some horrid end. That neither thing happened I cannot help. Phœbe followed the gleam that led her on, it might have been but an *ignus fatuus*, a false light that should never have shone, but it was her light, and I can say no more and no less on the matter. One more trial was before her, for Frau von Mácoczy had died before her husband went out to South Africa, and when Franz returned from his hopeless search among the many nameless graves, he and Phœbe met once more, and he tried his utmost to persuade her to marry him and live out the rest of her days with him on his Hungarian estates. But Phœbe was not to be persuaded, albeit even dear old Mr. Curtis had a sort of lingering idea that she should do something of the kind, and that even a belated marriage would be a comfort to Jock. Still, Phœbe held steadfastly to her post at Gorsecombe. Mari and Roszi and their overflowing nurseries and schoolrooms were not likely to welcome her; Mari and her husband were already living at the old home, and Franz was well looked after.

No one could take Phœbe's place at the Manor

House, and love and Phœbe had long since parted company, and were not in the least likely to meet again. So Franz von Mácoczy went back to Hungary, and Phœbe turned to her work. The brass in the church spoke of Jock as the son of Phœbe Summers and Franz von Mácoczy; no one quite understood it, but that did not matter; both were proud of their boy, both names were his, he was their son; and so the matter will rest always until people have forgotten what it really meant.

There are certain days in the year when Phœbe is quieter than usual, but she keeps them in her heart alone, and never speaks of what they mean to her. On Jock's birthday and the day he left her for ever, and on the day of his glorious death, there are flowers from his garden on the brass. She goes early in the morning and places them there, and there are fresh flowers before his portrait, that is all. To those who are her friends the days are the same as all the rest; but when I can I spend them with her, because I understand; and sometimes we even speak of him, wonder whom he would have married, and regret the children that might have taken a place—not his—in our hearts, and in whom we might have lived his gallant boyhood over and over again.

People scoff at women's friendships, and say that they are non-existent, but I know better. If I were penniless, nay, wicked, to-morrow, though it is rather late in the day for me to contemplate crime, Phœbe would be the first to come to my rescue. I know Phœbe was wrong when she became Jock's mother, but that is her business, not mine, after all. She is

my friend, and I love her, and "Love is the fulfilling of the law" after all is done and said, and who are we that we should sit in judgment on our fellow sinners? I think of Madame de Fortuna turning her back on her husband and his name at the time of his desperate trouble. I recollect women who left home and little children because a lover beckoned, who were divorced and re-married and now live in the odour of sanctity, and are seen and heard of everywhere; and I look at my dear old Phœbe in her quiet home, far from the madding crowd, with her poor crazy old ladies, now even growing gradually better, and then passing out into the world again, while their places are taken once more by those who without her fostering care would be in hideous misery in some great county asylum in the mockery of the "paying block." When I do so I know that one can live down one's sins if one has courage, and that one can pay in this world for the false steps that we hoped would have led on to Paradise, but that only landed us in the mud, perhaps, too, for evermore.

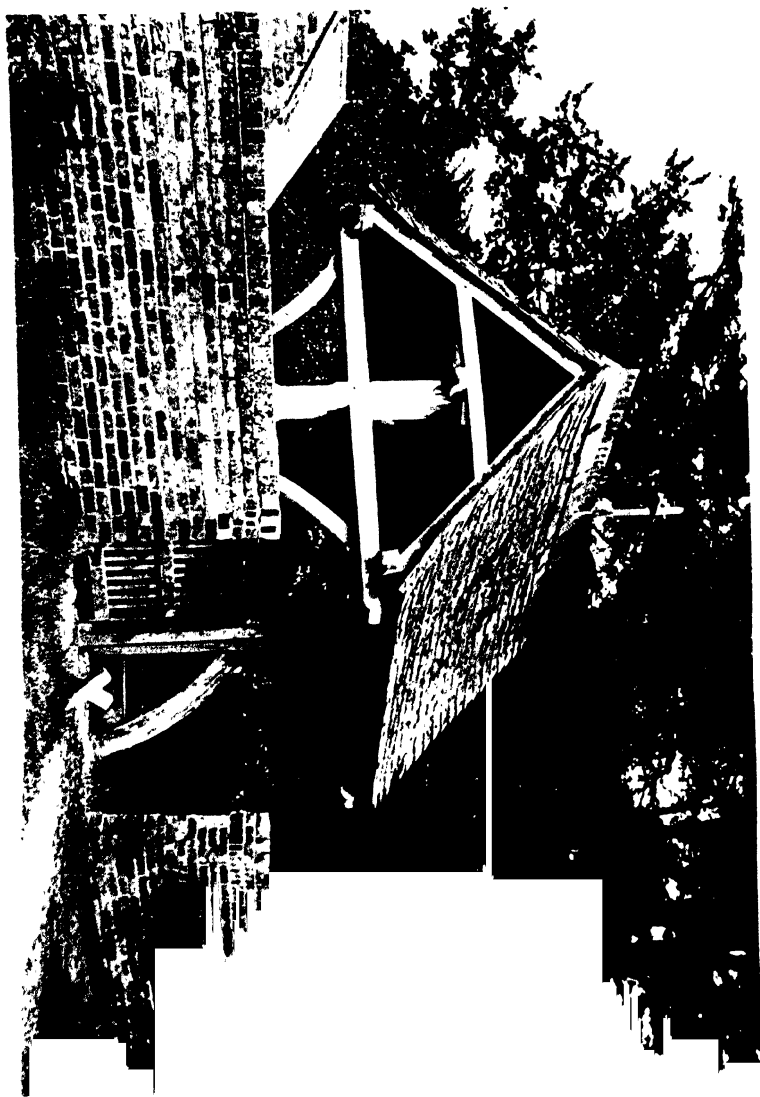
On Jock's last birthday Phœbe and I walked up the hill to the church, and stood for a few minutes looking at the sleepy village and at the lovely view over and beyond the blue smoke that rose slowly up into the clear autumnal air. It was autumn with us all; the few years that made such a gap in our girlhood were bridged and we seemed the same age. Sorrow had bowed our shoulders a little, our hair was white, and we found the hill steeper now than it used to be. Anyone seeing us standing there together; young, happy lovers bicycling past the bottom of the hill, or motorists

tearing breathlessly by the charming spot; would perhaps have cast a glance at us and wondered idly why two old ladies were standing near the lych-gate that Mr. Orbiton had built "In Memory," albeit he did not say of whom or what. We must look such an uninteresting worn-out couple, "out of drawing," too, as my father would have said in by-gone years.

All the same, we would neither of us have exchanged our memories for their futures, or gone back one step on the way toward the days when we were young. Phœbe at any rate has fought a good fight; if I have not, it is because I have not learned the rules of warfare in the hard school she did, and because I never had the bitter schooling in my early days which made my dear, dear friend all that she has been and is. Phœbe weighed the matter of life carefully; her standards of right and wrong were plain, and easily to be tested. I never knew one from the other, and by the time I found out the difference I was so far on the wrong path that I found it hard indeed to retrace my steps.

The autumn to us both is always a time of retrospection, a time of clearing up one's garden and of making ready for the fast on-coming winter time. We had watched the gardener all the morning in the garden, clearing out the dead and dying annuals, the while we jealously guarded all Jock's pet flowers and those which we knew would bloom again in spring; but the annuals were gone, leaving only seed pods, and some we would keep and cherish, but the rest we knew must be thrown away.

As we climbed the hill we had talked about



the garden, and wondered if the Maker of the world treated His human flowers as we treated our garden blossoms here, and, if so, who were the perennials and who the seedless annuals that were so ruthlessly cut off and cast away. We could but wonder, could but long with that terrible longing only known to those who have been very close to the shadow of death, that we could know, and not merely hope for, another life than this. If only the dead could come back, either to forgive or be forgiven! But they never do; people may say what they like on the subject; there are no *révenants*, otherwise Jock must just touch us, just whisper that all is well—Jock and one other——

Phœbe sat down on what the village folk call the “coffin rest” by the side of the lych-gate, and I leaned against the post by her side. The place was full of memories for us both, and we even recollected the Vicar’s story of the old man who was buried under the yew tree, who on by-gone Sundays used to sell hot gingerbread cakes to the farmers and their wives, who rode pillion-wise to church and hitched their horses to the posts, against one of which I was now leaning. Somehow the gingerbread had a most peculiar effect on the good folk, and it was then discovered that though he sold the cakes at a fancy price he gave away glasses of spirituous liquors, and so escaped the penalty of the law that otherwise might have been enforced. The old man and his customers sleep quietly enough in the churchyard, and two or three generations have joined them there since that time. All the sins, sorrows, joys, pleasures might never have been for all they mattered nowadays. It was impossible not to

wonder where all the good folk were! Perhaps they were merely soil in the churchyard, or flowers, or weeds, or even not that. But something appeared to tell us that this was not so. Anyhow, it did not matter. Phœbe, I think, would have felt happier had Jock's grave been in England; all the same, she was strong enough to believe that the gallant blood that watered the arid South African soil would not be shed in vain, and that somehow and somewhere the grain would rise and the fields would be white and ready for the harvest. "He would have been thirty-six this birthday," she said, looking out across the weald. "Nay, he is thirty-six; he grows somewhere in that unknown world towards full perfection, and sometimes I feel he is near us, especially when we are all three together, as we are now."

I pressed her hand and said nothing. I hope we meet, I feel sometimes we all do meet, but I know it is but a dream, but mere imagination. All the same, Jock's birthday gift goes where it is most required, and every year someone or other is the better in pocket or health because of the dear boy's life and death. Even I cannot pass by an old soldier without a kindly word or a small gift; and Phœbe, who has now much more than I possess, gives with a royal bounty to those who stand to her in Jock's beloved place.

The young folk romping by think us poor silly old women no doubt, if they think at all, and give us of their divine pity because we are old and can never be young any more, for we see them glance at us as they pass, and we know just what they think. But oh! how thankful we both are that the autumn has come,

and that nothing much can ever touch either of us again. We both have finished with life as regards ourselves, but we both will work until the call comes, for work is the only thing that matters after all, and to die in harness is the best gift the gods can bestow on anyone on this earth. Sometimes Marta comes to see us and her Home, and sometimes her girl comes with her. Phœbe has a fancy that she and Jock would have married, and is very tender to her always. I cannot say. Marta is very happy, her children are good and kind, and she has passed out of the shadow of her cruel creed into a wider, happier religion, and even to her now love is the fulfilling of the law. The sun sinks quietly as it always does, it seems to me, on Jock's birthday, and there is a touch of frost in the clear, keen air. We have brought him red salvias for war, and mignonette for sweetness, and Michaelmas daisies for meekness and endurance; and we place them on the brass, and round all we twine the ivy and rosemary that are never lacking in his memorial wreaths. On the day he died we take palms for victory. Does he see, does he know? Ah! what does it matter? We do, and so we keep his blessed happy memory ever green. We are sometimes called morbid and foolish, but it does not matter, for we understand each other. We have been friends for more than fifty years, and so we remain friends; and after all we know what that means to us both too well ever to speak on the subject.

The church feels cold, the last rays of the sun glint on the beloved brass; the way down the hill is easy, but somehow we can hardly bear to close and lock

the door and leave our flowers alone with Jock's memorial. We hear the children in the village calling to each other, the dogs bark gaily, the labourers are all coming home; one by one the lights in the cottages glow in the little windows, while the scarlet curtains in the "Red Lion" are drawn, and mine host comes out in his white apron and looks at what he calls "the weather." The Vicarage gates clank to and fro, for the old clerk is waiting impatiently for the key. There is the birthday cake to cut, the thirty-six candles to light; the old ladies are all agog and waiting for the minute, and though they have not the least idea why there is the cake, they all feel they have a part in our celebration, and one after the other solemnly reads out the date and the initials, and all repeat in chorus our dear lad's motto: "Love is the fulfilling of the law." We know as little as they do what it all meant, but that does not matter.

The story is done, but, lest any should not read it aright, I will say that the love that fulfils the law is not passion, but the actual selfless essence of life, squeezed out sometimes in the treading of the heart to blood, and only found when self ceases to be. Yet so precious is it always that no suffering is too severe to bear, if only it gives us of that draught to drink!

March 26, 1911.

THE END.

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