



DR. WORTLE'S SCHOOL

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

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PART I

I

DR. WORTLE

The Rev. Jeffrey Wortle, D.D., was a man much esteemed by others—and by himself. He combined two professions, in both of which he had been successful—had been, and continued to be, at the time in which we speak of him. I will introduce him to the reader in the present tense as Rector of Bowick, and proprietor and headmaster of the school established in the village of that name. The seminary at Bowick had for some time enjoyed a reputation under him;—not that he had ever himself used so newfangled and unpalatable a word in speaking of his school. Bowick School had been established by himself as preparatory to Eton. Dr. Wortle had been elected to an assistant-mastership at Eton early in life soon after he had become a Fellow of Exeter. There he had worked successfully for ten years, and had then retired to the living of Bowick. On going there he had determined to occupy his leisure, and if possible to make his fortune, by taking a few boys into his house. By dint of charging high prices and giving good food—perhaps in part, also, by the quality of the education which he imparted—his establishment had become popular and had outgrown the capacity of the parsonage. He had been enabled to purchase a field or two close abutting on the glebe gardens, and had there built convenient premises. He now limited his number to thirty boys, for each of which he charged £200 a-year. It was said of him by his friends that if he would only raise his price to £250, he might double the number, and really make a fortune. In answer to this, he told his friends that he knew his own business best;—he declared that his charge was the only sum that was compatible both with regard to himself and honesty to his customers, and asserted that the labours he endured were already quite heavy enough. In fact, he recommended all those who gave him advice to mind their own business.

It may be said of him that he knew his own so well as to justify him in repudiating counsel from others. There are very different ideas of what “a fortune” may be supposed to consist. It will not be necessary to give Dr. Wortle’s exact idea. No doubt it changed with him, increasing as his money increased. But he was supposed to be a comfortable man. He paid ready money and high prices. He liked that people under him should

thrive—and he liked them to know that they throve by his means. He liked to be master, and always was. He was just, and liked his justice to be recognised. He was generous also, and liked that, too, to be known. He kept a carriage for his wife, who had been the daughter of a poor clergyman at Windsor, and was proud to see her as well dressed as the wife of any county squire. But he was a domineering husband. As his wife worshipped him, and regarded him as a Jupiter on earth from whose nod there could be and should be no appeal, but little harm came from this. If a tyrant, he was an affectionate tyrant. His wife felt him to be so. His servants, his parish, and his school all felt him to be so. They obeyed him, loved him, and believed in him.

So, upon the whole, at the time with which we are dealing, did the diocese, the county, and that world of parents by whom the boys were sent to his school. But this had not come about without some hard fighting. He was over fifty years of age, and had been Rector of Bowick for nearly twenty. During that time there had been a succession of three bishops, and he had quarrelled more or less with all of them. It might be juster to say that they had all of them had more or less of occasion to find fault with him. Now Dr. Wortle—or Mr. Wortle, as he should be called in reference to that period—was a man who would bear censure from no human being. He had left his position at Eton because the Headmaster had required from him some slight change of practice. There had been no quarrel on that occasion, but Mr. Wortle had gone. He at once commenced his school at Bowick, taking half-a-dozen pupils into his own house. The bishop of that day suggested that the cure of the souls of the parishioners of Bowick was being subordinated to the Latin and Greek of the sons of the nobility. The bishop got a response which gave an additional satisfaction to his speedy translation to a more comfortable diocese. Between the next bishop and Mr. Wortle there was, unfortunately, misunderstanding, and almost feud for the entire ten years during which his lordship reigned in the Palace of Broughton. This Bishop of Broughton had been one of that large batch of Low Church prelates who were brought forward under Lord Palmerston. Among them there was none more low, more pious, more sincere, or more given to interference. To teach Mr. Wortle his duty as a parish clergyman was evidently a necessity to such a bishop. To repudiate any such teaching was evidently a necessity to Mr. Wortle. Consequently there were differences, in all of which Mr. Wortle carried his own. What the good bishop suffered no one probably knew except his wife and his domestic chaplain. What Mr. Wortle enjoyed—or Dr. Wortle, as he came to be

called about this time—was patent to all the county and all the diocese. The sufferer died, not, let us hope, by means of the Doctor; and then came the third bishop. He, too, had found himself obliged to say a word. He was a man of the world—wise, prudent, not given to interference or faultfinding, friendly by nature, one who altogether hated a quarrel, a bishop beyond all things determined to be the friend of his clergymen;—and yet he thought himself obliged to say a word. There were matters in which Dr. Wortle affected a peculiarly anti-clerical mode of expression, if not of feeling. He had been foolish enough to declare openly that he was in search of a curate who should have none of the “grace of godliness” about him. He was wont to ridicule the piety of young men who devoted themselves entirely to their religious offices. In a letter which he wrote he spoke of one youthful divine as “a conceited ass who had preached for forty minutes.” He not only disliked, but openly ridiculed all signs of a special pietistic bearing. It was said of him that he had been heard to swear. There can be no doubt that he made himself wilfully distasteful to many of his stricter brethren. Then it came to pass that there was a correspondence between him and the bishop as to that outspoken desire of his for a curate without the grace of godliness. But even here Dr. Wortle was successful. The management of his parish was preeminently good. The parish school was a model. The farmers went to church. Dissenters there were none. The people of Bowick believed thoroughly in their parson, and knew the comfort of having an openhanded, well-to-do gentleman in the village. This third episcopal difficulty did not endure long. Dr. Wortle knew his man, and was willing enough to be on good terms with his bishop so long as he was allowed to be in all things his own master.

There had, too, been some fighting between Dr. Wortle and the world about his school. He was, as I have said, a thoroughly generous man, but he required, himself, to be treated with generosity. Any question as to the charges made by him as schoolmaster was unendurable. He explained to all parents that he charged for each boy at the rate of two hundred a-year for board, lodging, and tuition, and that anything required for a boy’s benefit or comfort beyond that ordinarily supplied would be charged for as an extra at such price as Dr. Wortle himself thought to be an equivalent. Now the popularity of his establishment no doubt depended in a great degree on the sufficiency and comfort of the good things of the world which he provided. The beer was of the best; the boys were not made to eat fat; their taste in the selection of joints was consulted. The morning coffee was excellent. The cook was a great adept at cakes and

puddings. The Doctor would not himself have been satisfied unless everything had been plentiful, and everything of the best. He would have hated a butcher who had attempted to seduce him with meat beneath the usual price. But when he had supplied that which was sufficient according to his own liberal ideas, he did not give more without charging for it. Among his customers there had been a certain Honourable Mr. Stantiloup, and—which had been more important—an Honourable Mrs. Stantiloup. Mrs. Stantiloup was a lady who liked all the best things which the world could supply, but hardly liked paying the best price. Dr. Wortle's school was the best thing the world could supply of that kind, but then the price was certainly the very best. Young Stantiloup was only eleven, and as there were boys at Bowick as old as seventeen—for the school had not altogether maintained its old character as being merely preparatory—Mrs. Stantiloup had thought that her boy should be admitted at a lower fee. The correspondence which had ensued had been unpleasant. Then young Stantiloup had had the influenza, and Mrs. Stantiloup had sent her own doctor. Champagne had been ordered, and carriage exercise. Mr. Stantiloup had been forced by his wife to refuse to pay sums demanded for these undoubted extras. Ten shillings a-day for a drive for a little boy seemed to her a great deal—seemed so to Mrs. Stantiloup. Ought not the Doctor's wife to have been proud to take out her little boy in her own carriage? And then £2 10s. for champagne for the little boy! It was monstrous. Mr. Stantiloup remonstrated. Dr. Wortle said that the little boy had better be taken away and the bill paid at once. The little boy was taken away and the money was offered, short of £5. The matter was instantly put into the hands of the Doctor's lawyer, and a suit commenced. The Doctor, of course, got his money, and then there followed an acrimonious correspondence in *The Times* and other newspapers. Mrs. Stantiloup did her best to ruin the school, and many very eloquent passages were written not only by her or by her own special scribe, but by others who took the matter up, to prove that two hundred a-year was a great deal more than ought to be paid for the charge of a little boy during three quarters of the year. But in the course of the next twelve months Dr. Wortle was obliged to refuse admittance to a dozen eligible pupils because he had not room for them.

No doubt he had suffered during these contests—suffered, that is, in mind. There had been moments in which it seemed that the victory would be on the other side, that the forces congregated against him were too many for him, and that not being able to bend he would have to be broken; but in every case he had fought it out, and in every case he had

conquered. He was now a prosperous man, who had achieved his own way, and had made all those connected with him feel that it was better to like him and obey him, than to dislike him and fight with him. His curates troubled him as little as possible with the grace of godliness, and threw off as far as they could that zeal which is so dear to the youthful mind but which so often seems to be weak and flabby to their elders. His ushers or assistants in the school fell in with his views implicitly, and were content to accept compensation in the shape of personal civilities. It was much better to go shares with the Doctor in a joke than to have to bear his hard words.

It is chiefly in reference to one of these ushers that our story has to be told. But before we commence it, we must say a few more words as to the Doctor and his family. Of his wife I have already spoken. She was probably as happy a woman as you shall be likely to meet on a summer's day. She had good health, easy temper, pleasant friends, abundant means, and no ambition. She went nowhere without the Doctor, and wherever he went she enjoyed her share of the respect which was always shown to him. She had little or nothing to do with the school, the Doctor having many years ago resolved that though it became him as a man to work for his bread, his wife should not be a slave. When the battles had been going on—those between the Doctor and the bishops, and the Doctor and Mrs. Stantiloup, and the Doctor and the newspapers—she had for a while been unhappy. It had grieved her to have it insinuated that her husband was an atheist, and asserted that her husband was a cormorant; but his courage had sustained her, and his continual victories had taught her to believe at last that he was indomitable.

They had one child, a daughter, Mary, of whom it was said in Bowick that she alone knew the length of the Doctor's foot. It certainly was so that, if Mrs. Wortle wished to have anything done which was a trifle beyond her own influence, she employed Mary. And if the boys collectively wanted to carry a point, they would "collectively" obtain Miss Wortle's aid. But all this the Doctor probably knew very well; and though he was often pleased to grant favours thus asked, he did so because he liked the granting of favours when they had been asked with a proper degree of care and attention. She was at the present time of the age in which fathers are apt to look upon their children as still children, while other men regard them as being grown-up young ladies. It was now June, and in the approaching August she would be eighteen. It was said of her that of the girls all round she was the prettiest; and indeed it would be hard to find a sweeter-favoured girl than Mary Wortle. Her

father had been all his life a man noted for the manhood of his face. He had a broad forehead, with bright grey eyes—eyes that had always a smile passing round them, though the smile would sometimes show that touch of irony which a smile may contain rather than the good-humour which it is ordinarily supposed to indicate. His nose was aquiline, not hooky like a true bird's-beak, but with that bend which seems to give to the human face the clearest indication of individual will. His mouth, for a man, was perhaps a little too small, but was admirably formed, as had been the chin with a deep dimple on it, which had now by the slow progress of many dinners become doubled in its folds. His hair had been chestnut, but dark in its hue. It had now become grey, but still with the shade of the chestnut through it here and there. He stood five feet ten in height, with small hands and feet. He was now perhaps somewhat stout, but was still as upright on his horse as ever, and as well able to ride to hounds for a few fields when by chance the hunt came in the way of Bowick. Such was the Doctor. Mrs. Wortle was a pretty little woman, now over forty years of age, of whom it was said that in her day she had been the beauty of Windsor and those parts. Mary Wortle took mostly after her father, being tall and comely, having especially her father's eyes; but still they who had known Mrs. Wortle as a girl declared that Mary had inherited also her mother's peculiar softness and complexion.

For many years past none of the pupils had been received within the parsonage—unless when received there as guests, which was of frequent occurrence. All belonging to the school was built outside the glebe land, as a quite separate establishment, with a door opening from the parsonage garden to the schoolyard. Of this door the rule was that the Doctor and the gardener should have the only two keys; but the rule may be said to have become quite obsolete, as the door was never locked. Sometimes the bigger boys would come through unasked—perhaps in search of a game of lawn-tennis with Miss Wortle, perhaps to ask some favour of Mrs. Wortle, who always was delighted to welcome them, perhaps even to seek the Doctor himself, who never on such occasions would ask how it came to pass that they were on that side of the wall. Sometimes Mrs. Wortle would send her housekeeper through for some of the little boys. It would then be a good time for the little boys. But this would generally be during the Doctor's absence.

Here, on the school side of the wall, there was a separate establishment of servants, and a separate kitchen. There was no sending backwards or forwards of food or of clothes—unless it might be when some special delicacy was sent in if a boy were unwell. For these no

extra charge was ever made, as had been done in the case of young Stantiloup. Then a strange doctor had come, and had ordered the wine and the carriage. There was no extra charge for the kindly glasses of wine which used to be administered in quite sufficient plenty.

Behind the school, and running down to the little river Pin, there is a spacious cricket-ground, and a court marked out for lawn-tennis. Up close to the school is a racket-court. No doubt a good deal was done to make the externals of the place alluring to those parents who love to think that their boys shall be made happy at school. Attached to the school, forming part of the building, is a pleasant, well-built residence, with six or eight rooms, intended for the senior or classical assistant-master. It had been the Doctor's scheme to find a married gentleman to occupy this house, whose wife should receive a separate salary for looking after the linen and acting as matron to the school—doing what his wife did till he became successful—while the husband should be in orders and take part of the church duties as a second curate. But there had been a difficulty in this.

II

THE NEW USHER

The Doctor had found it difficult to carry out the scheme described in the last chapter. They indeed who know anything of such matters will be inclined to call it Utopian, and to say that one so wise in worldly matters as our schoolmaster should not have attempted to combine so many things. He wanted a gentleman, a schoolmaster, a curate, a matron, and a lady—we may say all in one. Curates and ushers are generally unmarried. An assistant schoolmaster is not often in orders, and sometimes is not a gentleman. A gentleman, when he is married, does not often wish to dispose of the services of his wife. A lady, when she has a husband, has generally sufficient duties of her own to employ her, without undertaking others. The scheme, if realised, would no doubt be excellent, but the difficulties were too many. The Stantiloups, who lived about twenty miles off, made fun of the Doctor and his project; and the Bishop was said to have expressed himself as afraid that he would not be able to license as curate anyone selected as usher to the school. One attempt was made after another in vain;—but at last it was declared through the country far and wide that the Doctor had succeeded in this, as in every other enterprise that he had attempted. There had come a Rev. Mr. Peacocke and his wife. Six years since, Mr. Peacocke had been well known at Oxford as a Classic, and had become a Fellow of Trinity. Then he had taken orders, and had some time afterwards married, giving up his Fellowship as a matter of course. Mr. Peacocke, while living at Oxford, had been well known to a large Oxford circle, but he had suddenly disappeared from that world, and it had reached the ears of only a few of his more intimate friends that he had undertaken the duties of vice-president of a classical college at Saint Louis in the State of Missouri. Such a disruption as this was for a time complete; but after five years Mr. Peacocke appeared again at Oxford, with a beautiful American wife, and the necessity of earning an income by his erudition.

It would at first have seemed very improbable that Dr. Wortle should have taken into his school or into his parish a gentleman who had chosen the United States as a field for his classical labours. The Doctor, whose mind was by no means logical, was a thoroughgoing Tory of the old

school, and therefore considered himself bound to hate the name of a republic. He hated rolling stones, and Mr. Peacocke had certainly been a rolling stone. He loved Oxford with all his heart, and some years since had been heard to say hard things of Mr. Peacocke, when that gentleman deserted his college for the sake of establishing himself across the Atlantic. But he was one who thought that there should be a place of penitence allowed to those who had clearly repented of their errors; and, moreover, when he heard that Mr. Peacocke was endeavouring to establish himself in Oxford as a “coach” for undergraduates, and also that he was a married man without any encumbrance in the way of family, there seemed to him to be an additional reason for pardoning that American escapade. Circumstances brought the two men together. There were friends at Oxford who knew how anxious the Doctor was to carry out that plan of his in reference to an usher, a curate, and a matron, and here were the very things combined. Mr. Peacocke’s scholarship and power of teaching were acknowledged; he was already in orders; and it was declared that Mrs. Peacocke was undoubtedly a lady. Many inquiries were made. Many meetings took place. Many difficulties arose. But at last Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke came to Bowick, and took up their abode in the school.

All the Doctor’s requirements were not at once fulfilled. Mrs. Peacocke’s position was easily settled. Mrs. Peacocke, who seemed to be a woman possessed of sterling sense and great activity, undertook her duties without difficulty. But Mr. Peacocke would not at first consent to act as curate in the parish. He did, however, after a time perform a portion of the Sunday services. When he first came to Bowick he had declared that he would undertake no clerical duty. Education was his profession, and to that he meant to devote himself exclusively. Nor for the six or eight months of his sojourn did he go back from this; so that the Doctor may be said even still to have failed in carrying out his purpose. But at last the new schoolmaster appeared in the pulpit of the parish church and preached a sermon.

All that had passed in private conference between the Doctor and his assistant on the subject need not here be related. Mr. Peacocke’s aversion to do more than attend regularly at the church services as one of the parishioners had been very strong. The Doctor’s anxiety to overcome his assistant’s reasoning had also been strong. There had no doubt been much said between them. Mr. Peacocke had been true to his principles, whatever those principles were, in regard to his appointment as a curate—but it came to pass that he for some months preached regularly

every Sunday in the parish church, to the full satisfaction of the parishioners. For this he had accepted no payment, much to the Doctor's dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, it was certainly the case that they who served the Doctor gratuitously never came by the worse of the bargain.

Mr. Peacocke was a small wiry man, anything but robust in appearance, but still capable of great bodily exertion. He was a great walker. Labour in the school never seemed to fatigue him. The addition of a sermon to preach every week seemed to make no difference to his energies in the school. He was a constant reader, and could pass from one kind of mental work to another without fatigue. The Doctor was a noted scholar, but it soon became manifest to the Doctor himself, and to the boys, that Mr. Peacocke was much deeper in scholarship than the Doctor. Though he was a poor man, his own small classical library was supposed to be a repository of all that was known about Latin and Greek. In fact, Mr. Peacocke grew to be a marvel; but of all the marvels about him, the thing most marvellous was the entire faith which the Doctor placed in him. Certain changes even were made in the old-established "curriculum" of tuition—and were made, as all the boys supposed, by the advice of Mr. Peacocke. Mr. Peacocke was treated with a personal respect which almost seemed to imply that the two men were equal. This was supposed by the boys to come from the fact that both the Doctor and the assistant had been Fellows of their colleges at Oxford; but the parsons and other gentry around could see that there was more in it than that. Mr. Peacocke had some power about him which was potent over the Doctor's spirit.

Mrs. Peacocke, in her line, succeeded almost as well. She was a woman something over thirty years of age when she first came to Bowick, in the very pride and bloom of woman's beauty. Her complexion was dark and brown—so much so, that it was impossible to describe her colour generally by any other word. But no clearer skin was ever given to a woman. Her eyes were brown, and her eyebrows black, and perfectly regular. Her hair was dark and very glossy, and always dressed as simply as the nature of a woman's head will allow. Her features were regular, but with a great show of strength. She was tall for a woman, but without any of that look of length under which female altitude sometimes suffers. She was strong and well made, and apparently equal to any labour to which her position might subject her. When she had been at Bowick about three months, a boy's leg had been broken, and she had nursed him, not only with assiduity, but with great capacity. The boy was the youngest son of the Marchioness of Altamont;

and when Lady Altamont paid a second visit to Bowick, for the sake of taking her boy home as soon as he was fit to be moved, her ladyship made a little mistake. With the sweetest and most caressing smile in the world, she offered Mrs. Peacocke a ten-pound note. "My dear madam," said Mrs. Peacocke, without the slightest reserve or difficulty, "it is so natural that you should do this, because you cannot of course understand my position; but it is altogether out of the question." The Marchioness blushed, and stammered, and begged a hundred pardons. Being a good-natured woman, she told the whole story to Mrs. Wortle. "I would just as soon have offered the money to the Marchioness herself," said Mrs. Wortle, as she told it to her husband. "I would have done it a deal sooner," said the Doctor. "I am not in the least afraid of Lady Altamont; but I stand in awful dread of Mrs. Peacocke." Nevertheless Mrs. Peacocke had done her work by the little lord's bedside, just as though she had been a paid nurse.

And so she felt herself to be. Nor was she in the least ashamed of her position in that respect. If there was aught of shame about her, as some people said, it certainly did not come from the fact that she was in the receipt of a salary for the performance of certain prescribed duties. Such remuneration was, she thought, as honourable as the Doctor's income; but to her American intelligence, the acceptance of a present of money from a Marchioness would have been a degradation.

It certainly was said of her by some persons that there must have been something in her former life of which she was ashamed. The Honourable Mrs. Stantiloup, to whom all the affairs of Bowick had been of consequence since her husband had lost his lawsuit, and who had not only heard much, but had inquired far and near about Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke, declared diligently among her friends, with many nods and winks, that there was something "rotten in the state of Denmark." She did at first somewhat imprudently endeavour to spread a rumour abroad that the Doctor had become enslaved by the lady's beauty. But even those hostile to Bowick could not accept this. The Doctor certainly was not the man to put in jeopardy the respect of the world and his own standing for the beauty of any woman; and, moreover, the Doctor, as we have said before, was over fifty years of age. But there soon came up another ground on which calumny could found a story. It was certainly the case that Mrs. Peacocke had never accepted any hospitality from Mrs. Wortle or other ladies in the neighbourhood. It reached the ears of Mrs. Stantiloup, first, that the ladies had called upon each other, as ladies are wont to do who intend to cultivate a mutual personal acquaintance,

and then that Mrs. Wortle had asked Mrs. Peacocke to dinner. But Mrs. Peacocke had refused not only that invitation, but subsequent invitations to the less ceremonious form of tea-drinking.

All this had been true, and it had been true also—though of this Mrs. Stantiloup had not heard the particulars—that Mrs. Peacocke had explained to her neighbour that she did not intend to put herself on a visiting footing with anyone. “But why not, my dear?” Mrs. Wortle had said, urged to the argument by precepts from her husband. “Why should you make yourself desolate here, when we shall be so glad to have you?” “It is part of my life that it must be so,” Mrs. Peacocke had answered. “I am quite sure that the duties I have undertaken are becoming a lady; but I do not think that they are becoming to one who either gives or accepts entertainments.”

There had been something of the same kind between the Doctor and Mr. Peacocke. “Why the mischief shouldn’t you and your wife come and eat a bit of mutton, and drink a glass of wine, over at the Rectory, like any other decent people?” I never believed that accusation against the Doctor in regard to swearing; but he was no doubt addicted to expletives in conversation, and might perhaps have indulged in a strong word or two, had he not been prevented by the sanctity of his orders. “Perhaps I ought to say,” replied Mr. Peacocke, “because we are not like any other decent people.” Then he went on to explain his meaning. Decent people, he thought, in regard to social intercourse, are those who are able to give and take with ease among each other. He had fallen into a position in which neither he nor his wife could give anything, and from which, though some might be willing to accept him, he would be accepted only, as it were, by special favour. “Bosh!” ejaculated the Doctor.

Mr. Peacocke simply smiled. He said it might be bosh, but that even were he inclined to relax his own views, his wife would certainly not relax hers. So it came to pass that although the Doctor and Mr. Peacocke were really intimate, and that something of absolute friendship sprang up between the two ladies, when Mr. Peacocke had already been more than twelve months in Bowick neither had he nor Mrs. Peacocke broken bread in the Doctor’s house.

And yet the friendship had become strong. An incident had happened early in the year which had served greatly to strengthen it. At the school there was a little boy, just eleven years old, the only son of a Lady De Lawle, who had in early years been a dear friend to Mrs. Wortle. Lady De Lawle was the widow of a baronet, and the little boy was the heir to a large fortune. The mother had been most loath to part with her

treasure. Friends, uncles, and trustees had declared that the old prescribed form of education for British aristocrats must be followed—a t’other school, namely, then Eton, and then Oxford. No; his mother might not go with him, first to one, and then to the other. Such going and living with him would deprive his education of all the real salt. Therefore Bowick was chosen as the t’other school, because Mrs. Wortle would be more like a mother to the poor desolate boy than any other lady. So it was arranged, and the “poor desolate boy” became the happiest of the young pickles whom it was Mrs. Wortle’s special province to spoil whenever she could get hold of them.

Now it happened that on one beautiful afternoon towards the end of April, Mrs. Wortle had taken young De Lawle and another little boy with her over the footbridge which passed from the bottom of the parsonage garden to the glebe meadow which ran on the other side of a little river, and with them had gone a great Newfoundland dog, who was on terms equally friendly with the inmates of the Rectory and the school. Where this bridge passed across the stream the gardens and the field were on the same level. But as the water ran down to the ground on which the school buildings had been erected, there arose a steep bank over a bend in the river, or, rather, steep cliff; for, indeed, it was almost perpendicular, the force of the current as it turned at this spot having washed away the bank. In this way it had come to pass that there was a precipitous fall of about a dozen feet from the top of the little cliff into the water, and that the water here, as it eddied round the curve, was black and deep, so that the bigger boys were wont to swim in it, arrangements for bathing having been made on the further or school side. There had sometimes been a question whether a rail should not be placed for protection along the top of this cliff, but nothing of the kind had yet been done. The boys were not supposed to play in this field, which was on the other side of the river, and could only be reached by the bridge through the parsonage garden.

On this day young De Lawle and his friend and the dog rushed up the hill before Mrs. Wortle, and there began to romp, as was their custom. Mary Wortle, who was one of the party, followed them, enjoining the children to keep away from the cliff. For a while they did so, but of course returned. Once or twice they were recalled and scolded, always asserting that the fault was altogether with Neptune. It was Neptune that knocked them down and always pushed them towards the river. Perhaps it was Neptune; but be that as it might, there came a moment very terrible to them all. The dog in one of his gyrations came violently

against the little boy, knocked him off his legs, and pushed him over the edge. Mrs. Wortle, who had been making her way slowly up the hill, saw the fall, heard the splash, and fell immediately to the ground.

Other eyes had also seen the accident. The Doctor and Mr. Peacocke were at the moment walking together in the playgrounds at the school side of the brook. When the boy fell they had paused in their walk, and were standing, the Doctor with his back to the stream, and the assistant with his face turned towards the cliff. A loud exclamation broke from his lips as he saw the fall, but in a moment—almost before the Doctor had realised the accident which had occurred—he was in the water, and two minutes afterwards young De Lawle, drenched indeed, frightened, and out of breath, but in nowise seriously hurt, was out upon the bank; and Mr. Peacocke, drenched also, but equally safe, was standing over him, while the Doctor on his knees was satisfying himself that his little charge had received no fatal injury. It need hardly be explained that such a termination as this to such an accident had greatly increased the good feeling with which Mr. Peacocke was regarded by all the inhabitants of the school and Rectory.

III

THE MYSTERY

Mr. Peacocke himself said that in this matter a great deal of fuss was made about nothing. Perhaps it was so. He got a ducking, but, being a strong swimmer, probably suffered no real danger. The boy, rolling down three or four feet of bank, had then fallen down six or eight feet into deep water. He might, no doubt, have been much hurt. He might have struck against a rock and have been killed—in which case Mr. Peacocke's prowess would have been of no avail. But nothing of this kind happened. Little Jack De Lawle was put to bed in one of the Rectory bedrooms, and was comforted with sherry-negus and sweet jelly. For two days he rejoiced thoroughly in his accident, being freed from school, and subjected only to caresses. After that he rebelled, having become tired of his bed. But by that time his mother had been most unnecessarily summoned. Unless she was wanted to examine the forlorn condition of his clothes, there was nothing that she could do. But she came, and, of course, showered blessings on Mr. Peacocke's head—while Mrs. Wortle went through to the school and showered blessings on Mrs. Peacocke. What would they have done had the Peacockes not been there?

“You must let them have their way, whether for good or bad,” the Doctor said, when his assistant complained rather of the blessings—pointing out at any rate their absurdity. “One man is damned forever, because, in the conscientious exercise of his authority, he gives a little boy a rap which happens to make a small temporary mark on his skin. Another becomes a hero because, when in the equally conscientious performance of a duty, he gives himself a ducking. I won't think you a hero; but, of course, I consider myself very fortunate to have had beside me a man younger than myself, and quick and ready at such an emergence. Of course I feel grateful, but I shan't bother you by telling you so.”

But this was not the end of it. Lady De Lawle declared that she could not be happy unless Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke would bring Jack home for the holidays to De Lawle Park. Of course she carried her blessings up into Mrs. Peacocke's little drawing-room, and became quite convinced, as was Mrs. Wortle, that Mrs. Peacocke was in all respects a lady. She

heard of Mr. Peacocke's antecedents at Oxford, and expressed her opinion that they were charming people. She could not be happy unless they would promise to come to De Lawle Park for the holidays. Then Mrs. Peacocke had to explain that in her present circumstances she did not intend to visit anywhere. She was very much flattered, and delighted to think that the dear little boy was none the worse for his accident; but there must be an end of it. There was something in her manner, as she said this, which almost overawed Lady De Lawle. She made herself, at any rate, understood, and no further attempt was made for the next six weeks to induce her or Mr. Peacocke to enter the Rectory dining-room. But a good deal was said about Mr. Peacocke—generally in his favour.

Generally in his favour—because he was a fine scholar, and could swim well. His preaching perhaps did something for him, but the swimming did more. But though there was so much said of good, there was something also of evil. A man would not altogether refuse society for himself and his wife unless there were some cause for him to do so. He and she must have known themselves to be unfit to associate with such persons as they would have met at De Lawle Park. There was a mystery, and the mystery, when unravelled, would no doubt prove to be very deleterious to the character of the persons concerned.

Mrs. Stantiloup was quite sure that such must be the case. "It might be very well," said Mrs. Stantiloup, "for Dr. Wortle to obtain the services of a well-educated usher for his school, but it became quite another thing when he put a man up to preach in the church, of whose life, for five years, no one knew anything." Somebody had told her something as to the necessity of a bishop's authority for the appointment of a curate; but no one had strictly defined to her what a curate is. She was, however, quite ready to declare that Mr. Peacocke had no business to preach in that pulpit, and that something very disagreeable would come of it.

Nor was this feeling altogether confined to Mrs. Stantiloup, though it had perhaps originated with what she had said among her own friends. "Don't you think it well you should know something of his life during these five years?" This had been said to the Rector by the Bishop himself—who probably would have said nothing of the kind had not these reports reached his ears. But reports, when they reach a certain magnitude, and attain a certain importance, require to be noticed.

So much in this world depends upon character that attention has to be paid to bad character even when it is not deserved. In dealing with men and women, we have to consider what they believe, as well as what we believe ourselves. The utility of a sermon depends much on the idea that

the audience has of the piety of the man who preaches it. Though the words of God should never have come with greater power from the mouth of man, they will come in vain if they be uttered by one who is known as a breaker of the Commandments;—they will come in vain from the mouth of one who is even suspected to be so. To all this, when it was said to him by the Bishop in the kindest manner, Dr. Wortle replied that such suspicions were monstrous, unreasonable, and uncharitable. He declared that they originated with that abominable virago, Mrs. Stantiloup. “Look round the diocese,” said the Bishop in reply to this, “and see if you can find a single clergyman acting in it, of the details of whose life for the last five years you know absolutely nothing.” Thereupon the Doctor said that he would make inquiry of Mr. Peacocke himself. It might well be, he thought, that Mr. Peacocke would not like such inquiry, but the Doctor was quite sure that any story told to him would be true. On returning home he found it necessary, or at any rate expedient, to postpone his questions for a few days. It is not easy to ask a man what he has been doing with five years of his life, when the question implies a belief that these five years have been passed badly. And it was understood that the questioning must in some sort apply to the man’s wife. The Doctor had once said to Mrs. Wortle that he stood in awe of Mrs. Peacocke. There had certainly come upon him an idea that she was a lady with whom it would not be easy to meddle. She was obedient, diligent, and minutely attentive to any wish that was expressed to her in regard to her duties; but it had become manifest to the Doctor that in all matters beyond the school she was independent, and was by no means subject to external influences. She was not, for instance, very constant in her own attendance at church, and never seemed to feel it necessary to apologise for her absence. The Doctor, in his many and familiar conversations with Mr. Peacocke, had not found himself able to allude to this; and he had observed that the husband did not often speak of his own wife unless it were on matters having reference to the school. So it came to pass that he dreaded the conversation which he proposed to himself, and postponed it from day to day with a cowardice which was quite unusual to him.

And now, O kindhearted reader, I feel myself constrained, in the telling of this little story, to depart altogether from those principles of story-telling to which you probably have become accustomed, and to put the horse of my romance before the cart. There is a mystery respecting Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke which, according to all laws recognised in such matters, ought not to be elucidated till, let us say, the last chapter but

two, so that your interest should be maintained almost to the end—so near the end that there should be left only space for those little arrangements which are necessary for the well-being, or perhaps for the evil-being, of our personages. It is my purpose to disclose the mystery at once, and to ask you to look for your interest—should you choose to go on with my chronicle—simply in the conduct of my persons, during this disclosure, to others. You are to know it all before the Doctor or the Bishop—before Mrs. Wortle or the Hon. Mrs. Stantiloup, or Lady De Lawle. You are to know it all before the Peacockes become aware that it must necessarily be disclosed to anyone. It may be that when I shall have once told the mystery there will no longer be any room for interest in the tale to you. That there are many such readers of novels I know. I doubt whether the greater number be not such. I am far from saying that the kind of interest of which I am speaking—and of which I intend to deprive myself—is not the most natural and the most efficacious. What would the *Black Dwarf* be if everyone knew from the beginning that he was a rich man and a baronet?—or *The Pirate*, if all the truth about Norna of the Fitful-head had been told in the first chapter? Therefore, put the book down if the revelation of some future secret be necessary for your enjoyment. Our mystery is going to be revealed in the next paragraph—in the next half-dozen words. Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke were not man and wife.

The story how it came to be so need not be very long;—nor will it, as I think, entail any great degree of odious criminality either upon the man or upon the woman. At St. Louis Mrs. Peacocke had become acquainted with two brothers named Lefroy, who had come up from Louisiana, and had achieved for themselves characters which were by no means desirable. They were sons of a planter who had been rich in extent of acres and number of slaves before the war of the Secession. General Lefroy had been in those days a great man in his State, had held command during the war, and had been utterly ruined. When the war was over the two boys—then seventeen and sixteen years of age—were old enough to remember and to regret all that they had lost, to hate the idea of Abolition, and to feel that the world had nothing left for them but what was to be got by opposition to the laws of the Union, which was now hateful to them. They were both handsome, and, in spite of the sufferings of their State, an attempt had been made to educate them like gentlemen. But no career of honour had been open to them, and they had fallen by degrees into dishonour, dishonesty, and brigandage.

The elder of these, when he was still little more than a stripling, had married Ella Beaufort, the daughter of another ruined planter in his State. She had been only sixteen when her father died, and not seventeen when she married Ferdinand Lefroy. It was she who afterwards came to England under the name of Mrs. Peacocke.

Mr. Peacocke was Vice-President of the College at Missouri when he first saw her, and when he first became acquainted with the two brothers, each of whom was called Colonel Lefroy. Then there arose a great scandal in the city as to the treatment which the wife received from her husband. He was about to go away South, into Mexico, with the view of pushing his fortune there with certain desperadoes, who were maintaining a perpetual war against the authorities of the United States on the borders of Texas, and he demanded that his wife should accompany him. This she refused to do, and violence was used to force her. Then it came to pass that certain persons in St. Louis interfered on her behalf, and among these was the Reverend Mr. Peacocke, the Vice-President of the College, upon whose feelings the singular beauty and dignified demeanour of the woman, no doubt, had had much effect. The man failed to be powerful over his wife, and then the two brothers went away together. The woman was left to provide for herself, and Mr. Peacocke was generous in the aid he gave to her in doing so.

It may be understood that in this way an intimacy was created, but it must not be understood that the intimacy was of such a nature as to be injurious to the fair fame of the lady. Things went on in this way for two years, during which Mrs. Lefroy's conduct drew down upon her reproaches from no one. Then there came tidings that Colonel Lefroy had perished in making one of those raids in which the two brothers were continually concerned. But which Colonel Lefroy had perished? If it were the younger brother, that would be nothing to Mr. Peacocke. If it were the elder, it would be everything. If Ferdinand Lefroy were dead, he would not scruple at once to ask the woman to be his wife. That which the man had done, and that which he had not done, had been of such a nature as to solve all bonds of affection. She had already allowed herself to speak of the man as one whose life was a blight upon her own; and though there had been no word of outspoken love from her lips to his ears, he thought that he might succeed if it could be made certain that Ferdinand Lefroy was no longer among the living.

"I shall never know," she said in her misery. "What I do hear I shall never believe. How can one know anything as to what happens in a country such as that?"

Then he took up his hat and staff, and, vice-president, professor, and clergyman as he was, started off for the Mexican border. He did tell her that he was going, but barely told her. "It's a thing that ought to be found out," he said, "and I want a turn of travelling. I shall be away three months." She merely bade God bless him, but said not a word to hinder or to encourage his going.

He was gone just the three months which he had himself named, and then returned elate with his news. He had seen the younger brother, Robert Lefroy, and had learnt from him that the elder Ferdinand had certainly been killed. Robert had been most ungracious to him, having even on one occasion threatened his life; but there had been no doubt that he, Robert, was alive, and that Ferdinand had been killed by a party of United States soldiers.

Then the clergyman had his reward, and was accepted by the widow with a full and happy heart. Not only had her release been complete, but so was her present joy; and nothing seemed wanting to their happiness during the six first months after their union. Then one day, all of a sudden, Ferdinand Lefroy was standing within her little drawing-room at the College of St. Louis.

Dead? Certainly he was not dead! He did not believe that anyone had said that he was dead! She might be lying or not—he did not care; he, Peacocke, certainly had lied;—so said the Colonel. He did not believe that Peacocke had ever seen his brother Robert. Robert was dead—must have been dead, indeed, before the date given for that interview. The woman was a bigamist—that is, if any second marriage had ever been perpetrated. Probably both had wilfully agreed to the falsehood. For himself he should resolve at once what steps he meant to take. Then he departed, it being at that moment after nine in the evening. In the morning he was gone again, and from that moment they had never either heard of him or seen him.

How was it to be with them? They could have almost brought themselves to think it a dream, were it not that others besides themselves had seen the man, and known that Colonel Ferdinand Lefroy had been in St. Louis. Then there came to him an idea that even she might disbelieve the words which he had spoken;—that even she might think his story to have been false. But to this she soon put an end. "Dearest," she said, "I never knew a word that was true to come from his mouth, or a word that was false from yours."

Should they part? There is no one who reads this but will say that they should have parted. Every day passed together as man and wife must be

a falsehood and a sin. There would be absolute misery for both in parting;—but there is no law from God or man entitling a man to escape from misery at the expense of falsehood and sin. Though their hearts might have burst in the doing of it, they should have parted. Though she would have been friendless, alone, and utterly despicable in the eyes of the world, abandoning the name which she cherished, as not her own, and going back to that which she utterly abhorred, still she should have done it. And he, resolving, as no doubt he would have done under any circumstances, that he must quit the city of his adoption—he should have left her with such material sustenance as her spirit would have enabled her to accept, should have gone his widowed way, and endured as best he might the idea that he had left the woman whom he loved behind, in the desert, all alone! That he had not done so the reader is aware. That he had lived a life of sin—that he and she had continued in one great falsehood—is manifest enough. Mrs. Stantiloup, when she hears it all, will have her triumph. Lady De Lawle's soft heart will rejoice because that invitation was not accepted. The Bishop will be unutterably shocked; but, perhaps, to the good man there will be some solace in the feeling that he had been right in his surmises. How the Doctor bore it this story is intended to tell—and how also Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke bore it, when the sin and the falsehood were made known to all the world around them. The mystery has at any rate been told, and they who feel that on this account all hope of interest is at an end had better put down the book.

PART II

IV

THE DOCTOR ASKS HIS QUESTION

The Doctor, instigated by the Bishop, had determined to ask some questions of Mr. Peacocke as to his American life. The promise had been given at the Palace, and the Doctor, as he returned home, repented himself in that he had made it. His lordship was a gossip, as bad as an old woman, as bad as Mrs. Stantiloup, and wanted to know things in which a man should feel no interest. So said the Doctor to himself. What was it to him, the Bishop, or to him, the Doctor, what Mr. Peacocke had been doing in America? The man's scholarship was patent, his morals were unexceptional, his capacity for preaching undoubted, his peculiar fitness for his place at Bowick unquestionable. Who had a right to know more? That the man had been properly educated at Oxford, and properly ordained on entering his Fellowship, was doubted by no man. Even if there had been some temporary backslidings in America—which might be possible, for which of us have not backslided at some time of our life?—why should they be raked up? There was an uncharitableness in such a proceeding altogether opposed to the Doctor's view of life. He hated severity. It may almost be said that he hated that state of perfection which would require no pardon. He was thoroughly human, quite content with his own present position, anticipating no millennium for the future of the world, and probably, in his heart, looking forward to heaven as simply the better alternative when the happiness of this world should be at an end. He himself was in no respect a wicked man, and yet a little wickedness was not distasteful to him.

And he was angry with himself in that he had made such a promise. It had been a rule of life with him never to take advice. The Bishop had his powers, within which he, as Rector of Bowick, would certainly obey the Bishop; but it had been his theory to oppose his Bishop, almost more readily than anyone else, should the Bishop attempt to exceed his power. The Bishop had done so in giving this advice, and yet he had promised. He was angry with himself, but did not on that account think that the promise should be evaded. Oh no! Having said that he would do it, he would do it. And having said that he would do it, the sooner that he did it the better. When three or four days had passed by, he despised himself

because he had not yet made for himself a fit occasion. "It is such a mean, sneaking thing to do," he said to himself. But still it had to be done.

It was on a Saturday afternoon that he said this to himself, as he returned back to the parsonage garden from the cricket-ground, where he had left Mr. Peacocke and the three other ushers playing cricket with ten or twelve of the bigger boys of the school. There was a French master, a German master, a master for arithmetic and mathematics with the adjacent sciences, besides Mr. Peacocke, as assistant classical master. Among them Mr. Peacocke was *facile princeps* in rank and supposed ability; but they were all admitted to the delights of the playground. Mr. Peacocke, in spite of those years of his spent in America where cricket could not have been familiar to him, remembered well his old pastime, and was quite an adept at the game. It was ten thousand pities that a man should be disturbed by unnecessary questionings who could not only teach and preach, but play cricket also. But nevertheless it must be done. When, therefore, the Doctor entered his own house, he went into his study and wrote a short note to his assistant;—

"MY DEAR PEACOCKE—Could you come over and see me in my study this evening for half an hour? I have a question or two which I wish to ask you. Any hour you may name will suit me after eight.—Yours most sincerely,

"JEFFREY WORTLE."

In answer to this there came a note to say that at half-past eight Mr. Peacocke would be with the Doctor.

At half-past eight Mr. Peacocke came. He had fancied, on reading the Doctor's note, that some further question would be raised as to money. The Doctor had declared that he could no longer accept gratuitous clerical service in the parish, and had said that he must look out for someone else if Mr. Peacocke could not oblige him by allowing his name to be referred in the usual way to the Bishop. He had now determined to say, in answer to this, that the school gave him enough to do, and that he would much prefer to give up the church;—although he would always be happy to take a part occasionally if he should be wanted. The Doctor had been sitting alone for the last quarter of an hour when his assistant entered the room, and had spent the time in endeavouring to arrange the conversation that should follow. He had come at last to a conclusion. He

would let Mr. Peacocke know exactly what had passed between himself and the Bishop, and would then leave it to his usher either to tell his own story as to his past life, or to abstain from telling it. He had promised to ask the question, and he would ask it; but he would let the man judge for himself whether any answer ought to be given.

“The Bishop has been bothering me about you, Peacocke,” he said, standing up with his back to the fireplace, as soon as the other man had shut the door behind him. The Doctor’s face was always expressive of his inward feelings, and at this moment showed very plainly that his sympathies were not with the Bishop.

“I’m sorry that his lordship should have troubled himself,” said the other, “as I certainly do not intend to take any part in his diocese.”

“We’ll sink that for the present,” said the Doctor. “I won’t let that be mixed up with what I have got to say just now. You have taken a certain part in the diocese already, very much to my satisfaction. I hope it may be continued; but I won’t bother about that now. As far as I can see, you are just the man that would suit me as a colleague in the parish.”

Mr. Peacocke bowed, but remained silent. “The fact is,” continued the Doctor, “that certain old women have got hold of the Bishop, and made him feel that he ought to answer their objections. That Mrs. Stantiloup has a tongue as loud as the town-crier’s bell.”

“But what has Mrs. Stantiloup to say about me?”

“Nothing, except in so far as she can hit me through you.”

“And what does the Bishop say?”

“He thinks that I ought to know something of your life during those five years you were in America.”

“I think so also,” said Mr. Peacocke.

“I don’t want to know anything for myself. As far as I am concerned, I am quite satisfied. I know where you were educated, how you were ordained, and I can feel sure, from your present efficiency, that you cannot have wasted your time. If you tell me that you do not wish to say anything, I shall be contented, and I shall tell the Bishop that, as far as I am concerned, there must be an end of it.”

“And what will he do?” asked Mr. Peacocke.

“Well; as far as the curacy is concerned, of course he can refuse his licence.”

“I have not the slightest intention of applying to his lordship for a licence.”

This the usher said with a tone of self-assertion which grated a little on the Doctor’s ear, in spite of his good-humour towards the speaker. “I

don't want to go into that," he said. "A man never can say what his intentions may be six months hence."

"But if I were to refuse to speak of my life in America," said Mr. Peacocke, "and thus to decline to comply with what I must confess would be no more than a rational requirement on your part, how then would it be with myself and my wife in regard to the school?"

"It would make no difference whatever," said the Doctor.

"There is a story to tell," said Mr. Peacocke, very slowly.

"I am sure that it cannot be to your disgrace."

"I do not say that it is—nor do I say that it is not. There may be circumstances in which a man may hardly know whether he has done right or wrong. But this I do know—that, had I done otherwise, I should have despised myself. I could not have done otherwise and have lived."

"There is no man in the world," said the Doctor, earnestly, "less anxious to pry into the secrets of others than I am. I take things as I find them. If the cook sends me up a good dish I don't care to know how she made it. If I read a good book, I am not the less gratified because there may have been something amiss with the author."

"You would doubt his teaching," said Mr. Peacocke, "who had gone astray himself."

"Then I must doubt all human teaching, for all men have gone astray. You had better hold your tongue about the past, and let me tell those who ask unnecessary questions to mind their own business."

"It is very odd, Doctor," said Mr. Peacocke, "that all this should have come from you just now."

"Why odd just now?"

"Because I had been turning it in my mind for the last fortnight whether I ought not to ask you as a favour to listen to the story of my life. That I must do so before I could formally accept the curacy I had determined. But that only brought me to the resolution of refusing the office. I think—I think that, irrespective of the curacy, it ought to be told. But I have not quite made up my mind."

"Do not suppose that I am pressing you."

"Oh no; nor would your pressing me influence me. Much as I owe to your undeserved kindness and forbearance, I am bound to say that. Nothing can influence me in the least in such a matter but the well-being of my wife, and my own sense of duty. And it is a matter in which I can unfortunately take counsel from no one. She, and she alone, besides myself, knows the circumstances, and she is so forgetful of herself that I can hardly ask her for an opinion."

The Doctor by this time had no doubt become curious. There was a something mysterious with which he would like to become acquainted. He was by no means a philosopher, superior to the ordinary curiosity of mankind. But he was manly, and even at this moment remembered his former assurances. "Of course," said he, "I cannot in the least guess what all this is about. For myself I hate secrets. I haven't a secret in the world. I know nothing of myself which you mightn't know too for all that I cared. But that is my good fortune rather than my merit. It might well have been with me as it is with you; but, as a rule, I think that where there is a secret it had better be kept. No one, at any rate, should allow it to be wormed out of him by the impertinent assiduity of others. If there be anything affecting your wife which you do not wish all the world on this side of the water to know, do not tell it to anyone on this side of the water."

"There is something affecting my wife that I do not wish all the world to know."

"Then tell it to no one," said Dr. Wortle, authoritatively.

"I will tell you what I will do," said Mr. Peacocke; "I will take a week to think of it, and then I will let you know whether I will tell it or whether I will not; and if I tell it I will let you know also how far I shall expect you to keep my secret, and how far to reveal it. I think the Bishop will be entitled to know nothing about me unless I ask to be recognised as one of the clergy of his diocese."

"Certainly not; certainly not," said the Doctor. And then the interview was at an end.

Mr. Peacocke, when he went away from the Rectory, did not at once return to his own house, but went off for a walk alone. It was now nearly midsummer, and there was broad daylight till ten o'clock. It was after nine when he left the Doctor's, but still there was time for a walk which he knew well through the fields, which would take him round by Bowick Wood, and home by a path across the squire's park and by the church. An hour would do it, and he wanted an hour to collect his thoughts before he should see his wife, and discuss with her, as he would be bound to do, all that had passed between him and the Doctor. He had said that he could not ask her advice. In this there had been much of truth. But he knew also that he would do nothing as to which he had not received at any rate her assent. She, for his sake, would have annihilated herself, had that been possible. Again and again, since that horrible apparition had showed itself in her room at St. Louis, she had begged that she might leave him—not on her own behalf, not from any dread of

the crime that she was committing, not from shame in regard to herself should her secret be found out, but because she felt herself to be an impediment to his career in the world. As to herself, she had no pricks of conscience. She had been true to the man—brutal, abominable as he had been to her—until she had in truth been made to believe that he was dead; and even when he had certainly been alive—for she had seen him—he had only again seen her, again to desert her. Duty to him she could owe never. There was no sting of conscience with her in that direction. But to the other man she owed, as she thought, everything that could be due from a woman to a man. He had come within her ken, and had loved her without speaking of his love. He had seen her condition, and had sympathised with her fully. He had gone out, with his life in his hand—he, a clergyman, a quiet man of letters—to ascertain whether she was free; and finding her, as he believed, to be free, he had returned to take her to his heart, and to give her all that happiness which other women enjoy, but which she had hitherto only seen from a distance. Then the blow had come. It was necessary, it was natural, that she should be ruined by such a blow. Circumstances had ruined her. That fate had betaken her which so often falls upon a woman who trusts herself and her life to a man. But why should he fall also with her fall? There was still a career before him. He might be useful; he might be successful; he might be admired. Everything might still be open to him—except the love of another woman. As to that, she did not doubt his truth. Why should he be doomed to drag her with him as a log tied to his foot, seeing that a woman with a misfortune is condemned by the general voice of the world, whereas for a man to have stumbled is considered hardly more than a matter of course? She would consent to take from him the means of buying her bread; but it would be better—she had said—that she should eat it on her side of the water, while he might earn it on the other.

We know what had come of these arguments. He had hitherto never left her for a moment since that man had again appeared before their eyes. He had been strong in his resolution. If it were a crime, then he would be a criminal. If it were a falsehood, then would he be a liar. As to the sin, there had no doubt been some divergence of opinion between him and her. The teaching that he had undergone in his youth had been that with which we, here, are all more or less acquainted, and that had been strengthened in him by the fact of his having become a clergyman. She had felt herself more at liberty to proclaim to herself a gospel of her own for the guidance of her own soul. To herself she had never seemed to be vicious or impure, but she understood well that he was not equally

free from the bonds which religion had imposed upon him. For his sake—for his sake, it would be better that she should be away from him.

All this was known to him accurately, and all this had to be considered by him as he walked across the squire's park in the gloaming of the evening. No doubt—he now said to himself—the Doctor should have been made acquainted with his condition before he or she had taken their place at the school. Reticence under such circumstances had been a lie. Against his conscience there had been many pricks. Living in his present condition he certainly should not have gone up into that pulpit to preach the Word of God. Though he had been silent, he had known that the evil and the deceit would work round upon him. But now what should he do? There was only one thing on which he was altogether decided;—nothing should separate them. As he had said so often before, he said again now—“If there be sin, let it be sin.” But this was clear to him—were he to give Dr. Wortle a true history of what had happened to him in America, then must he certainly leave Bowick. And this was equally certain, that before telling his tale, he must make known his purpose to his wife.

But as he entered his own house he had determined that he would tell the Doctor everything.

V

“THEN WE MUST GO”

“I thought you were never going to have done with that old Jupiter,” said Mrs. Peacocke, as she began at that late hour of the evening to make tea for herself and her husband.

“Why have you waited for me?”

“Because I like company. Did you ever know me go to tea without you when there was a chance of your coming? What has Jupiter been talking about all this time?”

“Jupiter has not been talking all this time. Jupiter talked only for half an hour. Jupiter is a very good fellow.”

“I always thought so. Otherwise I should never have consented to have been one of his satellites, or have been contented to see you doing chief moon. But you have been with him an hour and a half.”

“Since I left him I have walked all round by Bowick Lodge. I had something to think of before I could talk to you—something to decide upon, indeed, before I could return to the house.”

“What have you decided?” she asked. Her voice was altogether changed. Though she was seated in her chair and had hardly moved, her appearance and her carriage of herself were changed. She still held the cup in her hand which she had been about to fill, but her face was turned towards his, and her large brown speaking eyes were fixed upon him.

“Let me have my tea,” he said, “and then I will tell you.” While he drank his tea she remained quite quiet, not touching her own, but waiting patiently till it should suit him to speak. “Ella,” he said, “I must tell it all to Dr. Wortle.”

“Why, dearest?” As he did not answer at once, she went on with her question. “Why now more than before?”

“Nay, it is not now more than before. As we have let the before go by, we can only do it now.”

“But why at all, dear? Has the argument, which was strong when we came, lost any of its force?”

“It should have had no force. We should not have taken the man’s good things, and have subjected him to the injury which may come to him by our bad name.”

“Have we not given him good things in return?”

“Not the good things which he had a right to expect—not that respectability which is all the world to such an establishment as this.”

“Let me go,” she said, rising from her chair and almost shrieking.

“Nay, Ella, nay; if you and I cannot talk as though we were one flesh, almost with one soul between us, as though that which is done by one is done by both, whether for weal or woe—if you and I cannot feel ourselves to be in a boat together either for swimming or for sinking, then I think that no two persons on this earth ever can be bound together after that fashion. ‘Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.’” Then she rose from her chair, and flinging herself on her knees at his feet, buried her face in his lap. “Ella,” he said, “the only injury you can do me is to speak of leaving me. And it is an injury which is surely unnecessary because you cannot carry it beyond words. Now, if you will sit up and listen to me, I will tell you what passed between me and the Doctor.” Then she raised herself from the ground and took her seat at the tea-table, and listened patiently as he began his tale. “They have been talking about us here in the county.”

“Who has found it necessary to talk about one so obscure as I?”

“What does it matter who they might be? The Doctor in his kindly wrath—for he is very wroth—mentions this name and the other. What does it matter? Obscurity itself becomes mystery, and mystery of course produces curiosity. It was bound to be so. It is not they who are in fault, but we. If you are different from others, of course you will be inquired into.”

“Am I so different?”

“Yes;—different in not eating the Doctor’s dinners when they are offered to you; different in not accepting Lady De Lawle’s hospitality; different in contenting yourself simply with your duties and your husband. Of course we are different. How could we not be different? And as we are different, so of course there will be questions and wonderings, and that sifting and searching which always at last finds out the facts. The Bishop says that he knows nothing of my American life.”

“Why should he want to know anything?”

“Because I have been preaching in one of his churches. It is natural;—natural that the mothers of the boys should want to know something. The Doctor says that he hates secrets. So do I.”

“Oh, my dearest!”

“A secret is always accompanied by more or less of fear, and produces more or less of cowardice. But it can no more be avoided than a sore on the flesh or a broken bone. Who would not go about, with all his affairs such as the world might know, if it were possible? But there come gangrenes in the heart, or perhaps in the pocket. Wounds come, undeserved wounds, as those did to you, my darling; but wounds which may not be laid bare to all eyes. Who has a secret because he chooses it?”

“But the Bishop?”

“Well—yes, the Bishop. The Bishop has told the Doctor to examine me, and the Doctor has done it. I give him the credit of saying that the task has been most distasteful to him. I do him the justice of acknowledging that he has backed out of the work he had undertaken. He has asked the question, but has said in the same breath that I need not answer it unless I like.”

“And you? You have not answered it yet?”

“No; I have answered nothing as yet. But I have, I think, made up my mind that the question must be answered.”

“That everything should be told?”

“Everything—to him. My idea is to tell everything to him, and to leave it to him to decide what should be done. Should he refuse to repeat the story any further, and then bid us go away from Bowick, I should think that his conduct had been altogether straightforward and not uncharitable.”

“And you—what would you do then?”

“I should go. What else?”

“But whither?”

“Ah! on that we must decide. He would be friendly with me. Though he might think it necessary that I should leave Bowick, he would not turn against me violently.”

“He could do nothing.”

“I think he would assist me rather. He would help me, perhaps, to find some place where I might still earn my bread by such skill as I possess;—where I could do so without dragging in aught of my domestic life, as I have been forced to do here.”

“I have been a curse to you,” exclaimed the unhappy wife.

“My dearest blessing,” he said. “That which you call a curse has come from circumstances which are common to both of us. There need be no more said about it. That man has been a source of terrible trouble to us.

The trouble must be discussed from time to time, but the necessity of enduring it may be taken for granted."

"I cannot be a philosopher such as you are," she said.

"There is no escape from it. The philosophy is forced upon us. When an evil thing is necessary, there remains only the consideration how it may be best borne."

"You must tell him, then?"

"I think so. I have a week to consider of it; but I think so. Though he is very kind at this moment in giving me the option, and means what he says in declaring that I shall remain even though I tell him nothing, yet his mind would become uneasy, and he would gradually become discontented. Think how great is his stake in the school! How would he feel towards me, were its success to be gradually diminished because he kept a master here of whom people believed some unknown evil?"

"There has been no sign of any such falling off?"

"There has been no time for it. It is only now that people are beginning to talk. Had nothing of the kind been said, had this Bishop asked no questions, had we been regarded as people simply obscure, to whom no mystery attached itself, the thing might have gone on; but as it is, I am bound to tell him the truth."

"Then we must go?"

"Probably."

"At once?"

"When it has been so decided, the sooner the better. How could we endure to remain here when our going shall be desired?"

"Oh no!"

"We must flit, and again seek some other home. Though he should keep our secret—and I believe he will if he be asked—it will be known that there is a secret, and a secret of such a nature that its circumstances have driven us hence. If I could get literary work in London, perhaps we might live there."

"But how—how would you set about it? The truth is, dearest, that for work such as yours you should either have no wife at all, or else a wife of whom you need not be ashamed to speak the whole truth before the world."

"What is the use of it?" he said, rising from his chair as in anger.

"Why go back to all that which should be settled between us, as fixed by fate? Each of us has given to the other all that each has to give, and the partnership is complete. As far as that is concerned, I at any rate am contented."

“Ah, my darling!” she exclaimed, throwing her arms round his neck.

“Let there be an end to distinctions and differences, which, between you and me, can have no effect but to increase our troubles. You are a woman, and I am a man; and therefore, no doubt, your name, when brought in question, is more subject to remark than mine—as is my name, being that of a clergyman, more subject to remark than that of one not belonging to a sacred profession. But not on that account do I wish to unfrock myself; nor certainly on that account do I wish to be deprived of my wife. For good or bad, it has to be endured together; and expressions of regret as to that which is unavoidable, only aggravate our trouble.”

After that, he seated himself, and took up a book as though he were able at once to carry off his mind to other matters. She probably knew that he could not do so, but she sat silent by him for a while, till he bade her take herself to bed, promising that he would follow without delay.

For three days nothing further was said between them on the subject, nor was any allusion made to it between the Doctor and his assistant. The school went on the same as ever, and the intercourse between the two men was unaltered as to its general mutual courtesy. But there did undoubtedly grow in the Doctor’s mind a certain feverish feeling of insecurity. At any rate, he knew this, that there was a mystery, that there was something about the Peacockes—something referring especially to Mrs. Peacocke—which, if generally known, would be held to be deleterious to their character. So much he could not help deducing from what the man had already told him. No doubt he had undertaken, in his generosity, that although the man should decline to tell his secret, no alteration should be made as to the school arrangements; but he became conscious that in so promising he had in some degree jeopardised the well-being of the school. He began to whisper to himself that persons in such a position as that filled by this Mr. Peacocke and his wife should not be subject to peculiar remarks from ill-natured tongues. A weapon was afforded by such a mystery to the Stantiloups of the world, which the Stantiloups would be sure to use with all their virulence. To such an establishment as his school, respectability was everything. Credit, he said to himself, is a matter so subtle in its essence, that, as it may be obtained almost without reason, so, without reason, may it be made to melt away. Much as he liked Mr. Peacocke, much as he approved of him, much as there was in the man of manliness and worth which was absolutely dear to him—still he was not willing to put the character of his school in peril for the sake of Mr. Peacocke. Were he to do so, he would be neglecting a duty much more sacred than any he could owe to Mr. Peacocke. It was

thus that, during these three days, he conversed with himself on the subject, although he was able to maintain outwardly the same manner and the same countenance as though all things were going well between them. When they parted after the interview in the study, the Doctor, no doubt, had so expressed himself as rather to dissuade his usher from telling his secret than to encourage him to do so. He had been free in declaring that the telling of the secret should make no difference in his assistant's position at Bowick. But in all that, he had acted from his habitual impulse. He had since told himself that the mystery ought to be disclosed. It was not right that his boys should be left to the charge of one who, however competent, dared not speak of his own antecedents. It was thus he thought of the matter, after consideration. He must wait, of course, till the week should be over before he made up his mind to anything further.

“So Peacocke isn't going to take the curacy?”

This was said to the Doctor by Mr. Pearson, the squire, in the course of those two or three days of which we are speaking. Mr. Pearson was an old gentleman, who did not live often at Bowick, being compelled, as he always said, by his health, to spend the winter and spring of every year in Italy, and the summer months by his family in London. In truth, he did not much care for Bowick, but had always been on good terms with the Doctor, and had never opposed the school. Mr. Pearson had been good also as to Church matters—as far as goodness can be shown by generosity—and had interested himself about the curates. So it had come to pass that the Doctor did not wish to snub his neighbour when the question was asked. “I rather think not,” said the Doctor. “I fear I shall have to look out for someone else.” He did not prolong the conversation; for, though he wished to be civil, he did not wish to be communicative. Mr. Pearson had shown his parochial solicitude, and did not trouble himself with further questions.

“So Mr. Peacocke isn't going to take the curacy?” This, the very same question in the very same words, was put to the Doctor on the next morning by the vicar of the next parish. The Rev. Mr. Puddicombe, a clergyman without a flaw who did his duty excellently in every station of life, was one who would preach a sermon or take a whole service for a brother parson in distress, and never think of reckoning up that return sermons or return services were due to him—one who gave dinners, too, and had pretty daughters;—but still our Doctor did not quite like him. He was a little too pious, and perhaps given to ask questions. “So Mr. Peacocke isn't going to take the curacy?”

There was a certain animation about the asking of this question by Mr. Puddicombe very different from Mr. Pearson's listless manner. It was clear to the Doctor that Mr. Puddicombe wanted to know. It seemed to the Doctor that something of condemnation was implied in the tone of the question, not only against Mr. Peacocke, but against himself also, for having employed Mr. Peacocke. "Upon my word I can't tell you," he said, rather crossly.

"I thought that it had been all settled. I heard that it was decided."

"Then you have heard more than I have."

"It was the Bishop told me."

Now it certainly was the case that in that fatal conversation which had induced the Doctor to interrogate Mr. Peacocke about his past life, the Doctor himself had said that he intended to look out for another curate. He probably did not remember that at the moment. "I wish the Bishop would confine himself to asserting things that he knows," said the Doctor, angrily.

"I am sure the Bishop intends to do so," said Mr. Puddicombe, very gravely. "But I apologise. I had not intended to touch a subject on which there may perhaps be some reserve. I was only going to tell you of an excellent young man of whom I have heard. But, good morning." Then Mr. Puddicombe withdrew.

VI

LORD CARSTAIRS

During the last six months Mr. Peacocke's most intimate friend at Bowick, excepting of course his wife, had been one of the pupils at the school. The lad was one of the pupils, but could not be said to be one of the boys. He was the young Lord Carstairs, eldest son of Earl Bracy. He had been sent to Bowick now six years ago, with the usual purpose of progressing from Bowick to Eton. And from Bowick to Eton he had gone in due course. But there, things had not gone well with the young lord. Some school disturbance had taken place when he had been there about a year and a half, in which he was, or was supposed to have been, a ringleader. It was thought necessary, for the preservation of the discipline of the school, that a victim should be made;—and it was perhaps thought well, in order that the impartiality of the school might be made manifest, that the victim should be a lord. Earl Bracy was therefore asked to withdraw his son; and young Lord Carstairs, at the age of seventeen, was left to seek his education where he could. It had been, and still was, the Earl's purpose to send his son to Oxford, but there was now an interval of two years before that could be accomplished. During one year he was sent abroad to travel with a tutor, and was then reported to have been all that a well-conducted lad ought to be. He was declared to be quite worthy of all that Oxford would do for him. It was even suggested that Eton had done badly for herself in throwing off from her such a young nobleman. But though Lord Carstairs had done well with his French and German on the Continent, it would certainly be necessary that he should rub up his Greek and Latin before he went to Christ Church. Then a request was made to the Doctor to take him in at Bowick in some sort as a private pupil. After some demurring the Doctor consented. It was not his wont to run counter to earls who treated him with respect and deference. Earl Bracy had in a special manner been his friend, and Lord Carstairs himself had been a great favourite at Bowick. When that expulsion from Eton had come about, the Doctor had interested himself, and had declared that a very scant measure of justice had been shown to the young lord. He was thus in a measure compelled to accede to the request made to him, and Lord Carstairs was received

back at Bowick, not without hesitation, but with a full measure of affectionate welcome. His bedroom was in the parsonage-house, and his dinner he took with the Doctor's family. In other respects he lived among the boys.

"Will it not be bad for Mary?" Mrs. Wortle had said anxiously to her husband when the matter was first discussed.

"Why should it be bad for Mary?"

"Oh, I don't know;—but young people together, you know? Mightn't it be dangerous?"

"He is a boy, and she is a mere child. They are both children. It will be a trouble, but I do not think it will be at all dangerous in that way." And so it was decided. Mrs. Wortle did not at all agree as to their both being children. She thought that her girl was far from being a child. But she had argued the matter quite as much as she ever argued anything with the Doctor. So the matter was arranged, and young Lord Carstairs came back to Bowick.

As far as the Doctor could see, nothing could be nicer than his young pupil's manners. He was not at all above playing with the other boys. He took very kindly to his old studies and his old haunts, and of an evening, after dinner, went away from the drawing-room to the study in pursuit of his Latin and his Greek, without any precocious attempt at making conversation with Miss Wortle. No doubt there was a good deal of lawn-tennis of an afternoon, and the lawn-tennis was generally played in the rectory garden. But then this had ever been the case, and the lawn-tennis was always played with two on a side; there were no tête-à-tête games between his lordship and Mary, and whenever the game was going on, Mrs. Wortle was always there to see fair-play. Among other amusements the young lord took to walking far afield with Mr. Peacocke. And then, no doubt, many things were said about that life in America. When a man has been much abroad, and has passed his time there under unusual circumstances, his doings will necessarily become subjects of conversation to his companions. To have travelled in France, Germany, or in Italy, is not uncommon; nor is it uncommon to have lived a year or years in Florence or in Rome. It is not uncommon now to have travelled all through the United States. The Rocky Mountains or Peru are hardly uncommon, so much has the taste for travelling increased. But for an Oxford Fellow of a college, and a clergyman of the Church of England, to have established himself as a professor in Missouri, is uncommon, and it could hardly be but that Lord Carstairs should ask questions respecting that faraway life.

Mr. Peacocke had no objection to such questions. He told his young friend much about the manners of the people of St. Louis—told him how far the people had progressed in classical literature, in what they fell behind, and in what they excelled youths of their own age in England, and how far the college was a success. Then he described his own life—both before and after his marriage. He had liked the people of St. Louis well enough—but not quite well enough to wish to live among them. No doubt their habits were very different from those of Englishmen. He could, however, have been happy enough there—only that circumstances arose.

“Did Mrs. Peacocke like the place?” the young lord asked one day.

“She is an American, you know.”

“Oh yes; I have heard. But did she come from St. Louis?”

“No; her father was a planter in Louisiana, not far from New Orleans, before the abolition of slavery.”

“Did she like St. Louis?”

“Well enough, I think, when we were first married. She had been married before, you know. She was a widow.”

“Did she like coming to England among strangers?”

“She was glad to leave St. Louis. Things happened there which made her life unhappy. It was on that account I came here, and gave up a position higher and more lucrative than I shall ever now get in England.”

“I should have thought you might have had a school of your own,” said the lad. “You know so much, and get on so well with boys. I should have thought you might have been tutor at a college.”

“To have a school of my own would take money,” said he, “which I have not got. To be tutor at a college would take—But never mind. I am very well where I am, and have nothing to complain of.” He had been going to say that to be tutor of a college he would want high standing. And then he would have been forced to explain that he had lost at his own college that standing which he had once possessed.

“Yes,” he said on another occasion, “she is unhappy; but do not ask her any questions about it.”

“Who—I? Oh dear, no! I should not think of taking such a liberty.”

“It would be as a kindness, not as a liberty. But still, do not speak to her about it. There are sorrows which must be hidden, which it is better to endeavour to bury by never speaking of them, by not thinking of them, if that were possible.”

“Is it as bad as that?” the lad asked.

“It is bad enough sometimes. But never mind. You remember that Roman wisdom—‘*Dabit Deus his quoque finem.*’ And I think that all things are bearable if a man will only make up his mind to bear them. Do not tell anyone that I have complained.”

“Who—I? Oh, never!”

“Not that I have said anything which all the world might not know; but that it is unmanly to complain. Indeed I do not complain, only I wish that things were lighter to her.” Then he went off to other matters; but his heart was yearning to tell everything to this young lad.

Before the end of the week had arrived, there came a letter to him which he had not at all expected, and a letter also to the Doctor—both from Lord Bracy. The letter to Mr. Peacocke was as follows:—

“MY DEAR SIR—I have been much gratified by what I have heard both from Dr. Wortle and my son as to his progress. He will have to come home in July, when the Doctor’s school is broken up, and, as you are probably aware, will go up to Oxford in October. I think it would be very expedient that he should not altogether lose the holidays, and I am aware how much more he would do with adequate assistance than without it. The meaning of all this is, that I and Lady Bracy will feel very much obliged if you and Mrs. Peacocke will come and spend your holidays with us at Carstairs. I have written to Dr. Wortle on the subject, partly to tell him of my proposal, because he has been so kind to my son, and partly to ask him to fix the amount of remuneration, should you be so kind as to accede to my request.

“His mother has heard on more than one occasion from her son how very good-natured you have been to him.—
Yours faithfully,

“BRACY.”

It was, of course, quite out of the question. Mr. Peacocke, as soon as he had read the letter, felt that it was so. Had things been smooth and easy with him, nothing would have delighted him more. His liking for the lad was most sincere, and it would have been a real pleasure to him to have worked with him during the holidays. But it was quite out of the question. He must tell Lord Carstairs that it was so, and must at the

moment give such explanation as might occur to him. He almost felt that in giving that explanation he would be tempted to tell his whole story.

But the Doctor met him before he had an opportunity of speaking to Lord Carstairs. The Doctor met him, and at once produced the Earl's letter. "I have heard from Lord Bracy, and you, I suppose, have had a letter too," said the Doctor. His manner was easy and kind, as though no disagreeable communication was due to be made on the following day.

"Yes," said Mr. Peacocke. "I have had a letter."

"Well?"

"His lordship has asked me to go to Carstairs for the holidays; but it is out of the question."

"It would do Carstairs all the good in the world," said the Doctor; "and I do not see why you should not have a pleasant visit and earn twenty-five pounds at the same time."

"It is quite out of the question."

"I suppose you would not like to leave Mrs. Peacocke," said the Doctor.

"Either to leave her or to take her! To go myself under any circumstances would be altogether out of the question. I shall come to you tomorrow, Doctor, as I said I would last Saturday. What hour will suit you?" Then the Doctor named an hour in the afternoon, and knew that the revelation was to be made to him. He felt, too, that that revelation would lead to the final departure of Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke from Bowick, and he was unhappy in his heart. Though he was anxious for his school, he was anxious also for his friend. There was a gratification in the feeling that Lord Bracy thought so much of his assistant—or would have been but for this wretched mystery!

"No," said Mr. Peacocke to the lad. "I regret to say that I cannot go. I will tell you why, perhaps, another time, but not now. I have written to your father by this post, because it is right that he should be told at once. I have been obliged to say that it is impossible."

"I am so sorry! I should so much have liked it. My father would have done everything to make you comfortable, and so would mamma." In answer to all this Mr. Peacocke could only say that it was impossible. This happened on Friday afternoon, Friday being a day on which the school was always very busy. There was no time for the doing of anything special, as there would be on the following day, which was a half-holiday. At night, when the work was altogether over, he showed the letter to his wife, and told her what he had decided.

"Couldn't you have gone without me?" she asked.

“How can I do that,” he said, “when before this time tomorrow I shall have told everything to Dr. Wortle? After that, he would not let me go. He would do no more than his duty in telling me that if I proposed to go he must make it all known to Lord Bracy. But this is a trifle. I am at the present moment altogether in the dark as to what I shall do with myself when tomorrow evening comes. I cannot guess, because it is so hard to know what are the feelings in the breast of another man. It may so well be that he should refuse me permission to go to my desk in the school again.”

“Will he be hard like that?”

“I can hardly tell myself whether it would be hard. I hardly know what I should feel it my duty to do in such a position myself. I have deceived him.”

“No!” she exclaimed.

“Yes; I have deceived him. Coming to him as I did, I gave him to understand that there was nothing wrong;—nothing to which special objection could be made in my position.”

“Then we are deceiving all the world in calling ourselves man and wife.”

“Certainly we are; but to that we had made up our mind! We are not injuring all the world. No doubt it is a lie—but there are circumstances in which a lie can hardly be a sin. I would have been the last to say so before all this had come upon me, but I feel it to be so now. It is a lie to say that you are my wife.”

“Is it? Is it?”

“Is it not? And yet I would rather cut my tongue out than say otherwise. To give you my name is a lie—but what should I think of myself were I to allow you to use any other? What would you have thought if I had asked you to go away and leave me when that bad hour came upon us?”

“I would have borne it.”

“I could not have borne it. There are worse things than a lie. I have found, since this came upon us, that it may be well to choose one sin in order that another may be shunned. To cherish you, to comfort you, to make the storm less sharp to you—that has already been my duty as well as my pleasure. To do the same to me is your duty.”

“And my pleasure; and my pleasure—my only pleasure.”

“We must cling to each other, let the world call us what names it may. But there may come a time in which one is called on to do a special act of justice to others. It has come now to me. From the world at large I am

prepared, if possible, to keep my secret, even though I do it by lying;—but to this one man I am driven to tell it, because I may not return his friendship by doing him an evil.”

Morning school at this time of the year at Bowick began at half-past seven. There was an hour of school before breakfast, at which the Doctor did not himself put in an appearance. He was wont to tell the boys that he had done all that when he was young, and that now in his old age it suited him best to have his breakfast before he began the work of the day. Mr. Peacocke, of course, attended the morning school. Indeed, as the matutinal performances were altogether classical, it was impossible that much should be done without him. On this Saturday morning, however, he was not present; and a few minutes after the proper time, the mathematical master took his place. “I saw him coming across out of his own door,” little Jack Talbot said to the younger of the two Clifford boys, “and there was a man coming up from the gate who met him.”

“What sort of a man?” asked Clifford.

“He was a rummy-looking fellow, with a great beard, and a queer kind of coat. I never saw anyone like him before.”

“And where did they go?”

“They stood talking for a minute or two just before the front door, and then Mr. Peacocke took him into the house. I heard him tell Carstairs to go through and send word up to the Doctor that he wouldn’t be in school this morning.”

It had all happened just as young Talbot had said. A very “rummy-looking fellow” had at that early hour been driven over from Broughton to Bowick, and had caught Mr. Peacocke just as he was going into the school. He was a man with a beard, loose, flowing on both sides, as though he were winged like a bird—a beard that had been black, but was now streaked through and through with grey hairs. The man had a coat with frogged buttons that must have been intended to have a military air when it was new, but which was now much the worse for wear. The coat was so odd as to have caught young Talbot’s attention at once. And the man’s hat was old and seedy. But there was a look about him as though he were by no means ashamed either of himself or of his present purpose. “He came in a gig,” said Talbot to his friend; “for I saw the horse standing at the gate, and the man sitting in the gig.”

“You remember me, no doubt,” the stranger said, when he encountered Mr. Peacocke.

“I do not remember you in the least,” the schoolmaster answered.

“Come, come; that won’t do. You know me well enough. I’m Robert Lefroy.”

Then Mr. Peacocke, looking at him again, knew that the man was the brother of his wife’s husband. He had not seen him often, but he recognised him as Robert Lefroy, and having recognised him he took him into the house.

PART III

VII

ROBERT LEFROY

Ferdinand Lefroy, the man who had in truth been the woman's husband, had, during that one interview which had taken place between him and the man who had married his wife, on his return to St. Louis, declared that his brother Robert was dead. But so had Robert, when Peacocke encountered him down at Texas, declared that Ferdinand was dead. Peacocke knew that no word of truth could be expected from the mouths of either of them. But seeing is believing. He had seen Ferdinand alive at St. Louis after his marriage, and by seeing him, had been driven away from his home back to his old country. Now he also saw this other man, and was aware that his secret was no longer in his own keeping.

"Yes, I know you now. Why, when I saw you last, did you tell me that your brother was dead? Why did you bring so great an injury on your sister-in-law?"

"I never told you anything of the kind."

"As God is above us you told me so."

"I don't know anything about that, my friend. Maybe I was cut. I used to be drinking a good deal them days. Maybe I didn't say anything of the kind—only it suited you to go back and tell her so. Anyways I disremember it altogether. Anyways he wasn't dead. And I ain't dead now."

"I can see that."

"And I ain't drunk now. But I am not quite so well off as a fellow would wish to be. Can you get me breakfast?"

"Yes, I can get you breakfast," he said, after pausing for a while. Then he rang the bell and told the girl to bring some breakfast for the gentleman as soon as possible into the room in which they were sitting. This was in a little library in which he was in the habit of studying and going through lessons with the boys. He had brought the man here so that his wife might not come across him. As soon as the order was given, he ran upstairs to her room, to save her from coming down.

"A man;—what man?" she asked.

"Robert Lefroy. I must go to him at once. Bear yourself well and boldly, my darling. It is he, certainly. I know nothing yet of what he may

have to say, but it will be well that you should avoid him if possible. When I have heard anything I will tell you all." Then he hurried down and found the man examining the bookshelves.

"You have got yourself up pretty tidy again, Peacocke," said Lefroy.

"Pretty well."

"The old game, I suppose. Teaching the young idea. Is this what you call a college, now, in your country?"

"It is a school."

"And you're one of the masters."

"I am the second master."

"It ain't as good, I reckon, as the Missouri College."

"It's not so large, certainly."

"What's the screw?" he said.

"The payment, you mean. It can hardly serve us now to go into matters such as that. What is it that has brought you here, Lefroy?"

"Well, a big ship, an uncommonly bad sort of railway car, and the ricketiest little buggy that ever a man trusted his life to. Them's what's brought me here."

"I suppose you have something to say, or you would not have come," said Peacocke.

"Yes, I've a good deal to say of one kind or another. But here's the breakfast, and I'm well-nigh starved. What, cold meat! I'm darned if I can eat cold meat. Haven't you got anything hot, my dear?" Then it was explained to him that hot meat was not to be had, unless he would choose to wait, to have some lengthened cooking accomplished. To this, however, he objected, and then the girl left the room.

"I've a good many things to say of one kind or another," he continued. "It's difficult to say, Peacocke, how you and I stand with each other."

"I do not know that we stand with each other at all, as you call it."

"I mean as to relationship. Are you my brother-in-law, or are you not?" This was a question which in very truth the schoolmaster found it hard to answer. He did not answer it at all, but remained silent. "Are you my brother-in-law, or are you not? You call her Mrs. Peacocke, eh?"

"Yes, I call her Mrs. Peacocke."

"And she is here living with you?"

"Yes, she is here."

"Had she not better come down and see me? She is my sister-in-law, anyway."

"No," said Mr. Peacocke; "I think, on the whole, that she had better not come down and see you."

“You don’t mean to say she isn’t my sister-in-law? She’s that, whatever else she is. She’s that, whatever name she goes by. If Ferdinand had been ever so much dead, and that marriage at St. Louis had been ever so good, still she’d been my sister-in-law.”

“Not a doubt about it,” said Mr. Peacocke. “But still, under all the circumstances, she had better not see you.”

“Well, that’s a queer beginning, anyway. But perhaps you’ll come round by-and-by. She goes by Mrs. Peacocke?”

“She is regarded as my wife,” said the husband, feeling himself to become more and more indignant at every word, but knowing at the same time how necessary it was that he should keep his indignation hidden.

“Whether true or false?” asked the brother-in-law.

“I will answer no such question as that.”

“You ain’t very well disposed to answer any question, as far as I can see. But I shall have to make you answer one or two before I’ve done with you. There’s a Doctor here, isn’t there, as this school belongs to?”

“Yes, there is. It belongs to Dr. Wortle.”

“It’s him these boys are sent to?”

“Yes, he is the master; I am only his assistant.”

“It’s him they comes to for education, and morals, and religion?”

“Quite so.”

“And he knows, no doubt, all about you and my sister-in-law;—how you came and married her when she was another man’s wife, and took her away when you knew as that other man was alive and kicking?”

Mr. Peacocke, when these questions were put to him, remained silent, because literally he did not know how to answer them. He was quite prepared to take his position as he found it. He had told himself before this dreadful man had appeared, that the truth must be made known at Bowick, and that he and his wife must pack up and flit. It was not that the man could bring upon him any greater evil than he had anticipated. But the questions which were asked him were in themselves so bitter! The man, no doubt, was his wife’s brother-in-law. He could not turn him out of the house as he would a stranger, had a stranger come there asking such questions without any claim of family. Abominable as the man was to him, still he was there with a certain amount of right upon his side.

“I think,” said he, “that questions such as those you’ve asked can be of no service to you. To me they are intended only to be injurious.”

“They’re as a preface to what is to come,” said Robert Lefroy, with an impudent leer upon his face. “The questions, no doubt, are disagreeable

enough. She ain't your wife no more than she's mine. You've no business with her; and that you knew when you took her away from St. Louis. You may, or you mayn't, have been fooled by someone down in Texas when you went back and married her in all that hurry. But you knew what you were doing well enough when you took her away. You won't dare to tell me that you hadn't seen Ferdinand when you two mizzled off from the College?" Then he paused, waiting again for a reply.

"As I told you before," he said, "no further conversation on the subject can be of avail. It does not suit me to be cross-examined as to what I knew or what I did not know. If you have anything for me to hear, you can say it. If you have anything to tell to others, go and tell it to them."

"That's just it," said Lefroy.

"Then go and tell it."

"You're in a terrible hurry, Mister Peacocke. I don't want to drop in and spoil your little game. You're making money of your little game. I can help you as to carrying on your little game, better than you do at present. I don't want to blow upon you. But as you're making money out of it, I'd like to make a little too. I am precious hard up—I am."

"You will make no money of me," said the other.

"A little will go a long way with me; and remember, I have got tidings now which are worth paying for."

"What tidings?"

"If they're worth paying for, it's not likely that you are going to get them for nothing."

"Look here, Colonel Lefroy; whatever you may have to say about me will certainly not be prevented by my paying you money. Though you might be able to ruin me tomorrow I would not give you a dollar to save myself."

"But her," said Lefroy, pointing as it were upstairs, with his thumb over his shoulder.

"Nor her," said Peacocke.

"You don't care very much about her, then?"

"How much I may care I shall not trouble myself to explain to you. I certainly shall not endeavour to serve her after that fashion. I begin to understand why you have come, and can only beg you to believe that you have come in vain."

Lefroy turned to his food, which he had not yet finished, while his companion sat silent at the window, trying to arrange in his mind the circumstances of the moment as best he might. He declared to himself

that had the man come but one day later, his coming would have been matter of no moment. The story, the entire story, would then have been told to the Doctor, and the brother-in-law, with all his malice, could have added nothing to the truth. But now it seemed as though there would be a race which should tell the story first. Now the Doctor would, no doubt, be led to feel that the narration was made because it could no longer be kept back. Should this man be with the Doctor first, and should the story be told as he would tell it, then it would be impossible for Mr. Peacocke, in acknowledging the truth of it all, to bring his friend's mind back to the condition in which it would have been had this intruder not been in the way. And yet he could not make a race of it with the man. He could not rush across, and, all but out of breath with his energy, begin his narration while Lefroy was there knocking at the door. There would be an absence of dignity in such a mode of proceeding which alone was sufficient to deter him. He had fixed an hour already with the Doctor. He had said that he would be there in the house at a certain time. Let the man do what he would he would keep exactly to his purpose, unless the Doctor should seek an earlier interview. He would, in no tittle, be turned from his purpose by the unfortunate coming of this wretched man. "Well!" said Lefroy, as soon as he had eaten his last mouthful.

"I have nothing to say to you," said Peacocke.

"Nothing to say?"

"Not a word."

"Well, that's queer. I should have thought there'd have been a many words. I've got a lot to say to somebody, and mean to say it;—precious soon too. Is there any hotel here, where I can put this horse up? I suppose you haven't got stables of your own? I wonder if the Doctor would give me accommodation?"

"I haven't got a stable, and the Doctor certainly will not give you accommodation. There is a public-house less than a quarter of a mile further on, which no doubt your driver knows very well. You had better go there yourself, because after what has taken place, I am bound to tell you that you will not be admitted here."

"Not admitted?"

"No. You must leave this house, and will not be admitted into it again as long as I live in it."

"The Doctor will admit me."

"Very likely. I, at any rate, shall do nothing to dissuade him. If you go down to the road you'll see the gate leading up to his house. I think you'll find that he is downstairs by this time."

“You take it very cool, Peacocke.”

“I only tell you the truth. With you I will have nothing more to do. You have a story which you wish to tell to Dr. Wortle. Go and tell it to him.”

“I can tell it to all the world,” said Lefroy.

“Go and tell it to all the world.”

“And I ain’t to see my sister?”

“No; you will not see your sister-in-law here. Why should she wish to see one who has only injured her?”

“I ain’t injured her;—at any rate not as yet. I ain’t done nothing;—not as yet. I’ve been as dark as the grave;—as yet. Let her come down, and you go away for a moment, and let us see if we can’t settle it.”

“There is nothing for you to settle. Nothing that you can do, nothing that you can say, will influence either her or me. If you have anything to tell, go and tell it.”

“Why should you smash up everything in that way, Peacocke? You’re comfortable here; why not remain so? I don’t want to hurt you. I want to help you;—and I can. Three hundred dollars wouldn’t be much to you. You were always a fellow as had a little money by you.”

“If this box were full of gold,” said the schoolmaster, laying his hand upon a black desk which stood on the table, “I would not give you one cent to induce you to hold your tongue forever. I would not condescend even to ask it of you as a favour. You think that you can disturb our happiness by telling what you know of us to Dr. Wortle. Go and try.”

Mr. Peacocke’s manner was so firm that the other man began to doubt whether in truth he had a secret to tell. Could it be possible that Dr. Wortle knew it all, and that the neighbours knew it all, and that, in spite of what had happened, the position of the man and of the woman was accepted among them? They certainly were not man and wife, and yet they were living together as such. Could such a one as this Dr. Wortle know that it was so? He, when he had spoken of the purposes for which the boys were sent there, asking whether they were not sent for education, for morals and religion, had understood much of the Doctor’s position. He had known the peculiar value of his secret. He had been aware that a schoolmaster with a wife to whom he was not in truth married must be out of place in an English seminary such as this. But yet he now began to doubt. “I am to be turned out, then?” he asked.

“Yes, indeed, Colonel Lefroy. The sooner you go the better.”

“That’s a pretty sort of welcome to your wife’s brother-in-law, who has just come over all the way from Mexico to see her.”

“To get what he can out of her by his unwelcome presence,” said Peacocke. “Here you can get nothing. Go and do your worst. If you remain much longer I shall send for the policeman to remove you.”

“You will?”

“Yes, I shall. My time is not my own, and I cannot go over to my work leaving you in my house. You have nothing to get by my friendship. Go and see what you can do as my enemy.”

“I will,” said the Colonel, getting up from his chair; “I will. If I’m to be treated in this way it shall not be for nothing. I have offered you the right hand of an affectionate brother-in-law.”

“Bosh,” said Mr. Peacocke.

“And you tell me that I am an enemy. Very well; I will be an enemy. I could have put you altogether on your legs, but I’ll leave you without an inch of ground to stand upon. You see if I don’t.” Then he put his hat on his head, and stalked out of the house, down the road towards the gate.

Mr. Peacocke, when he was left alone, remained in the room collecting his thoughts, and then went upstairs to his wife.

“Has he gone?” she asked.

“Yes, he has gone.”

“And what has he said?”

“He has asked for money—to hold his tongue.”

“Have you given him any?”

“Not a cent. I have given him nothing but hard words. I have bade him go and do his worst. To be at the mercy of such a man as that would be worse for you and for me than anything that fortune has sent us even yet.”

“Did he want to see me?”

“Yes; but I refused. Was it not better?”

“Yes; certainly, if you think so. What could I have said to him? Certainly it was better. His presence would have half killed me. But what will he do, Henry?”

“He will tell it all to everybody that he sees.”

“Oh, my darling!”

“What matter though he tells it at the town-cross? It would have been told today by myself.”

“But only to one.”

“It would have been the same. For any purpose of concealment it would have been the same. I have got to hate the concealment. What have we done but clung together as a man and woman should who have loved each other, and have had a right to love? What have we done of

which we should be ashamed? Let it be told. Let it all be known. Have you not been good and pure? Have not I been true to you? Bear up your courage, and let the man do his worst. Not to save even you would I cringe before such a man as that. And were I to do so, I should save you from nothing.”

VIII

THE STORY IS TOLD

During the whole of that morning the Doctor did not come into the school. The school hours lasted from half-past nine to twelve, during a portion of which time it was his practice to be there. But sometimes, on a Saturday, he would be absent, when it was understood generally that he was preparing his sermon for the Sunday. Such, no doubt, might be the case now; but there was a feeling among the boys that he was kept away by some other reason. It was known that during the hour of morning school Mr. Peacocke had been occupied with that uncouth stranger, and some of the boys might have observed that the uncouth stranger had not taken himself altogether away from the premises. There was at any rate a general feeling that the uncouth stranger had something to do with the Doctor's absence.

Mr. Peacocke did his best to go on with the work as though nothing had occurred to disturb the usual tenor of his way, and as far as the boys were aware he succeeded. He was just as clear about his Greek verbs, just as incisive about that passage of Caesar, as he would have been had Colonel Lefroy remained on the other side of the water. But during the whole time he was exercising his mind in that painful process of thinking of two things at once. He was determined that Caesar should be uppermost; but it may be doubted whether he succeeded. At that very moment Colonel Lefroy might be telling the Doctor that his Ella was in truth the wife of another man. At that moment the Doctor might be deciding in his anger that the sinful and deceitful man should no longer be "officer of his." The hour was too important to him to leave his mind at his own disposal. Nevertheless he did his best. "Clifford, junior," he said, "I shall never make you understand what Caesar says here or elsewhere if you do not give your entire mind to Caesar."

"I do give my entire mind to Caesar," said Clifford, junior.

"Very well; now go on and try again. But remember that Caesar wants all your mind." As he said this he was revolving in his own mind how he would face the Doctor when the Doctor should look at him in his wrath. If the Doctor were in any degree harsh with him, he would hold his own against the Doctor as far as the personal contest might go. At twelve the

boys went out for an hour before their dinner, and Lord Carstairs asked him to play a game of rackets.

“Not today, my Lord,” he said.

“Is anything wrong with you?”

“Yes, something is very wrong.” They had strolled out of the building, and were walking up and down the gravel terrace in front when this was said.

“I knew something was wrong, because you called me my Lord.”

“Yes, something is so wrong as to alter for me all the ordinary ways of my life. But I wasn’t thinking of it. It came by accident—just because I am so troubled.”

“What is it?”

“There has been a man here—a man whom I knew in America.”

“An enemy?”

“Yes—an enemy. One who is anxious to do me all the injury he can.”

“Are you in his power, Mr. Peacocke?”

“No, thank God; not that. I am in no man’s power. He cannot do me any material harm. Anything which may happen would have happened whether he had come or not. But I am unhappy.”

“I wish I knew.”

“So do I—with all my heart. I wish you knew; I wish you knew. I would that all the world knew. But we shall live through it, no doubt. And if we do not, what matter. ‘Nil conscire sibi—nulla pallescere culpa.’ That is all that is necessary to a man. I have done nothing of which I repent;—nothing that I would not do again; nothing of which I am ashamed to speak as far as the judgment of other men is concerned. Go, now. They are making up sides for cricket. Perhaps I can tell you more before the evening is over.”

Both Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke were accustomed to dine with the boys at one, when Carstairs, being a private pupil, only had his lunch. But on this occasion she did not come into the dining-room. “I don’t think I can today,” she said, when he bade her to take courage, and not be altered more than she could help, in her outward carriage, by the misery of her present circumstances. “I could not eat if I were there, and then they would look at me.”

“If it be so, do not attempt it. There is no necessity. What I mean is, that the less one shrinks the less will be the suffering. It is the man who shivers on the brink that is cold, and not he who plunges into the water. If it were over—if the first brunt of it were over, I could find means to comfort you.”

He went through the dinner, as he had done the Caesar, eating the roast mutton and the baked potatoes, and the great plateful of currant-pie that was brought to him. He was fed and nourished, no doubt, but it may be doubtful whether he knew much of the flavour of what he ate. But before the dinner was quite ended, before he had said the grace which it was always his duty to pronounce, there came a message to him from the rectory. "The Doctor would be glad to see him as soon as dinner was done." He waited very calmly till the proper moment should come for the grace, and then, very calmly, he took his way over to the house. He was certain now that Lefroy had been with the Doctor, because he was sent for considerably before the time fixed for the interview.

It was his chief resolve to hold his own before the Doctor. The Doctor, who could read a character well, had so read that of Mr. Peacocke's as to have been aware from the first that no censure, no faultfinding, would be possible if the connection were to be maintained. Other ushers, other curates, he had occasionally scolded. He had been very careful never even to seem to scold Mr. Peacocke. Mr. Peacocke had been aware of it too—aware that he could not endure it, and aware also that the Doctor avoided any attempt at it. He had known that, as a consequence of this, he was bound to be more than ordinarily prompt in the performance of all his duties. The man who will not endure censure has to take care that he does not deserve it. Such had been this man's struggle, and it had been altogether successful. Each of the two understood the other, and each respected the other. Now their position must be changed. It was hardly possible, Mr. Peacocke thought, as he entered the house, that he should not be rebuked with grave severity, and quite out of the question that he should bear any rebuke at all.

The library at the rectory was a spacious and handsome room, in the centre of which stood a large writing-table, at which the Doctor was accustomed to sit when he was at work—facing the door, with a bow-window at his right hand. But he rarely remained there when anyone was summoned into the room, unless someone were summoned with whom he meant to deal in a spirit of severity. Mr. Peacocke would be there perhaps three or four times a-week, and the Doctor would always get up from his chair and stand, or seat himself elsewhere in the room, and would probably move about with vivacity, being a fidgety man of quick motions, who sometimes seemed as though he could not hold his own body still for a moment. But now when Mr. Peacocke entered the room he did not leave his place at the table. "Would you take a chair?" he said; "there is something that we must talk about."

“Colonel Lefroy has been with you, I take it.”

“A man calling himself by that name has been here. Will you not take a chair?”

“I do not know that it will be necessary. What he has told you—what I suppose he has told you—is true.”

“You had better at any rate take a chair. I do not believe that what he has told me is true.”

“But it is.”

“I do not believe that what he has told me is true. Some of it cannot, I think, be true. Much of it is not so—unless I am more deceived in you than I ever was in any man. At any rate sit down.” Then the schoolmaster did sit down. “He has made you out to be a perjured, wilful, cruel bigamist.”

“I have not been such,” said Peacocke, rising from his chair.

“One who has been willing to sacrifice a woman to his passion.”

“No; no.”

“Who deceived her by false witnesses.”

“Never.”

“And who has now refused to allow her to see her own husband’s brother, lest she should learn the truth.”

“She is there—at any rate for you to see.”

“Therefore the man is a liar. A long story has to be told, as to which at present I can only guess what may be the nature. I presume the story will be the same as that you would have told had the man never come here.”

“Exactly the same, Dr. Wortle.”

“Therefore you will own that I am right in asking you to sit down. The story may be very long—that is, if you mean to tell it.”

“I do—and did. I was wrong from the first in supposing that the nature of my marriage need be of no concern to others, but to herself and to me.”

“Yes—Mr. Peacocke; yes. We are, all of us, joined together too closely to admit of isolation such as that.” There was something in this which grated against the schoolmaster’s pride, though nothing had been said as to which he did not know that much harder things must meet his ears before the matter could be brought to an end between him and the Doctor. The “Mister” had been prefixed to his name, which had been omitted for the last three or four months in the friendly intercourse which had taken place between them; and then, though it had been done in the form of agreeing with what he himself had said, the Doctor had made his first complaint by declaring that no man had a right to regard his own

moral life as isolated from the lives of others around him. It was as much as to declare at once that he had been wrong in bringing this woman to Bowick, and calling her Mrs. Peacocke. He had said as much himself, but that did not make the censure lighter when it came to him from the mouth of the Doctor. "But come," said the Doctor, getting up from his seat at the table, and throwing himself into an easy-chair, so as to mitigate the austerity of the position; "let us hear the true story. So big a liar as that American gentleman probably never put his foot in this room before."

Then Mr. Peacocke told the story, beginning with all those incidents of the woman's life which had seemed to be so cruel both to him and to others at St. Louis before he had been in any degree intimate with her. Then came the departure of the two men, and the necessity for pecuniary assistance, which Mr. Peacocke now passed over lightly, saying nothing specially of the assistance which he himself had rendered. "And she was left quite alone?" asked the Doctor.

"Quite alone."

"And for how long?"

"Eighteen months had passed before we heard any tidings. Then there came news that Colonel Lefroy was dead."

"The husband?"

"We did not know which. They were both Colonels."

"And then?"

"Did he tell you that I went down into Mexico?"

"Never mind what he told me. All that he told me were lies. What you tell me I shall believe. But tell me everything."

There was a tone of complete authority in the Doctor's voice, but mixed with this there was a kindness which made the schoolmaster determined that he would tell everything as far as he knew how. "When I heard that one of them was dead, I went away down to the borders of Texas, in order that I might learn the truth."

"Did she know that you were going?"

"Yes;—I told her the day I started."

"And you told her why?"

"That I might find out whether her husband were still alive."

"But—" The Doctor hesitated as he asked the next question. He knew, however, that it had to be asked, and went on with it. "Did she know that you loved her?" To this the other made no immediate answer. The Doctor was a man who, in such a matter, was intelligent enough, and he

therefore put his question in another shape. "Had you told her that you loved her?"

"Never—while I thought that other man was living."

"She must have guessed it," said the Doctor.

"She might guess what she pleased. I told her that I was going, and I went."

"And how was it, then?"

"I went, and after a time I came across the very man who is here now, this Robert Lefroy. I met him and questioned him, and he told me that his brother had been killed while fighting. It was a lie."

"Altogether a lie?" asked the Doctor.

"How altogether?"

"He might have been wounded and given over for dead. The brother might have thought him to be dead."

"I do not think so. I believe it to have been a plot in order that the man might get rid of his wife. But I believed it. Then I went back to St. Louis—and we were married."

"You thought there was no obstacle but what you might become man and wife legally?"

"I thought she was a widow."

"There was no further delay?"

"Very little. Why should there have been delay?"

"I only ask."

"She had suffered enough, and I had waited long enough."

"She owed you a great deal," said the Doctor.

"It was not a case of owing," said Mr. Peacocke. "At least I think not. I think she had learnt to love me as I had learnt to love her."

"And how did it go with you then?"

"Very well—for some months. There was nothing to mar our happiness—till one day he came and made his way into our presence."

"The husband?"

"Yes; the husband, Ferdinand Lefroy, the elder brother;—he of whom I had been told that he was dead; he was there standing before us, talking to us—half drunk, but still well knowing what he was doing."

"Why had he come?"

"In want of money, I suppose—as this other one has come here."

"Did he ask for money?"

"I do not think he did then, though he spoke of his poor condition. But on the next day he went away. We heard that he had taken the steamer

down the river for New Orleans. We have never heard more of him from that day to this.”

“Can you imagine what caused conduct such as that?”

“I think money was given to him that night to go; but if so, I do not know by whom. I gave him none. During the next day or two I found that many in St. Louis knew that he had been there.”

“They knew then that you—”

“They knew that my wife was not my wife. That is what you mean to ask?” The Doctor nodded his head. “Yes, they knew that.”

“And what then?”

“Word was brought to me that she and I must part if I chose to keep my place at the College.”

“That you must disown her?”

“The President told me that it would be better that she should go elsewhere. How could I send her from me?”

“No, indeed;—but as to the facts?”

“You know them all pretty well now. I could not send her from me. Nor could I go and leave her. Had we been separated then, because of the law or because of religion, the burden, the misery, the desolation, would all have been upon her.”

“I would have clung to her, let the law say what it might,” said the Doctor, rising from his chair.

“You would?”

“I would;—and I think that I could have reconciled it to my God. But I might have been wrong,” he added; “I might have been wrong. I only say what I should have done.”

“It was what I did.”

“Exactly; exactly. We are both sinners. Both might have been wrong. Then you brought her over here, and I suppose I know the rest?”

“You know everything now,” said Mr. Peacocke.

“And believe every word I have heard. Let me say that, if that may be any consolation to you. Of my friendship you may remain assured. Whether you can remain here is another question.”

“We are prepared to go.”

“You cannot expect that I should have thought it all out during the hearing of the story. There is much to be considered;—very much. I can only say this, as between man and man, that no man ever sympathized with another more warmly than I do with you. You had better let me have till Monday to think about it.”

IX

MRS. WORTLE AND MR. PUDDICOMBE

In this way nothing was said at the first telling of the story to decide the fate of the schoolmaster and of the lady whom we shall still call his wife. There certainly had been no horror displayed by the Doctor. "Whether you can remain here is another question." The Doctor, during the whole interview, had said nothing harder than that. Mr. Peacocke, as he left the rectory, did feel that the Doctor had been very good to him. There had not only been no horror, but an expression of the kindest sympathy. And as to the going, that was left in doubt. He himself felt that he ought to go;—but it would have been so very sad to have to go without a friend left with whom he could consult as to his future condition!

"He has been very kind, then?" said Mrs. Peacocke to her husband when he related to her the particulars of the interview.

"Very kind."

"And he did not reproach you."

"Not a word."

"Nor me?"

"He declared that had it been he who was in question he would have clung to you forever and ever."

"Did he? Then will he leave us here?"

"That does not follow. I should think not. He will know that others must know it. Your brother-in-law will not tell him only. Lefroy, when he finds that he can get no money here, from sheer revenge will tell the story everywhere. When he left the rectory, he was probably as angry with the Doctor as he is with me. He will do all the harm that he can to all of us."

"We must go, then?"

"I should think so. Your position here would be insupportable even if it could be permitted. You may be sure of this;—everybody will know it."

"What do I care for everybody?" she said. "It is not that I am ashamed of myself."

"No, dearest; nor am I—ashamed of myself or of you. But there will be bitter words, and bitter words will produce bitter looks and scant

respect. How would it be with you if the boys looked at you as though they thought ill of you?"

"They would not;—oh, they would not!"

"Or the servants—if they reviled you?"

"Could it come to that?"

"It must not come to that. But it is as the Doctor said himself just now;—a man cannot isolate the morals, the manners, the ways of his life from the morals of others. Men, if they live together, must live together by certain laws."

"Then there can be no hope for us."

"None that I can see, as far as Bowick is concerned. We are too closely joined in our work with other people. There is not a boy here with whose father and mother and sisters we are not more or less connected. When I was preaching in the church, there was not one in the parish with whom I was not connected. Would it do, do you think, for a priest to preach against drunkenness, whilst he himself was a noted drunkard?"

"Are we like that?"

"It is not what the drunken priest might think of himself, but what others might think of him. It would not be with us the position which we know that we hold together, but that which others would think it to be. If I were in Dr. Wortle's case, and another were to me as I am to him, I should bid him go."

"You would turn him away from you; him and his—wife?"

"I should. My first duty would be to my parish and to my school. If I could befriend him otherwise I would do so;—and that is what I expect from Dr. Wortle. We shall have to go, and I shall be forced to approve of our dismissal."

In this way Mr. Peacocke came definitely and clearly to a conclusion in his own mind. But it was very different with Dr. Wortle. The story so disturbed him, that during the whole of that afternoon he did not attempt to turn his mind to any other subject. He even went so far as to send over to Mr. Puddicombe and asked for some assistance for the afternoon service on the following day. He was too unwell, he said, to preach himself, and the one curate would have the two entire services unless Mr. Puddicombe could help him. Could Mr. Puddicombe come himself and see him on the Sunday afternoon? This note he sent away by a messenger, who came back with a reply, saying that Mr. Puddicombe would himself preach in the afternoon, and would afterwards call in at the rectory.

For an hour or two before his dinner, the Doctor went out on horseback, and roamed about among the lanes, endeavouring to make up his mind. He was hitherto altogether at a loss as to what he should do in this present uncomfortable emergency. He could not bring his conscience and his inclination to come square together. And even when he counselled himself to yield to his conscience, his very conscience—a second conscience, as it were—revolted against the first. His first conscience told him that he owed a primary duty to his parish, a second duty to his school, and a third to his wife and daughter. In the performance of all these duties he would be bound to rid himself of Mr. Peacocke. But then there came that other conscience, telling him that the man had been more “sinned against than sinning,”—that common humanity required him to stand by a man who had suffered so much, and had suffered so unworthily. Then this second conscience went on to remind him that the man was preeminently fit for the duties which he had undertaken—that the man was a God-fearing, moral, and especially intellectual assistant in his school—that were he to lose him he could not hope to find anyone that would be his equal, or at all approaching to him in capacity. This second conscience went further, and assured him that the man’s excellence as a schoolmaster was even increased by the peculiarity of his position. Do we not all know that if a man be under a cloud the very cloud will make him more attentive to his duties than another? If a man, for the wages which he receives, can give to his employer high character as well as work, he will think that he may lighten his work because of his character. And as to this man, who was the very phoenix of school assistants, there would really be nothing amiss with his character if only this piteous incident as to his wife were unknown. In this way his second conscience almost got the better of the first.

But then it would be known. It would be impossible that it should not be known. He had already made up his mind to tell Mr. Puddicombe, absolutely not daring to decide in such an emergency without consulting some friend. Mr. Puddicombe would hold his peace if he were to promise to do so. Certainly he might be trusted to do that. But others would know it; the Bishop would know it; Mrs. Stantiloup would know it. That man, of course, would take care that all Broughton, with its close full of cathedral clergymen, would know it. When Mrs. Stantiloup should know it there would not be a boy’s parent through all the school who would not know it. If he kept the man he must keep him resolving that all the world should know that he kept him, that all the world should know of what

nature was the married life of the assistant in whom he trusted. And he must be prepared to face all the world, confiding in the uprightness and the humanity of his purpose.

In such case he must say something of this kind to all the world; “I know that they are not married. I know that their condition of life is opposed to the law of God and man. I know that she bears a name that is not, in truth, her own; but I think that the circumstances in this case are so strange, so peculiar, that they excuse a disregard even of the law of God and man.” Had he courage enough for this? And if the courage were there, was he high enough and powerful enough to carry out such a purpose? Could he beat down the Mrs. Stantiloups? And, indeed, could he beat down the Bishop and the Bishop’s phalanx;—for he knew that the Bishop and the Bishop’s phalanx would be against him? They could not touch him in his living, because Mr. Peacocke would not be concerned in the services of the church; but would not his school melt away to nothing in his hands, if he were to attempt to carry it on after this fashion? And then would he not have destroyed himself without advantage to the man whom he was anxious to assist?

To only one point did he make up his mind certainly during that ride. Before he slept that night he would tell the whole story to his wife. He had at first thought that he would conceal it from her. It was his rule of life to act so entirely on his own will, that he rarely consulted her on matters of any importance. As it was, he could not endure the responsibility of acting by himself. People would say of him that he had subjected his wife to contamination, and had done so without giving her any choice in the matter. So he resolved that he would tell his wife.

“Not married,” said Mrs. Wortle, when she heard the story.

“Married; yes. They were married. It was not their fault that the marriage was nothing. What was he to do when he heard that they had been deceived in this way?”

“Not married properly! Poor woman!”

“Yes, indeed. What should I have done if such had happened to me when we had been six months married?”

“It couldn’t have been.”

“Why not to you as well as to another?”

“I was only a young girl.”

“But if you had been a widow?”

“Don’t, my dear; don’t! It wouldn’t have been possible.”

“But you pity her?”

“Oh yes.”

“And you see that a great misfortune has fallen upon her, which she could not help?”

“Not till she knew it,” said the wife who had been married quite properly.

“And what then? What should she have done then?”

“Gone,” said the wife, who had no doubt as to the comfort, the beauty, the perfect security of her own position.

“Gone?”

“Gone away at once.”

“Whither should she go? Who would have taken her by the hand? Who would have supported her? Would you have had her lay herself down in the first gutter and die?”

“Better that than what she did do,” said Mrs. Wortle.

“Then, by all the faith I have in Christ, I think you are hard upon her. Do you think what it is to have to go out and live alone;—to have to look for your bread in desolation?”

“I have never been tried, my dear,” said she, clinging close to him. “I have never had anything but what was good.”

“Ought we not to be kind to one to whom Fortune has been so unkind?”

“If we can do so without sin.”

“Sin! I despise the fear of sin which makes us think that its contact will soil us. Her sin, if it be sin, is so near akin to virtue, that I doubt whether we should not learn of her rather than avoid her.”

“A woman should not live with a man unless she be his wife.”

Mrs. Wortle said this with more of obstinacy than he had expected.

“She was his wife, as far as she knew.”

“But when she knew that it was not so any longer—then she should have left him.”

“And have starved?”

“I suppose she might have taken bread from him.”

“You think, then, that she should go away from here?”

“Do not you think so? What will Mrs. Stantiloup say?”

“And I am to turn them out into the cold because of a virago such as she is? You would have no more charity than that?”

“Oh, Jeffrey! what would the Bishop say?”

“Cannot you get beyond Mrs. Stantiloup and beyond the Bishop, and think what Justice demands?”

“The boys would all be taken away. If you had a son, would you send him where there was a schoolmaster living—living—. Oh, you

wouldn't."

It is very clear to the Doctor that his wife's mind was made up on the subject; and yet there was no softer-hearted woman than Mrs. Wortle anywhere in the diocese, or one less likely to be severe upon a neighbour. Not only was she a kindly, gentle woman, but she was one who always had been willing to take her husband's opinion on all questions of right and wrong. She, however, was decided that they must go.

On the next morning, after service, which the schoolmaster did not attend, the Doctor saw Mr. Peacocke, and declared his intention of telling the story to Mr. Puddicombe. "If you bid me hold my tongue," he said, "I will do so. But it will be better that I should consult another clergyman. He is a man who can keep a secret." Then Mr. Peacocke gave him full authority to tell everything to Mr. Puddicombe. He declared that the Doctor might tell the story to whom he would. Everybody might know it now. He had, he said, quite made up his mind about that. What was the good of affecting secrecy when this man Lefroy was in the country?

In the afternoon, after service, Mr. Puddicombe came up to the house, and heard it all. He was a dry, thin, apparently unsympathetic man, but just withal, and by no means given to harshness. He could pardon whenever he could bring himself to believe that pardon would have good results; but he would not be driven by impulses and softness of heart to save the faulty one from the effect of his fault, merely because that effect would be painful. He was a man of no great mental calibre—not sharp, and quick, and capable of repartee as was the Doctor, but rational in all things, and always guided by his conscience. "He has behaved very badly to you," he said, when he heard the story.

"I do not think so; I have no such feeling myself."

"He behaved very badly in bringing her here without telling you all the facts. Considering the position that she was to occupy, he must have known that he was deceiving you."

"I can forgive all that," said the Doctor, vehemently. "As far as I myself am concerned, I forgive everything."

"You are not entitled to do so."

"How—not entitled?"

"You must pardon me if I seem to take a liberty in expressing myself too boldly in this matter. Of course I should not do so unless you asked me."

"I want you to speak freely—all that you think."

“In considering his conduct, we have to consider it all. First of all there came a great and terrible misfortune which cannot but excite our pity. According to his own story, he seems, up to that time, to have been affectionate and generous.”

“I believe every word of it,” said the Doctor.

“Allowing for a man’s natural bias on his own side, so do I. He had allowed himself to become attached to another man’s wife; but we need not, perhaps, insist upon that.” The Doctor moved himself uneasily in his chair, but said nothing. “We will grant that he put himself right by his marriage, though in that, no doubt, there should have been more of caution. Then came his great misfortune. He knew that his marriage had been no marriage. He saw the man and had no doubt.”

“Quite so; quite so,” said the Doctor, impatiently.

“He should, of course, have separated himself from her. There can be no doubt about it. There is no room for any quibble.”

“Quibble!” said the Doctor.

“I mean that no reference in our own minds to the pity of the thing, to the softness of the moment—should make us doubt about it. Feelings such as these should induce us to pardon sinners, even to receive them back into our friendship and respect—when they have seen the error of their ways and have repented.”

“You are very hard.”

“I hope not. At any rate I can only say as I think. But, in truth, in the present emergency you have nothing to do with all that. If he asked you for counsel you might give it to him, but that is not his present position. He has told you his story, not in a spirit of repentance, but because such telling had become necessary.”

“He would have told it all the same though this man had never come.”

“Let us grant that it is so, there still remains his relation to you. He came here under false pretences, and has done you a serious injury.”

“I think not,” said the Doctor.

“Would you have taken him into your establishment had you known it all before? Certainly not. Therefore I say that he has deceived you. I do not advise you to speak to him with severity; but he should, I think, be made to know that you appreciate what he has done.”

“And you would turn him off;—send him away at once, out about his business?”

“Certainly I would send him away.”

“You think him such a reprobate that he should not be allowed to earn his bread anywhere?”

“I have not said so. I know nothing of his means of earning his bread. Men living in sin earn their bread constantly. But he certainly should not be allowed to earn his here.”

“Not though that man who was her husband should now be dead, and he should again marry—legally marry—this woman to whom he has been so true and loyal?”

“As regards you and your school,” said Mr. Puddicombe, “I do not think it would alter his position.”

With this the conference ended, and Mr. Puddicombe took his leave. As he left the house the Doctor declared to himself that the man was a straitlaced, fanatical, hard-hearted bigot. But though he said so to himself, he hardly thought so; and was aware that the man’s words had had effect upon him.

PART IV

X

MR. PEACOCKE GOES

The Doctor had been all but savage with his wife, and, for the moment, had hated Mr. Puddicombe, but still what they said had affected him. They were both of them quite clear that Mr. Peacocke should be made to go at once. And he, though he hated Mr. Puddicombe for his cold logic, could not but acknowledge that all the man had said was true. According to the strict law of right and wrong the two unfortunates should have parted when they found that they were not in truth married. And, again, according to the strict law of right and wrong, Mr. Peacocke should not have brought the woman there, into his school, as his wife. There had been deceit. But then would not he, Dr. Wortle himself, have been guilty of similar deceit had it fallen upon him to have to defend a woman who had been true and affectionate to him? Mr. Puddicombe would have left the woman to break her heart and have gone away and done his duty like a Christian, feeling no tugging at his heartstrings. It was so that our Doctor spoke to himself of his counsellor, sitting there alone in his library.

During his conference with Lefroy something had been said which had impressed him suddenly with an idea. A word had fallen from the Colonel, an unintended word, by which the Doctor was made to believe that the other Colonel was dead, at any rate now. He had cunningly tried to lead up to the subject, but Robert Lefroy had been on his guard as soon as he had perceived the Doctor's object, and had drawn back, denying the truth of the word he had before spoken. The Doctor at last asked him the question direct. Lefroy then declared that his brother had been alive and well when he left Texas, but he did this in such a manner as to strengthen in the Doctor's mind the impression that he was dead. If it were so, then might not all these crooked things be made straight?

He had thought it better to raise no false hopes. He had said nothing of this to Peacocke on discussing the story. He had not even hinted it to his wife, from whom it might probably make its way to Mrs. Peacocke. He had suggested it to Mr. Puddicombe—asking whether there might not be a way out of all their difficulties. Mr. Puddicombe had declared that there could be no such way as far as the school was concerned. Let them

marry, and repent their sins, and go away from the spot they had contaminated, and earn their bread in some place in which there need be no longer additional sin in concealing the story of their past life. That seemed to have been Mr. Puddicombe's final judgment. But it was altogether opposed to Dr. Wortle's feelings.

When Mr. Puddicombe came down from the church to the rectory, Lord Carstairs was walking home after the afternoon service with Miss Wortle. It was his custom to go to church with the family, whereas the school went there under the charge of one of the ushers and sat apart in a portion of the church appropriated to themselves. Mrs. Wortle, when she found that the Doctor was not going to the afternoon service, declined to go herself. She was thoroughly disturbed by all these bad tidings, and was, indeed, very little able to say her prayers in a fit state of mind. She could hardly keep herself still for a moment, and was as one who thinks that the crack of doom is coming;—so terrible to her was her vicinity and connection with this man, and with the woman who was not his wife. Then, again, she became flurried when she found that Lord Carstairs and Mary would have to walk alone together; and she made little abortive attempts to keep first the one and then the other from going to church. Mary probably saw no reason for staying away, while Lord Carstairs possibly found an additional reason for going. Poor Mrs. Wortle had for some weeks past wished that the charming young nobleman had been at home with his father and mother, or anywhere but in her house. It had been arranged, however, that he should go in July and not return after the summer holidays. Under these circumstances, having full confidence in her girl, she had refrained from again expressing her fears to the Doctor. But there were fears. It was evident to her, though the Doctor seemed to see nothing of it, that the young lord was falling in love. It might be that his youth and natural bashfulness would come to her aid, and that nothing should be said before that day in July which would separate them. But when it suddenly occurred to her that they two would walk to and fro from church together, there was cause for additional uneasiness.

If she had heard their conversation as they came back she would have been in no way disturbed by its tone on the score of the young man's tenderness towards her daughter, but she might perhaps have been surprised by his vehemence in another respect. She would have been surprised also at finding how much had been said during the last twenty-four hours by others besides herself and her husband about the affairs of Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke.

“Do you know what he came about?” asked Mary. The “he” had of course been Robert Lefroy.

“Not in the least; but he came up there looking so queer, as though he certainly had come about something unpleasant.”

“And then he was with papa afterwards,” said Mary. “I am sure papa and mamma not coming to church has something to do with it. And Mr. Peacocke hasn’t been to church all day.”

“Something has happened to make him very unhappy,” said the boy. “He told me so even before this man came here. I don’t know anyone whom I like so much as Mr. Peacocke.”

“I think it is about his wife,” said Mary.

“How about his wife?”

“I don’t know, but I think it is. She is so very quiet.”

“How quiet, Miss Wortle?” he asked.

“She never will come in to see us. Mamma has asked her to dinner and to drink tea ever so often, but she never comes. She calls perhaps once in two or three months in a formal way, and that is all we see of her.”

“Do you like her?” he asked.

“How can I say, when I so seldom see her.”

“I do. I like her very much. I go and see her often; and I’m sure of this;—she is quite a lady. Mamma asked her to go to Carstairs for the holidays because of what I said.”

“She is not going?”

“No; neither of them will come. I wish they would; and oh, Miss Wortle, I do so wish you were going to be there too.” This is all that was said of peculiar tenderness between them on that walk home.

Late in the evening—so late that the boys had already gone to bed—the Doctor sent again for Mr. Peacocke. “I should not have troubled you tonight,” he said, “only that I have heard something from Pritchett.” Pritchett was the rectory gardener who had charge also of the school buildings, and was a person of great authority in the establishment. He, as well the Doctor, held Mr. Peacocke in great respect, and would have been almost as unwilling as the Doctor himself to tell stories to the schoolmaster’s discredit. “They are saying down at the Lamb”—the Lamb was the Bowick public-house—“that Lefroy told them all yesterday—” the Doctor hesitated before he could tell it.

“That my wife is not my wife?”

“Just so.”

“Of course I am prepared for it. I knew that it would be so; did not you?”

“I expected it.”

“I was sure of it. It may be taken for granted at once that there is no longer a secret to keep. I would wish you to act just as though all the facts were known to the entire diocese.” After this there was a pause, during which neither of them spoke for a few moments. The Doctor had not intended to declare any purpose of his own on that occasion, but it seemed to him now as though he were almost driven to do so. Then Mr. Peacocke seeing the difficulty at once relieved him from it. “I am quite prepared to leave Bowick,” he said, “at once. I know that it must be so. I have thought about it, and have perceived that there is no possible alternative. I should like to consult with you as to whither I had better go. Where shall I first take her?”

“Leave her here,” said the Doctor.

“Here! Where?”

“Where she is in the schoolhouse. No one will come to fill your place for a while.”

“I should have thought,” said Mr. Peacocke very slowly, “that her presence—would have been worse almost—than my own.”

“To me,”—said the Doctor—“to me she is as pure as the most unsullied matron in the country.” Upon this Mr. Peacocke, jumping from his chair, seized the Doctor’s hand, but could not speak for his tears; then he seated himself again, turning his face away towards the wall. “To no one could the presence of either of you be an evil. The evil is, if I may say so, that the two of you should be here together. You should be apart—till some better day has come upon you.”

“What better day can ever come?” said the poor man through his tears.

Then the Doctor declared his scheme. He told what he thought as to Ferdinand Lefroy, and his reason for believing that the man was dead. “I felt sure from his manner that his brother is now dead in truth. Go to him and ask him boldly,” he said.

“But his word would not suffice for another marriage ceremony.”

To this the Doctor agreed. It was not his intention, he said, that they should proceed on evidence as slight as that. No; a step must be taken much more serious in its importance, and occupying a considerable time. He, Peacocke, must go again to Missouri and find out all the truth. The Doctor was of opinion that if this were resolved upon, and that if the whole truth were at once proclaimed, then Mr. Peacocke need not hesitate to pay Robert Lefroy for any information which might assist him in his search. “While you are gone,” continued the Doctor almost wildly, “let bishops and Stantiloups and Puddicombes say what they may, she

shall remain here. To say that she will be happy is of course vain. There can be no happiness for her till this has been put right. But she will be safe; and here, at my hand, she will, I think, be free from insult. What better is there to be done?"

"There can be nothing better," said Peacocke drawing his breath—as though a gleam of light had shone in upon him.

"I had not meant to have spoken to you of this till tomorrow. I should not have done so, but that Pritchett had been with me. But the more I thought of it, the more sure I became that you could not both remain—till something had been done; till something had been done."

"I was sure of it, Dr. Wortle."

"Mr. Puddicombe saw that it was so. Mr. Puddicombe is not all the world to me by any means, but he is a man of common sense. I will be frank with you. My wife said that it could not be so."

"She shall not stay. Mrs. Wortle shall not be annoyed."

"You don't see it yet," said the Doctor. "But you do. I know you do. And she shall stay. The house shall be hers, as her residence, for the next six months. As for money—"

"I have got what will do for that, I think."

"If she wants money she shall have what she wants. There is nothing I will not do for you in your trouble—except that you may not both be here together till I shall have shaken hands with her as Mrs. Peacocke in very truth."

It was settled that Mr. Peacocke should not go again into the school, or Mrs. Peacocke among the boys, till he should have gone to America and have come back. It was explained in the school by the Doctor early—for the Doctor must now take the morning school himself—that circumstances of very grave import made it necessary that Mr. Peacocke should start at once for America. That the tidings which had been published at the Lamb would reach the boys, was more than probable. Nay; was it not certain? It would of course reach all the boys' parents. There was no use, no service, in any secrecy. But in speaking to the school not a word was said of Mrs. Peacocke. The Doctor explained that he himself would take the morning school, and that Mr. Rose, the mathematical master, would take charge of the school meals. Mrs. Cane, the housekeeper, would look to the linen and the bedrooms. It was made plain that Mrs. Peacocke's services were not to be required; but her name was not mentioned—except that the Doctor, in order to let it be understood that she was not to be banished from the house, begged the

boys as a favour that they would not interrupt Mrs. Peacocke's tranquillity during Mr. Peacocke's absence.

On the Tuesday morning Mr. Peacocke started, remaining, however, a couple of days at Broughton, during which the Doctor saw him. Lefroy declared that he knew nothing about his brother—whether he were alive or dead. He might be dead, because he was always in trouble, and generally drunk. Robert, on the whole, thought it probable that he was dead, but could not be got to say so. For a thousand dollars he would go over to Missouri, and, if necessary to Texas, so as to find the truth. He would then come back and give undeniable evidence. While making this benevolent offer, he declared, with tears in his eyes, that he had come over intending to be a true brother to his sister-in-law, and had simply been deterred from prosecuting his good intentions by Peacocke's austerity. Then he swore a most solemn oath that if he knew anything about his brother Ferdinand he would reveal it. The Doctor and Peacocke agreed together that the man's word was worth nothing; but that the man's services might be useful in enabling them to track out the truth. They were both convinced, by words which fell from him, that Ferdinand Lefroy was dead; but this would be of no avail unless they could obtain absolute evidence.

During these two days there were various conversations at Broughton between the Doctor, Mr. Peacocke, and Lefroy, in which a plan of action was at length arranged. Lefroy and the schoolmaster were to proceed to America together, and there obtain what evidence they could as to the life or death of the elder brother. When absolute evidence had been obtained of either, a thousand dollars was to be handed to Robert Lefroy. But when this agreement was made the man was given to understand that his own uncorroborated word would go for nothing.

"Who is to say what is evidence, and whatnot?" asked the man, not unnaturally.

"Mr. Peacocke must be the judge," said the Doctor.

"I ain't going to agree to that," said the other. "Though he were to see him dead, he might swear he hadn't, and not give me a red cent. Why ain't I to be judge as well as he?"

"Because you can trust him, and he cannot in the least trust you," said the Doctor. "You know well enough that if he were to see your brother alive, or to see him dead, you would get the money. At any rate, you have no other way of getting it but what we propose." To all this Robert Lefroy at last assented.

The prospect before Mr. Peacocke for the next three months was certainly very sad. He was to travel from Broughton to St. Louis, and possibly from thence down into the wilds of Texas, in company with this man, whom he thoroughly despised. Nothing could be more abominable to him than such an association; but there was no other way in which the proposed plan could be carried out. He was to pay Lefroy's expenses back to his own country, and could only hope to keep the man true to his purpose by doing so from day to day. Were he to give the man money, the man would at once disappear. Here in England, and in their passage across the ocean, the man might, in some degree, be amenable and obedient. But there was no knowing to what he might have recourse when he should find himself nearer to his country, and should feel that his companion was distant from his own.

"You'll have to keep a close watch upon him," whispered the Doctor to his friend. "I should not advise all this if I did not think you were a man of strong nerve."

"I am not afraid," said the other; "but I doubt whether he may not be too many for me. At any rate, I will try it. You will hear from me as I go on."

And so they parted as dear friends part. The Doctor had, in truth, taken the man altogether to his heart since all the circumstances of the story had come home to him. And it need hardly be said that the other was aware how deep a debt of gratitude he owed to the protector of his wife. Indeed the very money that was to be paid to Robert Lefroy, if he earned it, was advanced out of the Doctor's pocket. Mr. Peacocke's means were sufficient for the expenses of the journey, but fell short when these thousand dollars had to be provided.

XI

THE BISHOP

Mr. Peacocke had been quite right in saying that the secret would at once be known through the whole diocese. It certainly was so before he had been gone a week, and it certainly was the case also that the diocese generally did not approve of the Doctor's conduct. The woman ought not to have been left there. So said the diocese. It was of course the case, that though the diocese knew much, it did not know all. It is impossible to keep such a story concealed, but it is quite as impossible to make known all its details. In the eyes of the diocese the woman was of course the chief sinner, and the chief sinner was allowed to remain at the school! When this assertion was made to him the Doctor became very angry, saying that Mrs. Peacocke did not remain at the school; that, according to the arrangement as at present made, Mrs. Peacocke had nothing to do with the school; that the house was his own, and that he might lend it to whom he pleased. Was he to turn the woman out houseless, when her husband had gone, on such an errand, on his advice? Of course the house was his own, but as clergyman of the parish he had not a right to do what he liked with it. He had no right to encourage evil. And the man was not the woman's husband. That was just the point made by the diocese. And she was at the school—living under the same roof with the boys! The diocese was clearly of opinion that all the boys would be taken away.

The diocese spoke by the voice of its bishop, as a diocese should do. Shortly after Mr. Peacocke's departure, the Doctor had an interview with his lordship, and told the whole story. The doing this went much against the grain with him, but he hardly dared not to do it. He felt that he was bound to do it on the part of Mrs. Peacocke if not on his own. And then the man, who had now gone, though he had never been absolutely a curate, had preached frequently in the diocese. He felt that it would not be wise to abstain from telling the bishop.

The bishop was a goodly man, comely in his person, and possessed of manners which had made him popular in the world. He was one of those who had done the best he could with his talent, not wrapping it up in a napkin, but getting from it the best interest which the world's market could afford. But not on that account was he other than a good man. To

do the best he could for himself and his family—and also to do his duty—was the line of conduct which he pursued. There are some who reverse this order, but he was not one of them. He had become a scholar in his youth, not from love of scholarship, but as a means to success. The Church had become his profession, and he had worked hard at his calling. He had taught himself to be courteous and urbane, because he had been clever enough to see that courtesy and urbanity are agreeable to men in high places. As a bishop he never spared himself the work which a bishop ought to do. He answered letters, he studied the characters of the clergymen under him, he was just with his patronage, he endeavoured to be efficacious with his charges, he confirmed children in cold weather as well as in warm, he occasionally preached sermons, and he was beautiful and decorous in his gait of manner, as it behoves a clergyman of the Church of England to be. He liked to be master; but even to be master he would not encounter the abominable nuisance of a quarrel. When first coming to the diocese he had had some little difficulty with our Doctor; but the Bishop had abstained from violent assertion, and they had, on the whole, been friends. There was, however, on the Bishop's part, something of a feeling that the Doctor was the bigger man; and it was probable that, without active malignity, he would take advantage of any chance which might lower the Doctor a little, and bring him more within episcopal power. In some degree he begrudged the Doctor his manliness.

He listened with many smiles and with perfect courtesy to the story as it was told to him, and was much less severe on the unfortunates than Mr. Puddicombe had been. It was not the wickedness of the two people in living together, or their wickedness in keeping their secret, which offended him so much, as the evil which they were likely to do—and to have done. “No doubt,” he said, “an ill-living man may preach a good sermon, perhaps a better one than a pious God-fearing clergyman, whose intellect may be inferior though his morals are much better;—but coming from tainted lips, the better sermon will not carry a blessing with it.” At this the Doctor shook his head. “Bringing a blessing” was a phrase which the Doctor hated. He shook his head not too civilly, saying that he had not intended to trouble his lordship on so difficult a point in ecclesiastical morals. “But we cannot but remember,” said the Bishop, “that he has been preaching in your parish church, and the people will know that he has acted among them as a clergyman.”

“I hope the people, my lord, may never have the Gospel preached to them by a worse man.”

“I will not judge him; but I do think that it has been a misfortune. You, of course, were in ignorance.”

“Had I known all about it, I should have been very much inclined to do the same.”

This was, in fact, not true, and was said simply in a spirit of contradiction. The Bishop shook his head and smiled. “My school is a matter of more importance,” said the Doctor.

“Hardly, hardly, Dr. Wortle.”

“Of more importance in this way, that my school may probably be injured, whereas neither the morals nor the faith of the parishioners will have been hurt.”

“But he has gone.”

“He has gone;—but she remains.”

“What!” exclaimed the Bishop.

“He has gone, but she remains.” He repeated the words very distinctly, with a frown on his brow, as though to show that on that branch of the subject he intended to put up with no opposition—hardly even with an adverse opinion.

“She had a certain charge, as I understand—as to the school.”

“She had, my lord; and very well she did her work. I shall have a great loss in her—for the present.”

“But you said she remained.”

“I have lent her the use of the house till her husband shall come back.”

“Mr. Peacocke, you mean,” said the Bishop, who was unable not to put in a contradiction against the untruth of the word which had been used.

“I shall always regard them as married.”

“But they are not.”

“I have lent her the house, at any rate, during his absence. I could not turn her into the street.”

“Would not a lodging here in the city have suited her better?”

“I thought not. People here would have refused to take her—because of her story. The wife of some religious grocer, who sands his sugar regularly, would have thought her house contaminated by such an inmate.”

“So it would have been, Doctor, to some extent.” At hearing this the Doctor made very evident signs of discontent. “You cannot alter the ways of the world suddenly, though by example and precept you may help to improve them slowly. In our present imperfect condition of moral

culture, it is perhaps well that the company of the guilty should be shunned.”

“Guilty!”

“I am afraid that I must say so. The knowledge that such a feeling exists no doubt deters others from guilt. The fact that wrongdoing in women is scorned helps to maintain the innocence of women. Is it not so?”

“I must hesitate before I trouble your lordship by arguing such difficult questions. I thought it right to tell you the facts after what had occurred. He has gone, she is there—and there she will remain for the present. I could not turn her out. Thinking her, as I do, worthy of my friendship, I could not do other than befriend her.”

“Of course you must be the judge yourself.”

“I had to be the judge, my lord.”

“I am afraid that the parents of the boys will not understand it.”

“I also am afraid. It will be very hard to make them understand it. There will be some who will work hard to make them misunderstand it.”

“I hope not that.”

“There will. I must stand the brunt of it. I have had battles before this, and had hoped that now, when I am getting old, they might have been at an end. But there is something left of me, and I can fight still. At any rate, I have made up my mind about this. There she shall remain till he comes back to fetch her.” And so the interview was over, the Bishop feeling that he had in some slight degree had the best of it—and the Doctor feeling that he, in some slight degree, had had the worst. If possible, he would not talk to the Bishop on the subject again.

He told Mr. Puddicombe also. “With your generosity and kindness of heart I quite sympathise,” said Mr. Puddicombe, endeavouring to be pleasant in his manner.

“But not with my prudence.”

“Not with your prudence,” said Mr. Puddicombe, endeavouring to be true at the same time.

But the Doctor’s greatest difficulty was with his wife, whose conduct it was necessary that he should guide, and whose feelings and conscience he was most anxious to influence. When she first heard his decision she almost wrung her hands in despair. If the woman could have gone to America, and the man have remained, she would have been satisfied. Anything wrong about a man was but of little moment—comparatively so, even though he were a clergyman; but anything wrong about a woman—and she so near to herself! O dear! And the poor dear boys—

under the same roof with her! And the boys' mammas! How would she be able to endure the sight of that horrid Mrs. Stantiloup;—or Mrs. Stantiloup's words, which would certainly be conveyed to her? But there was something much worse for her even than all this. The Doctor insisted that she should go and call upon the woman! "And take Mary?" asked Mrs. Wortle.

"What would be the good of taking Mary? Who is talking of a child like that? It is for the sake of charity—for the dear love of Christ, that I ask you to do it. Do you ever think of Mary Magdalene?"

"Oh yes."

"This is no Magdalene. This is a woman led into no faults by vicious propensities. Here is one who has been altogether unfortunate—who has been treated more cruelly than any of whom you have ever read."

"Why did she not leave him?"

"Because she was a woman, with a heart in her bosom."

"I am to go to her?"

"I do not order it. I only ask it." Such asking from her husband was, she knew, very near alike to ordering.

"What shall I say to her?"

"Bid her keep up her courage till he shall return. If you were all alone, as she is, would not you wish that some other woman should come to comfort you? Think of her desolation."

Mrs. Wortle did think of it, and after a day or two made up her mind to obey her husband's—request. She made her call, but very little came of it, except that she promised to come again. "Mrs. Wortle," said the poor woman, "pray do not let me be a trouble to you. If you stay away I shall quite understand that there is sufficient reason. I know how good your husband has been to us." Mrs. Wortle said, however, as she took her leave, that she would come again in a day or two.

But there were other troubles in store for Mrs. Wortle. Before she had repeated her visit to Mrs. Peacocke, a lady, who lived about ten miles off, the wife of the Rector of Buttercup, called upon her. This was the Lady Margaret Momson, a daughter of the Earl of Brigstock, who had, thirty years ago, married a young clergyman. Nevertheless, up to the present day, she was quite as much the Earl's daughter as the parson's wife. She was first cousin to that Mrs. Stantiloup between whom and the Doctor internecine war was always being waged; and she was also aunt to a boy at the school, who, however, was in no way related to Mrs. Stantiloup, young Momson being the son of the parson's eldest brother. Lady Margaret had never absolutely and openly taken the part of

Mrs. Stantiloup. Had she done so, a visit even of ceremony would have been impossible. But she was supposed to have Stantiloup proclivities, and was not, therefore, much liked at Bowick. There had been a question indeed whether young Momson should be received at the school—because of the quasi connection with the arch-enemy; but Squire Momson of Buttercup, the boy's father, had set that at rest by bursting out, in the Doctor's hearing, into violent abuse against "the closefisted, vulgar old faggot." The son of a man imbued with such proper feelings was, of course, accepted.

But Lady Margaret was proud—especially at the present time. "What a romance this is, Mrs. Wortle," she said, "that has gone all through the diocese!" The reader will remember that Lady Margaret was also the wife of a clergyman.

"You mean—the Peacockes?"

"Of course I do."

"He has gone away."

"We all know that, of course;—to look for his wife's husband. Good gracious me! What a story!"

"They think that he is—dead now."

"I suppose they thought so before," said Lady Margaret.

"Of course they did."

"Though it does seem that no inquiry was made at all. Perhaps they don't care about those things over there as we do here. He couldn't have cared very much—nor she."

"The Doctor thinks that they are very much to be pitied."

"The Doctor always was a little quixotic—eh?"

"I don't think that at all, Lady Margaret."

"I mean in the way of being so very good-natured and kind. Her brother came;—didn't he?"

"Her first husband's brother," said Mrs. Wortle, blushing.

"Her first husband!"

"Well;—you know what I mean, Lady Margaret."

"Yes; I know what you mean. It is so very shocking; isn't it? And so the two men have gone off together to look for the third. Goodness me;—what a party they will be if they meet! Do you think they'll quarrel?"

"I don't know, Lady Margaret."

"And that he should be a clergyman of the Church of England! Isn't it dreadful? What does the Bishop say? Has he heard all about it?"

“The Bishop has nothing to do with it. Mr. Peacocke never held a curacy in the diocese.”

“But he has preached here very often—and has taken her to church with him! I suppose the Bishop has been told?”

“You may be sure that he knows it as well as you.”

“We are so anxious, you know, about dear little Gus.” Dear little Gus was Augustus Momson, the lady’s nephew, who was supposed to be the worst-behaved, and certainly the stupidest boy in the school.

“Augustus will not be hurt, I should say.”

“Perhaps not directly. But my sister has, I know, very strong opinions on such subjects. Now, I want to ask you one thing. Is it true that—she—remains here?”

“She is still living in the schoolhouse.”

“Is that prudent, Mrs. Wortle?”

“If you want to have an opinion on that subject, Lady Margaret, I would recommend you to ask the Doctor.” By which she meant to assert that Lady Margaret would not, for the life of her, dare to ask the Doctor such a question. “He has done what he has thought best.”

“Most good-natured, you mean, Mrs. Wortle.”

“I mean what I say, Lady Margaret. He has done what he has thought best, looking at all the circumstances. He thinks that they are very worthy people, and that they have been most cruelly ill-used. He has taken that into consideration. You call it good-nature. Others perhaps may call it—charity.” The wife, though she at her heart deplored her husband’s action in the matter, was not going to own to another lady that he had been imprudent.

“I am sure I hope they will,” said Lady Margaret. Then as she was taking her leave, she made a suggestion. “Some of the boys will be taken away, I suppose. The Doctor probably expects that.”

“I don’t know what he expects,” said Mrs. Wortle. “Some are always going, and when they go, others come in their places. As for me, I wish he would give the school up altogether.”

“Perhaps he means it,” said Lady Margaret; “otherwise, perhaps he wouldn’t have been so good-natured.” Then she took her departure.

When her visitor was gone Mrs. Wortle was very unhappy. She had been betrayed by her wrath into expressing that wish as to the giving up of the school. She knew well that the Doctor had no such intention. She herself had more than once suggested it in her timid way, but the Doctor had treated her suggestions as being worth nothing. He had his ideas

about Mary, who was undoubtedly a very pretty girl. Mary might marry well, and £20,000 would probably assist her in doing so.

When he was told of Lady Margaret's hints, he said in his wrath that he would send young Momson away instantly if a word was said to him by the boy's mamma. "Of course," said he, "if the lad turns out a scapegrace, as is like enough, it will be because Mrs. Peacocke had two husbands. It is often a question to me whether the religion of the world is not more odious than its want of religion." To this terrible suggestion poor Mrs. Wortle did not dare to make any answer whatever.

XII

THE STANTILOUP CORRESPONDENCE

We will now pass for a moment out of Bowick parish, and go over to Buttercup. There, at Buttercup Hall, the squire's house, in the drawing-room, were assembled Mrs. Momson, the squire's wife; Lady Margaret Momson, the Rector's wife; Mrs. Rolland, the wife of the Bishop; and the Hon. Mrs. Stantiloup. A party was staying in the house, collected for the purpose of entertaining the Bishop; and it would perhaps not have been possible to have got together in the diocese, four ladies more likely to be hard upon our Doctor. For though Squire Momson was not very fond of Mrs. Stantiloup, and had used strong language respecting her when he was anxious to send his boy to the Doctor's school, Mrs. Momson had always been of the other party, and had in fact adhered to Mrs. Stantiloup from the beginning of the quarrel. "I do trust," said Mrs. Stantiloup, "that there will be an end to all this kind of thing now."

"Do you mean an end to the school?" asked Lady Margaret.

"I do indeed. I always thought it matter of great regret that Augustus should have been sent there, after the scandalous treatment that Bob received." Bob was the little boy who had drank the champagne and required the carriage exercise.

"But I always heard that the school was quite popular," said Mrs. Rolland.

"I think you'll find," continued Mrs. Stantiloup, "that there won't be much left of its popularity now. Keeping that abominable woman under the same roof with the boys! No master of a school that wasn't absolutely blown up with pride, would have taken such people as those Peacockes without making proper inquiry. And then to let him preach in the church! I suppose Mr. Momson will allow you to send for Augustus at once?" This she said turning to Mrs. Momson.

"Mr. Momson thinks so much of the Doctor's scholarship," said the mother, apologetically. "And we are so anxious that Gus should do well when he goes to Eton."

"What is Latin and Greek as compared to his soul?" asked Lady Margaret.

“No, indeed,” said Mrs. Rolland. She had found herself compelled, as wife of the Bishop, to assent to the self-evident proposition which had been made. She was a quiet, silent little woman, whom the Bishop had married in the days of his earliest preferment, and who, though she was delighted to find herself promoted to the society of the big people in the diocese, had never quite lifted herself up into their sphere. Though she had her ideas as to what it was to be a Bishop’s wife, she had never yet been quite able to act up to them.

“I know that young Talbot is to leave,” said Mrs. Stantiloup. “I wrote to Mrs. Talbot immediately when all this occurred, and I’ve heard from her cousin Lady Grogram that the boy is not to go back after the holidays.” This happened to be altogether untrue. What she probably meant was, that the boy should not go back if she could prevent his doing so.

“I feel quite sure,” said Lady Margaret, “that Lady Anne will not allow her boys to remain when she finds out what sort of inmates the Doctor chooses to entertain.” The Lady Anne spoken of was Lady Anne Clifford, the widowed mother of two boys who were entrusted to the Doctor’s care.

“I do hope you’ll be firm about Gus,” said Mrs. Stantiloup to Mrs. Momson. “If we’re not to put down this kind of thing, what is the good of having any morals in the country at all? We might just as well live like pagans, and do without any marriage services, as they do in so many parts of the United States.”

“I wonder what the Bishop does think about it?” asked Mrs. Momson of the Bishop’s wife.

“It makes him very unhappy; I know that,” said Mrs. Rolland. “Of course he cannot interfere about the school. As for licensing the gentleman as a curate, that was of course quite out of the question.”

At this moment Mr. Momson, the clergyman, and the Bishop came into the room, and were offered, as is usual on such occasions, cold tea and the remains of the buttered toast. The squire was not there. Had he been with the other gentlemen, Mrs. Stantiloup, violent as she was, would probably have held her tongue; but as he was absent, the opportunity was not bad for attacking the Bishop on the subject under discussion. “We were talking, my lord, about the Bowick school.”

Now the Bishop was a man who could be very confidential with one lady, but was apt to be guarded when men are concerned. To any one of those present he might have said what he thought, had no one else been there to hear. That would have been the expression of a private opinion;

but to speak before the four would have been tantamount to a public declaration.

“About the Bowick school?” said he; “I hope there is nothing going wrong with the Bowick school.”

“You must have heard about Mr. Peacocke,” said Lady Margaret.

“Yes; I have certainly heard of Mr. Peacocke. He, I believe, has left Dr. Wortle’s seminary.”

“But she remains!” said Mrs. Stantiloup, with tragic energy.

“So I understand;—in the house; but not as part of the establishment.”

“Does that make so much difference?” asked Lady Margaret.

“It does make a very great difference,” said Lady Margaret’s husband, the parson, wishing to help the Bishop in his difficulty.

“I don’t see it at all,” said Mrs. Stantiloup. “The main spirit in the matter is just as manifest whether the lady is or is not allowed to look after the boys’ linen. In fact, I despise him for making the pretence. Her doing menial work about the house would injure no one. It is her presence there—the presence of a woman who has falsely pretended to be married, when she knew very well that she had no husband.”

“When she knew that she had two,” said Lady Margaret.

“And fancy, Lady Margaret—Lady Bracy absolutely asked her to go to Carstairs! That woman was always infatuated about Dr. Wortle. What would she have done if they had gone, and this other man had followed his sister-in-law there. But Lord and Lady Bracy would ask anyone to Carstairs—just anyone that they could get hold of!”

Mr. Momson was one whose obstinacy was wont to give way when sufficiently attacked. Even he, after having been for two days subjected to the eloquence of Mrs. Stantiloup, acknowledged that the Doctor took a great deal too much upon himself. “He does it,” said Mrs. Stantiloup, “just to show that there is nothing that he can’t bring parents to assent to. Fancy—a woman living there as housekeeper with a man as usher, pretending to be husband and wife, when they knew all along that they were not married!”

Mr. Momson, who didn’t care a straw about the morals of the man whose duty it was to teach his little boy his Latin grammar, or the morals of the woman who looked after his little boy’s waistcoats and trousers, gave a half-assenting grunt. “And you are to pay,” continued Mrs. Stantiloup, with considerable emphasis—“you are to pay two hundred and fifty pounds a-year for such conduct as that!”

“Two hundred,” suggested the squire, who cared as little for the money as he did for the morals.

“Two hundred and fifty—every shilling of it, when you consider the extras.”

“There are no extras, as far as I can see. But then my boy is strong and healthy, thank God,” said the squire, taking his opportunity of having one fling at the lady. But while all this was going on, he did give a half-assent that Gus should be taken away at midsummer, being partly moved thereto by a letter from the Doctor, in which he was told that his boy was not doing any good at the school.

It was a week after that that Mrs. Stantiloup wrote the following letter to her friend Lady Grogram, after she had returned home from Buttercup Hall. Lady Grogram was a great friend of hers, and was first cousin to that Mrs. Talbot who had a son at the school. Lady Grogram was an old woman of strong mind but small means, who was supposed to be potential over those connected with her. Mrs. Stantiloup feared that she could not be efficacious herself, either with Mr. or Mrs. Talbot; but she hoped that she might carry her purpose through Lady Grogram. It may be remembered that she had declared at Buttercup Hall that young Talbot was not to go back to Bowick. But this had been a figure of speech, as has been already explained:—

“MY DEAR LADY GROGRAM—Since I got your last letter I have been staying with the Momsons at Buttercup. It was awfully dull. He and she are, I think, the stupidest people that ever I met. None of those Momsons have an idea among them. They are just as heavy and inharmonious as their name. Lady Margaret was one of the party. She would have been better, only that our excellent Bishop was there too, and Lady Margaret thought it well to show off all her graces before the Bishop and the Bishop’s wife. I never saw such a dowdy in all my life as Mrs. Rolland. He is all very well, and looks at any rate like a gentleman. It was, I take it, that which got him his diocese. They say the Queen saw him once, and was taken by his manners.

“But I did one good thing at Buttercup. I got Mr. Momson to promise that that boy of his should not go back to Bowick. Dr. Wortle has become quite intolerable. I think he is determined to show that whatever he does, people shall put up with it. It is not only the most expensive establishment of the kind in all England, but also the worst conducted. You know, of course, how all this matter about

that woman stands now. She is remaining there at Bowick, absolutely living in the house, calling herself Mrs. Peacocke, while the man she was living with has gone off with her brother-in-law to look for her husband! Did you ever hear of such a mess as that?

“And the Doctor expects that fathers and mothers will still send their boys to such a place as that? I am very much mistaken if he will not find it altogether deserted before Christmas. Lord Carstairs is already gone.” [This was at any rate disingenuous, as she had been very severe when at Buttercup on all the Carstairs family because of their declared and perverse friendship for the Doctor.]

“Mr. Momson, though he is quite incapable of seeing the meaning of anything, has determined to take his boy away. She may thank me at any rate for that. I have heard that Lady Anne Clifford’s two boys will both leave.” [In one sense she had heard it, because the suggestion had been made by herself at Buttercup.] “I do hope that Mr. Talbot’s dear little boy will not be allowed to return to such contamination as that! Fancy—the man and the woman living there in that way together; and the Doctor keeping the woman on after he knew it all! It is really so horrible that one doesn’t know how to talk about it. When the Bishop was at Buttercup I really felt almost obliged to be silent.

“I know very well that Mrs. Talbot is always ready to take your advice. As for him, men very often do not think so much about these things as they ought. But he will not like his boy to be nearly the only one left at the school. I have not heard of one who is to remain for certain. How can it be possible that any boy who has a mother should be allowed to remain there?

“Do think of this, and do your best. I need not tell you that nothing ought to be so dear to us as a high tone of morals.—Most sincerely yours,

“JULIANA STANTILOUP.”

We need not pursue this letter further than to say that when it reached Mr. Talbot’s hands, which it did through his wife, he spoke of Mrs. Stantiloup in language which shocked his wife considerably, though

she was not altogether unaccustomed to strong language on his part. Mr. Talbot and the Doctor had been at school together, and at Oxford, and were friends.

I will give now a letter that was written by the Doctor to Mr. Momson in answer to one in which that gentleman signified his intention of taking little Gus away from the school.

“MY DEAR MR. MOMSON—After what you have said, of course I shall not expect your boy back after the holidays. Tell his mamma, with my compliments, that he shall take all his things home with him. As a rule I do charge for a quarter in advance when a boy is taken away suddenly, without notice, and apparently without cause. But I shall not do so at the present moment either to you or to any parent who may withdraw his son. A circumstance has happened which, though it cannot impair the utility of my school, and ought not to injure its character, may still be held as giving offence to certain persons. I will not be driven to alter my conduct by what I believe to be foolish misconception on their part. But they have a right to their own opinions, and I will not mulct them because of their conscientious convictions.—
Yours faithfully,

“JEFFREY WORTLE.”

“If you come across any friend who has a boy here, you are perfectly at liberty to show him or her this letter.”

The defection of the Momsons wounded the Doctor, no doubt. He was aware that Mrs. Stantiloup had been at Buttercup, and that the Bishop also had been there—and he could put two and two together; but it hurt him to think that one so “staunch” though so “stupid” as Mrs. Momson, should be turned from her purpose by such a woman as Mrs. Stantiloup. And he got other letters on the subject. Here is one from Lady Anne Clifford.

“DEAR DOCTOR—You know how safe I think my dear boys are with you, and how much obliged I am both to you and your wife for all your kindness. But people are saying things to me about one of the masters at your school and his wife. Is there any reason why I should be afraid? You will see

how thoroughly I trust you when I ask you the question.—
Yours very sincerely,

“ANNE CLIFFORD.”

Now Lady Anne Clifford was a sweet, confiding, affectionate, but not very wise woman. In a letter, written not many days before to Mary Wortle, who had on one occasion been staying with her, she said that she was at that time in the same house with the Bishop and Mrs. Rolland. Of course the Doctor knew again how to put two and two together.

Then there came a letter from Mr. Talbot—

“DEAR WORTLE—So you are boiling for yourself another pot of hot water. I never saw such a fellow as you are for troubles! Old Mother Shipton has been writing such a letter to our old woman, and explaining that no boy’s soul would any longer be worth looking after if he be left in your hands. Don’t you go and get me into a scrape more than you can help; but you may be quite sure of this that if I had as many sons as Priam I should send them all to you;—only I think that the cheques would be very long in coming.—Yours always,

“JOHN TALBOT.”

The Doctor answered this at greater length than he had done in writing to Mr. Momson, who was not specially his friend.

“MY DEAR TALBOT—You may be quite sure that I shall not repeat to anyone what you have told me of Mother Shipton. I knew, however, pretty well what she was doing and what I had to expect from her. It is astonishing to me that such a woman should still have the power of persuading anyone—astonishing also that any human being should continue to hate as she hates me. She has often tried to do me an injury, but she has never succeeded yet. At any rate she will not bend me. Though my school should be broken up tomorrow, which I do not think probable, I should still have enough to live upon—which is more, by all accounts, than her unfortunate husband can say for himself.

“The facts are these. More than twelve months ago I got an assistant named Peacocke, a clergyman, an Oxford man, and formerly a Fellow of Trinity;—a man quite superior to anything I have a right to expect in my school. He had gone as a Classical Professor to a college in the United States;—a rash thing to do, no doubt;—and had there married a widow, which was rasher still. The lady came here with him and undertook the charge of the schoolhouse—with a separate salary; and an admirable person in the place she was. Then it turned out, as no doubt you have heard, that her former husband was alive when they were married. They ought probably to have separated, but they didn’t. They came here instead, and here they were followed by the brother of the husband—who I take it is now dead, though of that we know nothing certain.

“That he should have told me his position is more than any man has a right to expect from another. Fortune had been most unkind to him, and for her sake he was bound to do the best that he could with himself. I cannot bring myself to be angry with him, though I cannot defend him by strict laws of right and wrong. I have advised him to go back to America and find out if the man be in truth dead. If so, let him come back and marry the woman again before all the world. I shall be ready to marry them and to ask him and her to my house afterwards.

“In the meantime what was to become of her? ‘Let her go into lodgings,’ said the Bishop. Go to lodgings at Broughton! You know what sort of lodgings she would get there among psalm-singing greengrocers who would tell her of her misfortune every day of her life! I would not subject her to the misery of going and seeking for a home. I told him, when I persuaded him to go, that she should have the rooms they were then occupying while he was away. In settling this, of course I had to make arrangements for doing in our own establishment the work which had lately fallen to her share. I mention this for the sake of explaining that she has got nothing to do with the school. No doubt the boys are under the same roof with her. Will your boy’s morals be the worse? It seems that Gustavus Momson’s will. You know

the father; do you not? I wonder whether anything will ever affect his morals?

“Now, I have told you everything. Not that I have doubted you; but, as you have been told so much, I have thought it well that you should have the whole story from myself. What effect it may have upon the school I do not know. The only boy of whose secession I have yet heard is young Momson. But probably there will be others. Four new boys were to have come, but I have already heard from the father of one that he has changed his mind. I think I can trace an acquaintance between him and Mother Shipton. If the body of the school should leave me I will let you know at once as you might not like to leave your boy under such circumstances.

“You may be sure of this, that here the lady remains until her husband returns. I am not going to be turned from my purpose at this time of day by anything that Mother Shipton may say or do.—Yours always,

“JEFFREY WORTLE.”

PART V

I

MR. PUDDICOMBE'S BOOT

It was not to be expected that the matter should be kept out of the county newspaper, or even from those in the metropolis. There was too much of romance in the story, too good a tale to be told, for any such hope. The man's former life and the woman's, the disappearance of her husband and his reappearance after his reported death, the departure of the couple from St. Louis and the coming of Lefroy to Bowick, formed together a most attractive subject. But it could not be told without reference to Dr. Wortle's school, to Dr. Wortle's position as clergyman of the parish—and also to the fact which was considered by his enemies to be of all the facts the most damning, that Mr. Peacocke had for a time been allowed to preach in the parish church. The *Broughton Gazette*, a newspaper which was supposed to be altogether devoted to the interest of the diocese, was very eloquent on this subject. "We do not desire," said the *Broughton Gazette*, "to make any remarks as to the management of Dr. Wortle's school. We leave all that between him and the parents of the boys who are educated there. We are perfectly aware that Dr. Wortle himself is a scholar, and that his school has been deservedly successful. It is advisable, no doubt, that in such an establishment none should be employed whose lives are openly immoral;—but as we have said before, it is not our purpose to insist upon this. Parents, if they feel themselves to be aggrieved, can remedy the evil by withdrawing their sons. But when we consider the great power which is placed in the hands of an incumbent of a parish, that he is endowed as it were with the freehold of his pulpit, that he may put up whom he will to preach the Gospel to his parishioners, even in a certain degree in opposition to his bishop, we think that we do no more than our duty in calling attention to such a case as this." Then the whole story was told at great length, so as to give the "we" of the *Broughton Gazette* a happy opportunity of making its leading article not only much longer, but much more amusing, than usual. "We must say," continued the writer, as he concluded his narrative, "that this man should not have been allowed to preach in the Bowick pulpit. He is no doubt a clergyman of the Church of England, and Dr. Wortle was within his rights in asking for his assistance; but the

incumbent of a parish is responsible for those he employs, and that responsibility now rests on Dr. Wortle.”

There was a great deal in this that made the Doctor very angry—so angry that he did not know how to restrain himself. The matter had been argued as though he had employed the clergyman in his church after he had known the history. “For aught I know,” he said to Mrs. Wortle, “any curate coming to me might have three wives, all alive.”

“That would be most improbable,” said Mrs. Wortle.

“So was all this improbable—just as improbable. Nothing could be more improbable. Do we not all feel overcome with pity for the poor woman because she encountered trouble that was so improbable? How much more improbable was it that I should come across a clergyman who had encountered such improbabilities.” In answer to this Mrs. Wortle could only shake her head, not at all understanding the purport of her husband’s argument.

But what was said about his school hurt him more than what was said about his church. In regard to his church he was impregnable. Not even the Bishop could touch him—or even annoy him much. But this “penny-a-liner,” as the Doctor indignantly called him, had attacked him in his tenderest point. After declaring that he did not intend to meddle with the school, he had gone on to point out that an immoral person had been employed there, and had then invited all parents to take away their sons. “He doesn’t know what moral and immoral means,” said the Doctor, again pleading his own case to his own wife. “As far as I know, it would be hard to find a man of a higher moral feeling than Mr. Peacocke, or a woman than his wife.”

“I suppose they ought to have separated when it was found out,” said Mrs. Wortle.

“No, no,” he shouted; “I hold that they were right. He was right to cling to her, and she was bound to obey him. Such a fellow as that,”—and he crushed the paper up in his hand in his wrath, as though he were crushing the editor himself—“such a fellow as that knows nothing of morality, nothing of honour, nothing of tenderness. What he did I would have done, and I’ll stick to him through it all in spite of the Bishop, in spite of the newspapers, and in spite of all the rancour of all my enemies.” Then he got up and walked about the room in such a fury that his wife did not dare to speak to him. Should he or should he not answer the newspaper? That was a question which for the first two days after he had read the article greatly perplexed him. He would have been very ready to advise any other man what to do in such a case. “Never notice

what may be written about you in a newspaper," he would have said. Such is the advice which a man always gives to his friend. But when the case comes to himself he finds it sometimes almost impossible to follow it. "What's the use? Who cares what the *Broughton Gazette* says? let it pass, and it will be forgotten in three days. If you stir the mud yourself, it will hang about you for months. It is just what they want you to do. They cannot go on by themselves, and so the subject dies away from them; but if you write rejoinders they have a contributor working for them for nothing, and one whose writing will be much more acceptable to their readers than any that comes from their own anonymous scribes. It is very disagreeable to be worried like a rat by a dog; but why should you go into the kennel and unnecessarily put yourself in the way of it?" The Doctor had said this more than once to clerical friends who were burning with indignation at something that had been written about them. But now he was burning himself, and could hardly keep his fingers from pen and ink.

In this emergency he went to Mr. Puddicombe, not, as he said to himself, for advice, but in order that he might hear what Mr. Puddicombe would have to say about it. He did not like Mr. Puddicombe, but he believed in him—which was more than he quite did with the Bishop. Mr. Puddicombe would tell him his true thoughts. Mr. Puddicombe would be unpleasant very likely; but he would be sincere and friendly. So he went to Mr. Puddicombe. "It seems to me," he said, "almost necessary that I should answer such allegations as these for the sake of truth."

"You are not responsible for the truth of the *Broughton Gazette*," said Mr. Puddicombe.

"But I am responsible to a certain degree that false reports shall not be spread abroad as to what is done in my church."

"You can contradict nothing that the newspaper has said."

"It is implied," said the Doctor, "that I allowed Mr. Peacocke to preach in my church after I knew his marriage was informal."

"There is no such statement in the paragraph," said Mr. Puddicombe, after attentive perusal of the article. "The writer has written in a hurry, as such writers generally do, but has made no statement such as you presume. Were you to answer him, you could only do so by an elaborate statement of the exact facts of the case. It can hardly be worth your while, in defending yourself against the *Broughton Gazette*, to tell the whole story in public of Mr. Peacocke's life and fortunes."

"You would pass it over altogether?"

“Certainly I would.”

“And so acknowledge the truth of all that the newspaper says.”

“I do not know that the paper says anything untrue,” said Mr. Puddicombe, not looking the Doctor in the face, with his eyes turned to the ground, but evidently with the determination to say what he thought, however unpleasant it might be. “The fact is that you have fallen into a—misfortune.”

“I don’t acknowledge it at all,” said the Doctor.

“All your friends at any rate will think so, let the story be told as it may. It was a misfortune that this lady whom you had taken into your establishment should have proved not to be the gentleman’s wife. When I am taking a walk through the fields and get one of my feet deeper than usual into the mud, I always endeavour to bear it as well as I may before the eyes of those who meet me rather than make futile efforts to get rid of the dirt and look as though nothing had happened. The dirt, when it is rubbed and smudged and scraped is more palpably dirt than the honest mud.”

“I will not admit that I am dirty at all,” said the Doctor.

“Nor do I, in the case which I describe. I admit nothing; but I let those who see me form their own opinion. If anyone asks me about my boot I tell him that it is a matter of no consequence. I advise you to do the same. You will only make the smudges more palpable if you write to the *Broughton Gazette*.”

“Would you say nothing to the boys’ parents?” asked the Doctor.

“There, perhaps, I am not a judge, as I never kept a school;—but I think not. If any father writes to you, then tell him the truth.”

If the matter had gone no farther than this, the Doctor might probably have left Mr. Puddicombe’s house with a sense of thankfulness for the kindness rendered to him; but he did go farther, and endeavoured to extract from his friend some sense of the injustice shown by the Bishop, the Stantiloups, the newspaper, and his enemies in general through the diocese. But here he failed signally. “I really think, Dr. Wortle, that you could not have expected it otherwise.”

“Expect that people should lie?”

“I don’t know about lies. If people have told lies I have not seen them or heard them. I don’t think the Bishop has lied.”

“I don’t mean the Bishop; though I do think that he has shown a great want of what I may call liberality towards a clergyman in his diocese.”

“No doubt he thinks you have been wrong. By liberality you mean sympathy. Why should you expect him to sympathise with your

wrongdoing?”

“What have I done wrong?”

“You have countenanced immorality and deceit in a brother clergyman.”

“I deny it,” said the Doctor, rising up impetuously from his chair.

“Then I do not understand the position, Dr. Wortle. That is all I can say.”

“To my thinking, Mr. Puddicombe, I never came across a better man than Mr. Peacocke in my life.”

“I cannot make comparisons. As to the best man I ever met in my life I might have to acknowledge that even he had done wrong in certain circumstances. As the matter is forced upon me, I have to express my opinion that a great sin was committed both by the man and by the woman. You not only condone the sin, but declare both by your words and deeds that you sympathise with the sin as well as with the sinners. You have no right to expect that the Bishop will sympathise with you in that;—nor can it be but that in such a country as this the voices of many will be loud against you.”

“And yours as loud as any,” said the Doctor, angrily.

“That is unkind and unjust,” said Mr. Puddicombe. “What I have said, I have said to yourself, and not to others; and what I have said, I have said in answer to questions asked by yourself.” Then the Doctor apologised with what grace he could. But when he left the house his heart was still bitter against Mr. Puddicombe.

He was almost ashamed of himself as he rode back to Bowick—first, because he had condescended to ask advice, and then because, after having asked it, he had been so thoroughly scolded. There was no one whom Mr. Puddicombe would admit to have been wrong in the matter except the Doctor himself. And yet though he had been so counselled and so scolded, he had found himself obliged to apologize before he left the house! And, too, he had been made to understand that he had better not rush into print. Though the *Broughton Gazette* should come to the attack again and again, he must hold his peace. That reference to Mr. Puddicombe’s dirty boot had convinced him. He could see the thoroughly squalid look of the boot that had been scraped in vain, and appreciate the wholesomeness of the unadulterated mud. There was more in the man than he had ever acknowledged before. There was a consistency in him, and a courage, and an honesty of purpose. But there was no softness of heart. Had there been a grain of tenderness there, he could not have spoken so often as he had done of Mrs. Peacocke without

expressing some grief at the unmerited sorrows to which that poor lady had been subjected.

His own heart melted with ruth as he thought, while riding home, of the cruelty to which she had been and was subjected. She was all alone there, waiting, waiting, waiting, till the dreary days should have gone by. And if no good news should come, if Mr. Peacocke should return with tidings that her husband was alive and well, what should she do then? What would the world then have in store for her? "If it were me," said the Doctor to himself, "I'd take her to some other home and treat her as my wife in spite of all the Puddicombes in creation;—in spite of all the bishops."

The Doctor, though he was a self-asserting and somewhat violent man, was thoroughly softhearted. It is to be hoped that the reader has already learned as much as that;—a man with a kind, tender, affectionate nature. It would perhaps be unfair to raise a question whether he would have done as much, been so willing to sacrifice himself, for a plain woman. Had Mr. Stantiloup, or Sir Samuel Griffin if he had suddenly come again to life, been found to have prior wives also living, would the Doctor have found shelter for them in their ignominy and trouble? Mrs. Wortle, who knew her husband thoroughly, was sure that he would not have done so. Mrs. Peacocke was a very beautiful woman, and the Doctor was a man who thoroughly admired beauty. To say that Mrs. Wortle was jealous would be quite untrue. She liked to see her husband talking to a pretty woman, because he would be sure to be in a good humour and sure to make the best of himself. She loved to see him shine. But she almost wished that Mrs. Peacocke had been ugly, because there would not then have been so much danger about the school.

"I'm just going up to see her," said the Doctor, as soon as he got home—"just to ask her what she wants."

"I don't think she wants anything," said Mrs. Wortle, weakly.

"Does she not? She must be a very odd woman if she can live there all day alone, and not want to see a human creature."

"I was with her yesterday."

"And therefore I will call today," said the Doctor, leaving the room with his hat on.

When he was shown up into the sitting-room he found Mrs. Peacocke with a newspaper in her hand. He could see at a glance that it was a copy of the *Broughton Gazette*, and could see also the length and outward show of the very article which he had been discussing with

Mr. Puddicombe. "Dr. Wortle," she said, "if you don't mind, I will go away from this."

"But I do mind. Why should you go away?"

"They have been writing about me in the newspapers."

"That was to be expected."

"But they have been writing about you."

"That was to have been expected also. You don't suppose they can hurt me?" This was a false boast, but in such conversations he was almost bound to boast.

"It is I, then, am hurting you?"

"You;—oh dear, no; not in the least."

"But I do. They talk of boys going away from the school."

"Boys will go and boys will come, but we run on forever," said the Doctor, playfully.

"I can well understand that it should be so," said Mrs. Peacocke, passing over the Doctor's parody as though unnoticed; "and I perceive that I ought not to be here."

"Where ought you to be, then?" said he, intending simply to carry on his joke.

"Where indeed! There is nowhere. But wherever I may do least injury to innocent people—to people who have not been driven by storms out of the common path of life. For this place I am peculiarly unfit."

"Will you find any place where you will be made more welcome?"

"I think not."

"Then let me manage the rest. You have been reading that dastardly article in the paper. It will have no effect upon me. Look here, Mrs. Peacocke;"—then he got up and held her hand as though he were going, but he remained some moments while he was still speaking to her—still holding her hand;—"it was settled between your husband and me, when he went away, that you should remain here under my charge till his return. I am bound to him to find a home for you. I think you are as much bound to obey him—which you can only do by remaining here."

"I would wish to obey him, certainly."

"You ought to do so—from the peculiar circumstances more especially. Don't trouble your mind about the school, but do as he desired. There is no question but that you must do so. Goodbye. Mrs. Wortle or I will come and see you tomorrow." Then, and not till then, he dropped her hand.

On the next day Mrs. Wortle did call, though these visits were to her an intolerable nuisance. But it was certainly better that she should alternate the visits with the Doctor than that he should go every day. The Doctor had declared that charity required that one of them should see the poor woman daily. He was quite willing that they should perform the task day and day about—but should his wife omit the duty he must go in his wife's place. What would all the world of Bowick say if the Doctor were to visit a lady, a young and a beautiful lady, every day, whereas his wife visited the lady not at all? Therefore they took it turn about, except that sometimes the Doctor accompanied his wife. The Doctor had once suggested that his wife should take the poor lady out in her carriage. But against this even Mrs. Wortle had rebelled. "Under such circumstances as hers she ought not to be seen driving about," said Mrs. Wortle. The Doctor had submitted to this, but still thought that the world of Bowick was very cruel.

Mrs. Wortle, though she made no complaint, thought that she was used cruelly in the matter. There had been an intention of going into Brittany during these summer holidays. The little tour had been almost promised. But the affairs of Mrs. Peacocke were of such a nature as not to allow the Doctor to be absent. "You and Mary can go, and Henry will go with you." Henry was a bachelor brother of Mrs. Wortle, who was always very much at the Doctor's disposal, and at hers. But certainly she was not going to quit England, not going to quit home at all, while her husband remained there, and while Mrs. Peacocke was an inmate of the school. It was not that she was jealous. The idea was absurd. But she knew very well what Mrs. Stantiloup would say.

II

EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS

But there arose a trouble greater than that occasioned by the *Broughton Gazette*. There came out an article in a London weekly newspaper, called *Everybody's Business*, which nearly drove the Doctor mad. This was on the last Saturday of the holidays. The holidays had been commenced in the middle of July, and went on till the end of August. Things had not gone well at Bowick during these weeks. The parents of all the four newly-expected boys had—changed their minds. One father had discovered that he could not afford it. Another declared that the mother could not be got to part with her darling quite so soon as he had expected. A third had found that a private tutor at home would best suit his purposes. While the fourth boldly said that he did not like to send his boy because of the “fuss” which had been made about Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke. Had this last come alone, the Doctor would probably have resented such a communication; but following the others as it did, he preferred the fourth man to any of the other three. “Miserable cowards,” he said to himself, as he docketed the letters and put them away. But the greatest blow of all—of all blows of this sort—came to him from poor Lady Anne Clifford. She wrote a piteous letter to him, in which she implored him to allow her to take her two boys away.

“MY DEAR DOCTOR WORTLE,” she said, “so many people have been telling so many dreadful things about this horrible affair, that I do not dare to send my darling boys back to Bowick again. Uncle Clifford and Lord Robert both say that I should be very wrong. The Marchioness has said so much about it that I dare not go against her. You know what my own feelings are about you and dear Mrs. Wortle; but I am not my own mistress. They all tell me that it is my first duty to think about the dear boys’ welfare; and of course that is true. I hope you won’t be very angry with me, and will write one line to say that you forgive me.—Yours most sincerely,

“ANNE CLIFFORD.”

In answer to this the Doctor did write as follows;—

“MY DEAR LADY ANNE—Of course your duty is very plain—to do what you think best for the boys; and it is natural enough that you should follow the advice of your relatives and theirs.—Faithfully yours,

“JEFFREY WORTLE.”

He could not bring himself to write in a more friendly tone, or to tell her that he forgave her. His sympathies were not with her. His sympathies at the present moment were only with Mrs. Peacocke. But then Lady Anne Clifford was not a beautiful woman, as was Mrs. Peacocke.

This was a great blow. Two other boys had also been summoned away, making five in all, whose premature departure was owing altogether to the virulent tongue of that wretched old Mother Shipton. And there had been four who were to come in the place of four others, who, in the course of nature, were going to carry on their more advanced studies elsewhere. Vacancies such as these had always been preoccupied long beforehand by ambitious parents. These very four places had been preoccupied, but now they were all vacant. There would be nine empty beds in the school when it met again after the holidays; and the Doctor well understood that nine beds remaining empty would soon cause others to be emptied. It is success that creates success, and decay that produces decay. Gradual decay he knew that he could not endure. He must shut up his school—give up his employment—and retire altogether from the activity of life. He felt that if it came to this with him he must in very truth turn his face to the wall and die. Would it—would it really come to that, that Mrs. Stantiloup should have altogether conquered him in the combat that had sprung up between them?

But yet he would not give up Mrs. Peacocke. Indeed, circumstanced as he was, he could not give her up. He had promised not only her, but her absent husband, that until his return there should be a home for her in the schoolhouse. There would be a cowardice in going back from his word which was altogether foreign to his nature. He could not bring himself to retire from the fight, even though by doing so he might save himself from the actual final slaughter which seemed to be imminent. He thought only of making fresh attacks upon his enemy, instead of meditating flight from those which were made upon him. As a dog, when another dog has

got him well by the ear, thinks not at all of his own wound, but only how he may catch his enemy by the lip, so was the Doctor in regard to Mrs. Stantiloup. When the two Clifford boys were taken away, he took some joy to himself in remembering that Mr. Stantiloup could not pay his butcher's bill.

Then, just at the end of the holidays, some good-natured friend sent to him a copy of *Everybody's Business*. There is no duty which a man owes to himself more clearly than that of throwing into the wastepaper basket, unsearched and even unopened, all newspapers sent to him without a previously-declared purpose. The sender has either written something himself which he wishes to force you to read, or else he has been desirous of wounding you by some ill-natured criticism upon yourself. *Everybody's Business* was a paper which, in the natural course of things, did not find its way into the Bowick Rectory; and the Doctor, though he was no doubt acquainted with the title, had never even looked at its columns. It was the purpose of the periodical to amuse its readers, as its name declared, with the private affairs of their neighbours. It went boldly about its work, excusing itself by the assertion that Jones was just as well inclined to be talked about as Smith was to hear whatever could be said about Jones. As both parties were served, what could be the objection? It was in the main good-natured, and probably did most frequently gratify the Joneses, while it afforded considerable amusement to the listless and numerous Smiths of the world. If you can't read and understand Jones's speech in Parliament, you may at any rate have mind enough to interest yourself with the fact that he never composed a word of it in his own room without a ring on his finger and a flower in his buttonhole. It may also be agreeable to know that Walker the poet always takes a mutton-chop and two glasses of sherry at half-past one. *Everybody's Business* did this for everybody to whom such excitement was agreeable. But in managing everybody's business in that fashion, let a writer be as good-natured as he may and let the principle be ever so well-founded that nobody is to be hurt, still there are dangers. It is not always easy to know what will hurt and what will not. And then sometimes there will come a temptation to be, not spiteful, but specially amusing. There must be danger, and a writer will sometimes be indiscreet. Personalities will lead to libels even when the libeller has been most innocent. It may be that after all the poor poet never drank a glass of sherry before dinner in his life—it may be that a little toast-and-water, even with his dinner, gives him all the refreshment that he wants, and that two glasses of alcoholic mixture in the middle of the day shall seem, when imputed to him, to

convey a charge of downright inebriety. But the writer has perhaps learned to regard two glasses of meridian wine as but a moderate amount of sustenance. This man is much flattered if it be given to be understood of him that he falls in love with every pretty woman that he sees;—whereas another will think that he has been made subject to a foul calumny by such insinuation.

Everybody's Business fell into some such mistake as this, in that very amusing article which was written for the delectation of its readers in reference to Dr. Wortle and Mrs. Peacocke. The *Broughton Gazette* no doubt confined itself to the clerical and highly moral views of the case, and, having dealt with the subject chiefly on behalf of the Close and the admirers of the Close, had made no allusion to the fact that Mrs. Peacocke was a very pretty woman. One or two other local papers had been more scurrilous, and had, with ambiguous and timid words, alluded to the Doctor's personal admiration for the lady. These, or the rumours created by them, had reached one of the funniest and lightest-handed of the contributors to *Everybody's Business*, and he had concocted an amusing article—which he had not intended to be at all libellous, which he had thought to be only funny. He had not appreciated, probably, the tragedy of the lady's position, or the sanctity of that of the gentleman. There was comedy in the idea of the Doctor having sent one husband away to America to look after the other while he consoled the wife in England. "It must be admitted," said the writer, "that the Doctor has the best of it. While one gentleman is gouging the other—as cannot but be expected—the Doctor will be at any rate in security, enjoying the smiles of beauty under his own fig-tree at Bowick. After a hot morning with *τυπτω* in the school, there will be *amo* in the cool of the evening." And this was absolutely sent to him by some good-natured friend!

The funny writer obtained a popularity wider probably than he had expected. His words reached Mrs. Stantiloup, as well as the Doctor, and were read even in the Bishop's palace. They were quoted even in the *Broughton Gazette*, not with approbation, but in a high tone of moral severity. "See the nature of the language to which Dr. Wortle's conduct has subjected the whole of the diocese!" That was the tone of the criticism made by the *Broughton Gazette* on the article in *Everybody's Business*. "What else has he a right to expect?" said Mrs. Stantiloup to Mrs. Rolland, having made quite a journey into Broughton for the sake of discussing it at the palace. There she explained it all to Mrs. Rolland, having herself studied the passage so as fully to appreciate the virus contained in it. "He passes all the morning in the school whipping the

boys himself because he has sent Mr. Peacocke away, and then amuses himself in the evening by making love to Mr. Peacocke's wife, as he calls her." Dr. Wortle, when he read and reread the article, and when the jokes which were made upon it reached his ears, as they were sure to do, was nearly maddened by what he called the heartless iniquity of the world; but his state became still worse when he received an affectionate but solemn letter from the Bishop warning him of his danger. An affectionate letter from a bishop must surely be the most disagreeable missive which a parish clergyman can receive. Affection from one man to another is not natural in letters. A bishop never writes affectionately unless he means to reprove severely. When he calls a clergyman his "dear brother in Christ," he is sure to go on to show that the man so called is altogether unworthy of the name. So it was with a letter now received at Bowick, in which the Bishop expressed his opinion that Dr. Wortle ought not to pay any further visits to Mrs. Peacocke till she should have settled herself down with one legitimate husband, let that legitimate husband be who it might. The Bishop did not indeed, at first, make reference by name to *Everybody's Business*, but he stated that the "metropolitan press" had taken up the matter, and that scandal would take place in the diocese if further cause were given. "It is not enough to be innocent," said the Bishop, "but men must know that we are so."

Then there came a sharp and pressing correspondence between the Bishop and the Doctor, which lasted four or five days. The Doctor, without referring to any other portion of the Bishop's letter, demanded to know to what "metropolitan newspaper" the Bishop had alluded, as, if any such paper had spread scandalous imputations as to him, the Doctor, respecting the lady in question, it would be his, the Doctor's, duty to proceed against that newspaper for libel. In answer to this the Bishop, in a note much shorter and much less affectionate than his former letter, said that he did not wish to name any metropolitan newspaper. But the Doctor would not, of course, put up with such an answer as this. He wrote very solemnly now, if not affectionately. "His lordship had spoken of 'scandal in the diocese.' The words," said the Doctor, "contained a most grave charge. He did not mean to say that any such accusation had been made by the Bishop himself; but such accusation must have been made by someone at least of the London newspapers or the Bishop would not have been justified in what he has written. Under such circumstances he, Dr. Wortle, thought himself entitled to demand from the Bishop the name of the newspaper in question, and the date on which the article had appeared."

In answer to this there came no written reply, but a copy of the *Everybody's Business* which the Doctor had already seen. He had, no doubt, known from the first that it was the funny paragraph about *τυπτω* and *amo* to which the Bishop had referred. But in the serious steps which he now intended to take, he was determined to have positive proof from the hands of the Bishop himself. The Bishop had not directed the pernicious newspaper with his own hands, but if called upon, could not deny that it had been sent from the palace by his orders. Having received it, the Doctor wrote back at once as follows;—

“RIGHT REVEREND AND DEAR LORD—Any word coming from your lordship to me is of grave importance, as should, I think, be all words coming from a bishop to his clergy; and they are of special importance when containing a reproof, whether deserved or undeserved. The scurrilous and vulgar attack made upon me in the newspaper which your lordship has sent to me would not have been worthy of my serious notice had it not been made worthy by your lordship as being the ground on which such a letter was written to me as that of your lordship's of the 12th instant. Now it has been invested with so much solemnity by your lordship's notice of it that I feel myself obliged to defend myself against it by public action.

“If I have given just cause of scandal to the diocese I will retire both from my living and from my school. But before doing so I will endeavour to prove that I have done neither. This I can only do by publishing in a court of law all the circumstances in reference to my connection with Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke. As regards myself, this, though necessary, will be very painful. As regards them, I am inclined to think that the more the truth is known, the more general and the more generous will be the sympathy felt for their position.

“As the newspaper sent to me, no doubt by your lordship's orders, from the palace, has been accompanied by no letter, it may be necessary that your lordship should be troubled by a subpoena, so as to prove that the newspaper alluded to by your lordship is the one against which my proceedings will be taken. It will be necessary, of course, that I should show that the libel in question has been deemed important enough to bring down upon me ecclesiastical

rebuke of such a nature as to make my remaining in the diocese unbearable—unless it is shown that that rebuke was undeserved.”

There was consternation in the palace when this was received. So stiffnecked a man, so obstinate, so unclerical—so determined to make much of little! The Bishop had felt himself bound to warn a clergyman that, for the sake of the Church, he could not do altogether as other men might. No doubt certain ladies had got around him—especially Lady Margaret Momson—filling his ears with the horrors of the Doctor’s proceedings. The gentleman who had written the article about the Greek and the Latin words had seen the truth of the thing at once—so said Lady Margaret. The Doctor had condoned the offence committed by the Peacockes because the woman had been beautiful, and was repaying himself for his mercy by basking in her loveliness. There was no saying that there was not some truth in this? Mrs. Wortle herself entertained a feeling of the same kind. It was palpable, on the face of it, to all except Dr. Wortle himself—and to Mrs. Peacocke. Mrs. Stantiloup, who had made her way into the palace, was quite convincing on this point. Everybody knew, she said, that the Doctor went across, and saw the lady all alone, every day. Everybody did not know that. If everybody had been accurate, everybody would have asserted that he did this thing every other day. But the matter, as it was represented to the Bishop by the ladies, with the assistance of one or two clergymen in the Close, certainly seemed to justify his lordship’s interference.

But this that was threatened was very terrible. There was a determination about the Doctor which made it clear to the Bishop that he would be as bad as he said. When he, the Bishop, had spoken of scandal, of course he had not intended to say that the Doctor’s conduct was scandalous; nor had he said anything of the kind. He had used the word in its proper sense—and had declared that offence would be created in the minds of people unless an injurious report were stopped. “It is not enough to be innocent,” he had said, “but men must know that we are so.” He had declared in that his belief in Dr. Wortle’s innocence. But yet there might, no doubt, be an action for libel against the newspaper. And when damages came to be considered, much weight would be placed naturally on the attention which the Bishop had paid to the article. The result of this was that the Bishop invited the Doctor to come and spend a night with him in the palace.

The Doctor went, reaching the palace only just before dinner. During dinner and in the drawing-room Dr. Wortle made himself very pleasant. He was a man who could always be soft and gentle in a drawing-room. To see him talking with Mrs. Rolland and the Bishop's daughters, you would not have thought that there was anything wrong with him. The discussion with the Bishop came after that, and lasted till midnight. "It will be for the disadvantage of the diocese that this matter should be dragged into Court—and for the disadvantage of the Church in general that a clergyman should seem to seek such redress against his bishop." So said the Bishop.

But the Doctor was obdurate. "I seek no redress," he said, "against my bishop. I seek redress against a newspaper which has calumniated me. It is your good opinion, my lord—your good opinion or your ill opinion which is the breath of my nostrils. I have to refer to you in order that I may show that this paper, which I should otherwise have despised, has been strong enough to influence that opinion."

III

“*AMO* IN THE COOL OF THE EVENING”

The Doctor went up to London, and was told by his lawyers that an action for damages probably would lie. “*Amo* in the cool of the evening,” certainly meant making love. There could be no doubt that allusion was made to Mrs. Peacocke. To accuse a clergyman of a parish, and a schoolmaster, of making love to a lady so circumstanced as Mrs. Peacocke, no doubt was libellous. Presuming that the libel could not be justified, he would probably succeed. “Justified!” said the Doctor, almost shrieking, to his lawyers; “I never said a word to the lady in my life except in pure kindness and charity. Every word might have been heard by all the world.” Nevertheless, had all the world been present, he would not have held her hand so tenderly or so long as he had done on a certain occasion which has been mentioned.

“They will probably apologise,” said the lawyer.

“Shall I be bound to accept their apology?”

“No; not bound; but you would have to show, if you went on with the action, that the damage complained of was of so grievous a nature that the apology would not salve it.”

“The damage has been already done,” said the Doctor, eagerly. “I have received the Bishop’s rebuke—a rebuke in which he has said that I have brought scandal upon the diocese.”

“Rebukes break no bones,” said the lawyer. “Can you show that it will serve to prevent boys from coming to your school?”

“It may not improbably force me to give up the living. I certainly will not remain there subject to the censure of the Bishop. I do not in truth want any damages. I would not accept money. I only want to set myself right before the world.” It was then agreed that the necessary communication should be made by the lawyer to the newspaper proprietors, so as to put the matter in a proper train for the action.

After this the Doctor returned home, just in time to open his school with his diminished forces. At the last moment there was another defaulter, so that there were now no more than twenty pupils. The school had not been so low as this for the last fifteen years. There had never been less than eight-and-twenty before, since Mrs. Stantiloup had first

begun her campaign. It was heartbreaking to him. He felt as though he were almost ashamed to go into his own school. In directing his housekeeper to send the diminished orders to the tradesmen he was thoroughly ashamed of himself; in giving his directions to the usher as to the re-divided classes he was thoroughly ashamed of himself. He wished that there was no school, and would have been contented now to give it all up, and to confine Mary's fortune to £10,000 instead of £20,000, had it not been that he could not bear to confess that he was beaten. The boys themselves seemed almost to carry their tails between their legs, as though even they were ashamed of their own school. If, as was too probable, another half-dozen should go at Christmas, then the thing must be abandoned. And how could he go on as rector of the parish with the abominable empty building staring him in the face every moment of his life.

"I hope you are not really going to law," said his wife to him.

"I must, my dear. I have no other way of defending my honour."

"Go to law with the Bishop?"

"No, not with the Bishop."

"But the Bishop would be brought into it?"

"Yes; he will certainly be brought into it."

"And as an enemy. What I mean is, that he will be brought in very much against his own will."

"Not a doubt about it," said the Doctor. "But he will have brought it altogether upon himself. How he can have condescended to send that scurrilous newspaper is more than I can understand. That one gentleman should have so treated another is to me incomprehensible. But that a bishop should have done so to a clergyman of his own diocese shakes all my old convictions. There is a vulgarity about it, a meanness of thinking, an aptitude to suspect all manner of evil, which I cannot fathom. What! did he really think that I was making love to the woman; did he doubt that I was treating her and her husband with kindness, as one human being is bound to treat another in affliction; did he believe, in his heart, that I sent the man away in order that I might have an opportunity for a wicked purpose of my own? It is impossible. When I think of myself and of him, I cannot believe it. That woman who has succeeded at last in stirring up all this evil against me—even she could not believe it. Her malice is sufficient to make her conduct intelligible;—but there is no malice in the Bishop's mind against me. He would infinitely sooner live with me on pleasant terms if he could justify his doing so to his conscience. He has been stirred to do this in the execution of some

presumed duty. I do not accuse him of malice. But I do accuse him of a meanness of intellect lower than what I could have presumed to have been possible in a man so placed. I never thought him clever; I never thought him great; I never thought him even to be a gentleman, in the fullest sense of the word; but I did think he was a man. This is the performance of a creature not worthy to be called so.”

“Oh, Jeffrey, he did not believe all that.”

“What did he believe? When he read that article, did he see in it a true rebuke against a hypocrite, or did he see in it a scurrilous attack upon a brother clergyman, a neighbour, and a friend? If the latter, he certainly would not have been instigated by it to write to me such a letter as he did. He certainly would not have sent the paper to me had he felt it to contain a foul-mouthed calumny.”

“He wanted you to know what people of that sort were saying.”

“Yes; he wanted me to know that, and he wanted me to know also that the knowledge had come to me from my bishop. I should have thought evil of anyone who had sent me the vile ribaldry. But coming from him, it fills me with despair.”

“Despair!” she said, repeating his word.

“Yes; despair as to the condition of the Church when I see a man capable of such meanness holding so high place. ‘*Amo in the cool of the evening!*’ That words such as those should have been sent to me by the Bishop, as showing what the ‘metropolitan press’ of the day was saying about my conduct! Of course, my action will be against him—against the Bishop. I shall be bound to expose his conduct. What else can I do? There are things which a man cannot bear and live. Were I to put up with this I must leave the school, leave the parish;—nay, leave the country. There is a stain upon me which I must wash out, or I cannot remain here.”

“No, no, no,” said his wife, embracing him.

“‘*Amo in the cool of the evening!*’ And that when, as God is my judge above me, I have done my best to relieve what has seemed to me the unmerited sorrows of two poor sufferers! Had it come from Mrs. Stantiloup, it would, of course, have been nothing. I could have understood that her malice should have condescended to anything, however low. But from the Bishop!”

“How will you be the worse? Who will know?”

“I know it,” said he, striking his breast. “I know it. The wound is here. Do you think that when a coarse libel is welcomed in the Bishop’s palace, and treated there as true, that it will not be spread abroad among

other houses? When the Bishop has thought it necessary to send it me, what will other people do—others who are not bound to be just and righteous in their dealings with me as he is? ‘*Amo in the cool of the evening!*’” Then he seized his hat and rushed out into the garden.

The gentleman who had written the paragraph certainly had had no idea that his words would have been thus effectual. The little joke had seemed to him to be good enough to fill a paragraph, and it had gone from him without further thought. Of the Doctor or of the lady he had conceived no idea whatsoever. Somebody else had said somewhere that a clergyman had sent a lady’s reputed husband away to look for another husband, while he and the lady remained together. The joke had not been much of a joke, but it had been enough. It had gone forth, and had now brought the whole palace of Broughton into grief, and had nearly driven our excellent Doctor mad! “*Amo in the cool of the evening!*” The words stuck to him like the shirt of Nessus, lacerating his very spirit. That words such as those should have been sent to him in a solemn sober spirit by the bishop of his diocese! It never occurred to him that he had, in truth, been imprudent when paying his visits alone to Mrs. Peacocke.

It was late in the evening, and he wandered away up through the green rides of a wood the borders of which came down to the glebe fields. He had been boiling over with indignation while talking to his wife. But as soon as he was alone he endeavoured—purposely endeavoured to rid himself for a while of his wrath. This matter was so important to him that he knew well that it behoved him to look at it all round in a spirit other than that of anger. He had talked of giving up his school, and giving up his parish, and had really for a time almost persuaded himself that he must do so unless he could induce the Bishop publicly to withdraw the censure which he felt to have been expressed against him.

And then what would his life be afterwards? His parish and his school had not been only sources of income to him. The duty also had been dear, and had been performed on the whole with conscientious energy. Was everything to be thrown up, and his whole life hereafter be made a blank to him, because the Bishop had been unjust and injudicious? He could see that it well might be so, if he were to carry this contest on. He knew his own temper well enough to be sure that, as he fought, he would grow hotter in the fight, and that when he was once in the midst of it nothing would be possible to him but absolute triumph or absolute annihilation. If once he should succeed in getting the Bishop into court as a witness, either the Bishop must be crushed or he himself. The Bishop must be got to say why he had sent that low ribaldry to a

clergyman in his parish. He must be asked whether he had himself believed it, or whether he had not believed it. He must be made to say that there existed no slightest reason for believing the insinuation contained; and then, having confessed so much, he must be asked why he had sent that letter to Bowick parsonage. If it were false as well as ribald, slanderous as well as vulgar, malicious as well as mean, was the sending of it a mode of communication between a bishop and a clergyman of which he as a bishop could approve? Questions such as these must be asked him; and the Doctor, as he walked alone, arranging these questions within his own bosom, putting them into the strongest language which he could find, almost assured himself that the Bishop would be crushed in answering them. The Bishop had made a great mistake. So the Doctor assured himself. He had been entrapped by bad advisers, and had fallen into a pit. He had gone wrong, and had lost himself. When cross-questioned, as the Doctor suggested to himself that he should be cross-questioned, the Bishop would have to own all this;—and then he would be crushed.

But did he really want to crush the Bishop? Had this man been so bitter an enemy to him that, having him on the hip, he wanted to strike him down altogether? In describing the man's character to his wife, as he had done in the fury of his indignation, he had acquitted the man of malice. He was sure now, in his calmer moments, that the man had not intended to do him harm. If it were left in the Bishop's bosom, his parish, his school, and his character would all be made safe to him. He was sure of that. There was none of the spirit of Mrs. Stantiloup in the feeling that had prevailed at the palace. The Bishop, who had never yet been able to be masterful over him, had desired in a mild way to become masterful. He had liked the opportunity of writing that affectionate letter. That reference to the "metropolitan press" had slipped from him unawares; and then, when badgered for his authority, when driven to give an instance from the London newspapers, he had sent the objectionable periodical. He had, in point of fact, made a mistake;—a stupid, foolish mistake, into which a really well-bred man would hardly have fallen. "Ought I to take advantage of it?" said the Doctor to himself when he had wandered for an hour or more alone through the wood. He certainly did not wish to be crushed himself. Ought he to be anxious to crush the Bishop because of this error?

"As for the paper," he said to himself, walking quicker as his mind turned to this side of the subject—"as for the paper itself, it is beneath my notice. What is it to me what such a publication, or even the readers

of it, may think of me? As for damages, I would rather starve than soil my hands with their money. Though it should succeed in ruining me, I could not accept redress in that shape.” And thus having thought the matter fully over, he returned home, still wrathful, but with mitigated wrath.

A Saturday was fixed on which he should again go up to London to see the lawyer. He was obliged now to be particular about his days, as, in the absence of Mr. Peacocke, the school required his time. Saturday was a half-holiday, and on that day he could be absent on condition of remitting the classical lessons in the morning. As he thought of it all he began to be almost tired of Mr. Peacocke. Nevertheless, on the Saturday morning, before he started, he called on Mrs. Peacocke—in company with his wife—and treated her with all his usual cordial kindness.

“Mrs. Wortle,” he said, “is going up to town with me; but we shall be home tonight, and we will see you on Monday if not tomorrow.”

Mrs. Wortle was going with him, not with the view of being present at his interview with the lawyer, which she knew would not be allowed, but on the pretext of shopping. Her real reason for making the request to be taken up to town was, that she might use the last moment possible in mitigating her husband’s wrath against the Bishop.

“I have seen one of the proprietors and the editor,” said the lawyer, “and they are quite willing to apologise. I really do believe they are very sorry. The words had been allowed to pass without being weighed. Nothing beyond an innocent joke was intended.”

“I dare say. It seems innocent enough to them. If soot be thrown at a chimney-sweeper the joke is innocent, but very offensive when it is thrown at you.”

“They are quite aware that you have ground to complain. Of course you can go on if you like. The fact that they have offered to apologise will no doubt be a point in their favour. Nevertheless you would probably get a verdict.”

“We could bring the Bishop into court?”

“I think so. You have got his letter speaking of the ‘metropolitan press’?”

“Oh yes.”

“It is for you to think, Dr. Wortle, whether there would not be a feeling against you among clergymen.”

“Of course there will. Men in authority always have public sympathy with them in this country. No man more rejoices that it should be so than

I do. But not the less is it necessary that now and again a man shall make a stand in his own defence. He should never have sent me that paper.”

“Here,” said the lawyer, “is the apology they propose to insert if you approve of it. They will also pay my bill—which, however, will not, I am sorry to say, be very heavy.” Then the lawyer handed to the Doctor a slip of paper, on which the following words were written;—

“Our attention has been called to a notice which was made in our impression of the ——— ultimo on the conduct of a clergyman in the diocese of Broughton. A joke was perpetrated which, we are sorry to find, has given offence where certainly no offence was intended. We have since heard all the details of the case to which reference was made, and are able to say that the conduct of the clergyman in question has deserved neither censure nor ridicule. Actuated by the purest charity he has proved himself a sincere friend to persons in great trouble.”

“They’ll put in your name if you wish it,” said the lawyer, “or alter it in any way you like, so that they be not made to eat too much dirt.”

“I do not want them to alter it,” said the Doctor, sitting thoughtfully. “Their eating dirt will do no good to me. They are nothing to me. It is the Bishop.” Then, as though he were not thinking of what he did, he tore the paper and threw the fragments down on the floor. “They are nothing to me.”

“You will not accept their apology?” said the lawyer.

“Oh yes;—or rather, it is unnecessary. You may tell them that I have changed my mind, and that I will ask for no apology. As far as the paper is concerned, it will be better to let the thing die a natural death. I should never have troubled myself about the newspaper if the Bishop had not sent it to me. Indeed I had seen it before the Bishop sent it, and thought little or nothing of it. Animals will after their kind. The wasp stings, and the polecat stinks, and the lion tears its prey asunder. Such a paper as that of course follows its own bent. One would have thought that a bishop would have done the same.”

“I may tell them that the action is withdrawn.”

“Certainly; certainly. Tell them also that they will oblige me by putting in no apology. And as for your bill, I would prefer to pay it myself. I will exercise no anger against them. It is not they who in truth have injured me.” As he returned home he was not altogether happy, feeling that the

Bishop would escape him; but he made his wife happy by telling her the decision to which he had come.

IV

“IT IS IMPOSSIBLE”

The absence of Dr. and Mrs. Wortle was peculiarly unfortunate on that afternoon, as a visitor rode over from a distance to make a call—a visitor whom they both would have been very glad to welcome, but of whose coming Mrs. Wortle was not so delighted to hear when she was told by Mary that he had spent two or three hours at the Rectory. Mrs. Wortle began to think whether the visitor could have known of her intended absence and the Doctor's. That Mary had not known that the visitor was coming she was quite certain. Indeed she did not really suspect the visitor, who was one too ingenuous in his nature to preconcert so subtle and so wicked a scheme. The visitor, of course, had been Lord Carstairs.

“Was he here long?” asked Mrs. Wortle anxiously.

“Two or three hours, mamma. He rode over from Buttercup where he is staying, for a cricket match, and of course I got him some lunch.”

“I should hope so,” said the Doctor. “But I didn't think that Carstairs was so fond of the Momson lot as all that.”

Mrs. Wortle at once doubted the declared purpose of this visit to Buttercup. Buttercup was more than halfway between Carstairs and Bowick.

“And then we had a game of lawn-tennis. Talbot and Monk came through to make up sides.” So much Mary told at once, but she did not tell more till she was alone with her mother.

Young Carstairs had certainly not come over on the sly, as we may call it, but nevertheless there had been a project in his mind, and fortune had favoured him. He was now about nineteen, and had been treated for the last twelve months almost as though he had been a man. It had seemed to him that there was no possible reason why he should not fall in love as well as another. Nothing more sweet, nothing more lovely, nothing more lovable than Mary Wortle had he ever seen. He had almost made up his mind to speak on two or three occasions before he left Bowick; but either his courage or the occasion had failed him. Once, as he was walking home with her from church, he had said one word;—but it had amounted to nothing. She had escaped from him before she was bound to understand what he meant. He did not for a moment suppose that she had

understood anything. He was only too much afraid that she regarded him as a mere boy. But when he had been away from Bowick two months he resolved that he would not be regarded as a mere boy any longer. Therefore he took an opportunity of going to Buttercup, which he certainly would not have done for the sake of the Momsons or for the sake of the cricket.

He ate his lunch before he said a word, and then, with but poor grace, submitted to the lawn-tennis with Talbot and Monk. Even to his youthful mind it seemed that Talbot and Monk were brought in on purpose. They were both of them boys he had liked, but he hated them now. However, he played his game, and when that was over, managed to get rid of them, sending them back through the gate to the school-ground.

"I think I must say goodbye now," said Mary, "because there are ever so many things in the house which I have got to do."

"I am going almost immediately," said the young lord.

"Papa will be so sorry not to have seen you." This had been said once or twice before.

"I came over," he said, "on purpose to see you."

They were now standing on the middle of the lawn, and Mary had assumed a look which intended to signify that she expected him to go. He knew the place well enough to get his own horse, or to order the groom to get it for him. But instead of that, he stood his ground, and now declared his purpose.

"To see me, Lord Carstairs!"

"Yes, Miss Wortle. And if the Doctor had been here, or your mother, I should have told them."

"Have told them what?" she asked. She knew; she felt sure that she knew; and yet she could not refrain from the question.

"I have come here to ask if you can love me."

It was a most decided way of declaring his purpose, and one which made Mary feel that a great difficulty was at once thrown upon her. She really did not know whether she could love him or not. Why shouldn't she have been able to love him? Was it not natural enough that she should be able? But she knew that she ought not to love him, whether able or not. There were various reasons which were apparent enough to her though it might be very difficult to make him see them. He was little more than a boy, and had not yet finished his education. His father and mother would not expect him to fall in love, at any rate till he had taken his degree. And they certainly would not expect him to fall in love with the daughter of his tutor. She had an idea that, circumstanced as she was,

she was bound by loyalty both to her own father and to the lad's father not to be able to love him. She thought that she would find it easy enough to say that she did not love him; but that was not the question. As for being able to love him—she could not answer that at all.

“Lord Carstairs,” she said, severely, “you ought not to have come here when papa and mamma are away.”

“I didn't know they were away. I expected to find them here.”

“But they ain't. And you ought to go away.”

“Is that all you can say to me?”

“I think it is. You know you oughtn't to talk to me like that. Your own papa and mamma would be angry if they knew it.”

“Why should they be angry? Do you think that I shall not tell them?”

“I am sure they would disapprove it altogether,” said Mary. “In fact it is all nonsense, and you really must go away.”

Then she made a decided attempt to enter the house by the drawing-room window, which opened out on a gravel terrace.

But he stopped her, standing boldly by the window. “I think you ought to give me an answer, Mary,” he said.

“I have; and I cannot say anything more. You must let me go in.”

“If they say that it's all right at Carstairs, then will you love me?”

“They won't say that it's all right; and papa won't think that it's right. It's very wrong. You haven't been to Oxford yet, and you'll have to remain there for three years. I think it's very ill-natured of you to come and talk to me like this. Of course it means nothing. You are only a boy, but yet you ought to know better.”

“It does mean something. It means a great deal. As for being a boy, I am older than you are, and have quite as much right to know my own mind.”

Hereupon she took advantage of some little movement in his position, and, tripping by him hastily, made good her escape into the house. Young Carstairs, perceiving that his occasion for the present was over, went into the yard and got upon his horse. He was by no means contented with what he had done, but still he thought that he must have made her understand his purpose.

Mary, when she found herself safe within her own room, could not refrain from asking herself the question which her lover had asked her. “Could she love him?” She didn't see any reason why she couldn't love him. It would be very nice, she thought, to love him. He was sweet-tempered, handsome, bright, and thoroughly good-humoured; and then his position in the world was very high. Not for a moment did she tell

herself that she would love him. She did not understand all the differences in the world's ranks quite as well as did her father, but still she felt that because of his rank—because of his rank and his youth combined—she ought not to allow herself to love him. There was no reason why the son of a peer should not marry the daughter of a clergyman. The peer and the clergyman might be equally gentlemen. But young Carstairs had been there in trust. Lord Bracy had sent him there to be taught Latin and Greek, and had a right to expect that he should not be encouraged to fall in love with his tutor's daughter. It was not that she did not think herself good enough to be loved by any young lord, but that she was too good to bring trouble on the people who had trusted her father. Her father would despise her were he to hear that she had encouraged the lad, or as some might say, had entangled him. She did not know whether she should not have spoken to Lord Carstairs more decidedly. But she could, at any rate, comfort herself with the assurance that she had given him no encouragement. Of course she must tell it all to her mother, but in doing so could declare positively that she had given the young man no encouragement.

"It was very unfortunate that Lord Carstairs should have come just when I was away," said Mrs. Wortle to her daughter as soon as they were alone together.

"Yes, mamma; it was."

"And so odd. I haven't been away from home any day all the summer before."

"He expected to find you."

"Of course he did. Had he anything particular to say!"

"Yes, mamma."

"He had? What was it, my dear?"

"I was very much surprised, mamma, but I couldn't help it. He asked me—"

"Asked you what, Mary?"

"Oh, mamma!" Here she knelt down and hid her face in her mother's lap.

"Oh, my dear, this is very bad;—very bad indeed."

"It needn't be bad for you, mamma; or for papa."

"Is it bad for you, my child?"

"No, mamma; except of course that I am sorry that it should be so."

"What did you say to him?"

"Of course I told him that it was impossible. He is only a boy, and I told him so."

“You made him no promise.”

“No, mamma; no! A promise! Oh dear no! Of course it is impossible. I knew that. I never dreamed of anything of the kind; but he said it all there out on the lawn.”

“Had he come on purpose?”

“Yes;—so he said. I think he had. But he will go to Oxford, and will of course forget it.”

“He is such a nice boy,” said Mrs. Wortle, who, in all her anxiety, could not but like the lad the better for having fallen in love with her daughter.

“Yes, mamma; he is. I always liked him. But this is quite out of the question. What would his papa and mamma say?”

“It would be very dreadful to have a quarrel, wouldn’t it—and just at present, when there are so many things to trouble your papa.” Though Mrs. Wortle was quite honest and true in the feeling she had expressed as to the young lord’s visit, yet she was alive to the glory of having a young lord for her son-in-law.

“Of course it is out of the question, mamma. It has never occurred to me for a moment as otherwise. He has got to go to Oxford and take his degree before he thinks of such a thing. I shall be quite an old woman by that time, and he will have forgotten me. You may be sure, mamma, that whatever I did say to him was quite plain. I wish you could have been here and heard it all, and seen it all.”

“My darling,” said the mother, embracing her, “I could not believe you more thoroughly even though I saw it all, and heard it all.”

That night Mrs. Wortle felt herself constrained to tell the whole story to her husband. It was indeed impossible for her to keep any secret from her husband. When Mary, in her younger years, had torn her frock or cut her finger, that was always told to the Doctor. If a gardener was seen idling his time, or a housemaid flirting with the groom, that certainly would be told to the Doctor. What comfort does a woman get out of her husband unless she may be allowed to talk to him about everything? When it had been first proposed that Lord Carstairs should come into the house as a private pupil she had expressed her fear to the Doctor—because of Mary. The Doctor had ridiculed her fears, and this had been the result. Of course she must tell the Doctor. “Oh, dear,” she said, “what do you think has happened while we were up in London?”

“Carstairs was here.”

“Oh, yes; he was here. He came on purpose to make a regular declaration of love to Mary.”

“Nonsense.”

“But he did, Jeffrey.”

“How do you know he came on purpose.”

“He told her so.”

“I did not think the boy had so much spirit in him,” said the Doctor. This was a way of looking at it which Mrs. Wortle had not expected. Her husband seemed rather to approve than otherwise of what had been done. At any rate, he had expressed none of that loud horror which she had expected. “Nevertheless,” continued the Doctor, “he’s a stupid fool for his pains.”

“I don’t know that he is a fool,” said Mrs. Wortle.

“Yes; he is. He is not yet twenty, and he has all Oxford before him. How did Mary behave?”

“Like an angel,” said Mary’s mother.

“That’s of course. You and I are bound to believe so. But what did she do, and what did she say?”

“She told him that it was simply impossible.”

“So it is—I’m afraid. She at any rate was bound to give him no encouragement.”

“She gave him none. She feels quite strongly that it is altogether impossible. What would Lord Bracy say?”

“If Carstairs were but three or four years older,” said the Doctor, proudly, “Lord Bracy would have much to be thankful for in the attachment on the part of his son, if it were met by a return of affection on the part of my daughter. What better could he want?”

“But he is only a boy,” said Mrs. Wortle.

“No; that’s where it is. And Mary was quite right to tell him that it is impossible. It is impossible. And I trust, for her sake, that his words have not touched her young heart.”

“Oh, no,” said Mrs. Wortle.

“Had it been otherwise how could we have been angry with the child?”

Now this did seem to the mother to be very much in contradiction to that which the Doctor had himself said when she had whispered to him that Lord Carstairs’s coming might be dangerous. “I was afraid of it, as you know,” said she.

“His character has altered during the last twelve months.”

“I suppose when boys grow into men it is so with them.”

“Not so quickly,” said the Doctor. “A boy when he leaves Eton is not generally thinking of these things.”

“A boy at Eton is not thrown into such society,” said Mrs. Wortle.

“I suppose his being here and seeing Mary every day has done it. Poor Mary!”

“I don’t think she is poor at all,” said Mary’s mother.

“I am afraid she must not dream of her young lover.”

“Of course she will not dream of him. She has never entertained any idea of the kind. There never was a girl with less nonsense of that kind than Mary. When Lord Carstairs spoke to her today I do not suppose she had thought about him more than any other boy that has been here.”

“But she will think now.”

“No;—not in the least. She knows it is impossible.”

“Nevertheless she will think about it. And so will you.”

“I!”

“Yes—why not? Why should you be different from other mothers? Why should I not think about it as other fathers might do? It is impossible. I wish it were not. For Mary’s sake, I wish he were three or four years older. But he is as he is, and we know that it is impossible. Nevertheless, it is natural that she should think about him. I only hope that she will not think about him too much.” So saying he closed the conversation for that night.

Mary did not think very much about “it” in such a way as to create disappointment. She at once realised the impossibilities, so far as to perceive that the young lord was the top brick of the chimney as far as she was concerned. The top brick of the chimney may be very desirable, but one doesn’t cry for it, because it is unattainable. Therefore Mary did not in truth think of loving her young lover. He had been to her a very nice boy; and so he was still; that;—that, and nothing more. Then had come this little episode in her life which seemed to lend it a gentle tinge of romance. But had she inquired of her bosom she would have declared that she had not been in love. With her mother there was perhaps something of regret. But it was exactly the regret which may be felt in reference to the top brick. It would have been so sweet had it been possible; but then it was so evidently impossible.

With the Doctor the feeling was somewhat different. It was not quite so manifest to him that this special brick was altogether unattainable, nor even that it was quite at the top of the chimney. There was no reason why his daughter should not marry an earl’s son and heir. No doubt the lad had been confided to him in trust. No doubt it would have been his duty to have prevented anything of the kind, had anything of the kind seemed to him to be probable. Had there been any moment in which the duty had

seemed to him to be a duty, he would have done it, even though it had been necessary to caution the Earl to take his son away from Bowick. But there had been nothing of the kind. He had acted in the simplicity of his heart, and this had been the result. Of course it was impossible. He acknowledged to himself that it was so, because of the necessity of those Oxford studies and those long years which would be required for the taking of the degree. But to his thinking there was no other ground for saying that it was impossible. The thing must stand as it was. If this youth should show himself to be more constant than other youths—which was not probable—and if, at the end of three or four years, Mary should not have given her heart to any other lover—which was also improbable—why, then, it might come to pass that he should some day find himself father-in-law to the future Earl Bracy. Though Mary did not think of it, nor Mrs. Wortle, he thought of it—so as to give an additional interest to these disturbed days.

V

CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE PALACE

The possible glory of Mary's future career did not deter the Doctor from thinking of his troubles—and especially that trouble with the Bishop which was at present heavy on his hand. He had determined not to go on with his action, and had so resolved because he had felt, in his more sober moments, that in bringing the Bishop to disgrace, he would be as a bird soiling its own nest. It was that conviction, and not any idea as to the sufficiency or insufficiency, as to the truth or falsehood, of the editor's apology, which had actuated him. As he had said to his lawyer, he did not in the least care for the newspaper people. He could not condescend to be angry with them. The abominable joke as to the two verbs was altogether in their line. As coming from them, they were no more to him than the ribald words of boys which he might hear in the street. The offence to him had come from the Bishop—and he resolved to spare the Bishop because of the Church. But yet something must be done. He could not leave the man to triumph over him. If nothing further were done in the matter, the Bishop would have triumphed over him. As he could not bring himself to expose the Bishop, he must see whether he could not reach the man by means of his own power of words;—so he wrote as follows;—

“MY DEAR LORD—I have to own that this letter is written with feelings which have been very much lacerated by what your lordship has done. I must tell you, in the first place, that I have abandoned my intention of bringing an action against the proprietors of the scurrilous newspaper which your lordship sent me, because I am unwilling to bring to public notice the fact of a quarrel between a clergyman of the Church of England and his Bishop. I think that, whatever may be the difficulty between us, it should be arranged without bringing down upon either of us adverse criticism from the public press. I trust your lordship will appreciate my feeling in this matter. Nothing less strong could have

induced me to abandon what seems to be the most certain means by which I could obtain redress.

“I had seen the paper which your lordship sent to me before it came to me from the palace. The scurrilous, unsavoury, and vulgar words which it contained did not matter to me much. I have lived long enough to know that, let a man’s own garments be as clean as they may be, he cannot hope to walk through the world without rubbing against those who are dirty. It was only when those words came to me from your lordship—when I found that the expressions which I found in that paper were those to which your lordship had before alluded as being criticisms on my conduct in the metropolitan press—criticisms so grave as to make your lordship think it necessary to admonish me respecting them—it was only then, I say, that I considered them to be worthy of my notice. When your lordship, in admonishing me, found it necessary to refer me to the metropolitan press, and to caution me to look to my conduct because the metropolitan press had expressed its dissatisfaction, it was, I submit to you, natural for me to ask you where I should find that criticism which had so strongly affected your lordship’s judgment. There are perhaps half a score of newspapers published in London whose animadversions I, as a clergyman, might have reason to respect—even if I did not fear them. Was I not justified in thinking that at least some two or three of these had dealt with my conduct, when your lordship held the metropolitan press *in terrorem* over my head? I applied to your lordship for the names of these newspapers, and your lordship, when pressed for a reply, sent to me—that copy of *Everybody’s Business*.

“I ask your lordship to ask yourself whether, so far, I have overstated anything. Did not that paper come to me as the only sample you were able to send me of criticism made on my conduct in the metropolitan press? No doubt my conduct was handled there in very severe terms. No doubt the insinuations, if true—or if of such kind as to be worthy of credit with your lordship, whether true or false—were severe, plainspoken, and damning. The language was so abominable, so vulgar, so nauseous, that I will not trust

myself to repeat it. Your lordship, probably, when sending me one copy, kept another. Now, I must ask your lordship—and I must beg of your lordship for a reply—whether the periodical itself has such a character as to justify your lordship in founding a complaint against a clergyman on its unproved statements, and also whether the facts of the case, as they were known to you, were not such as to make your lordship well aware that the insinuations were false. Before these ribald words were printed, your lordship had heard all the facts of the case from my own lips. Your lordship had known me and my character for, I think, a dozen years. You know the character that I bear among others as a clergyman, a schoolmaster, and a gentleman. You have been aware how great is the friendship I have felt for the unfortunate gentleman whose career is in question, and for the lady who bears his name. When you read those abominable words did they induce your lordship to believe that I had been guilty of the inexpressible treachery of making love to the poor lady whose misfortunes I was endeavouring to relieve, and of doing so almost in my wife's presence?

“I defy you to have believed them. Men are various, and their minds work in different ways—but the same causes will produce the same effects. You have known too much of me to have thought it possible that I should have done as I was accused. I should hold a man to be no less than mad who could so have believed, knowing as much as your lordship knew. Then how am I to reconcile to my idea of your lordship's character the fact that you should have sent me that paper? What am I to think of the process going on in your lordship's mind when your lordship could have brought yourself to use a narrative which you must have known to be false, made in a newspaper which you knew to be scurrilous, as the ground for a solemn admonition to a clergyman of my age and standing? You wrote to me, as is evident from the tone and context of your lordship's letter, because you found that the metropolitan press had denounced my conduct. And this was the proof you sent to me that such had been the case!

“It occurred to me at once that, as the paper in question had vilely slandered me, I could redress myself by an action

of law, and that I could prove the magnitude of the evil done me by showing the grave importance which your lordship had attached to the words. In this way I could have forced an answer from your lordship to the questions which I now put to you. Your lordship would have been required to state on oath whether you believed those insinuations or not; and, if so, why you believed them. On grounds which I have already explained I have thought it improper to do so. Having abandoned that course, I am unable to force any answer from your lordship. But I appeal to your sense of honour and justice whether you should not answer my questions;—and I also ask from your lordship an ample apology, if, on consideration, you shall feel that you have done me an undeserved injury.—I have the honour to be, my lord, your lordship’s most obedient, very humble servant,

“JEFFREY WORTLE.”

He was rather proud of this letter as he read it to himself, and yet a little afraid of it, feeling that he had addressed his Bishop in very strong language. It might be that the Bishop should send him no answer at all, or some curt note from his chaplain in which it would be explained that the tone of the letter precluded the Bishop from answering it. What should he do then? It was not, he thought, improbable, that the curt note from the chaplain would be all that he might receive. He let the letter lie by him for four-and-twenty hours after he had composed it, and then determined that not to send it would be cowardly. He sent it, and then occupied himself for an hour or two in meditating the sort of letter he would write to the Bishop when that curt reply had come from the chaplain.

That further letter must be one which must make all amicable intercourse between him and the Bishop impossible. And it must be so written as to be fit to meet the public eye if he should be ever driven by the Bishop’s conduct to put it in print. A great wrong had been done him;—a great wrong! The Bishop had been induced by influences which should have had no power over him to use his episcopal rod and to smite him—him Dr. Wortle! He would certainly show the Bishop that he should have considered beforehand whom he was about to smite. “‘Amo’ in the cool of the evening!” And that given as an expression of opinion from the metropolitan press in general! He had spared the

Bishop as far as that action was concerned, but he would not spare him should he be driven to further measures by further injustice. In this way he lashed himself again into a rage. Whenever those odious words occurred to him he was almost mad with anger against the Bishop.

When the letter had been two days sent, so that he might have had a reply had a reply come to him by return of post, he put a copy of it into his pocket and rode off to call on Mr. Puddicombe. He had thought of showing it to Mr. Puddicombe before he sent it, but his mind had revolted from such submission to the judgment of another.

Mr. Puddicombe would no doubt have advised him not to send it, and then he would have been almost compelled to submit to such advice. But the letter was gone now. The Bishop had read it, and no doubt reread it two or three times. But he was anxious that some other clergyman should see it—that some other clergyman should tell him that, even if inexpedient, it had still been justified. Mr. Puddicombe had been made acquainted with the former circumstances of the affair; and now, with his mind full of his own injuries, he went again to Mr. Puddicombe.

“It is just the sort of letter that you would write, as a matter of course,” said Mr. Puddicombe.

“Then I hope that you think it is a good letter?”

“Good as being expressive, and good also as being true, I do think it.”

“But not good as being wise?”

“Had I been in your case I should have thought it unnecessary. But you are self-demonstrative, and cannot control your feelings.”

“I do not quite understand you.”

“What did it all matter? The Bishop did a foolish thing in talking of the metropolitan press. But he had only meant to put you on your guard.”

“I do not choose to be put on my guard in that way,” said the Doctor.

“No; exactly. And he should have known you better than to suppose you would bear it. Then you pressed him, and he found himself compelled to send you that stupid newspaper. Of course he had made a mistake. But don’t you think that the world goes easier when mistakes are forgiven?”

“I did forgive it, as far as foregoing the action.”

“That, I think, was a matter of course. If you had succeeded in putting the poor Bishop into a witness-box you would have had every sensible clergyman in England against you. You felt that yourself.”

“Not quite that,” said the Doctor.

“Something very near it; and therefore you withdrew. But you cannot get the sense of the injury out of your mind, and, therefore, you have

persecuted the Bishop with that letter.”

“Persecuted?”

“He will think so. And so should I, had it been addressed to me. As I said before, all your arguments are true—only I think you have made so much more of the matter than was necessary! He ought not to have sent you that newspaper, nor ought he to have talked about the metropolitan press. But he did you no harm; nor had he wished to do you harm;—and perhaps it might have been as well to pass it over.”

“Could you have done so?”

“I cannot imagine myself in such a position. I could not, at any rate, have written such a letter as that, even if I would; and should have been afraid to write it if I could. I value peace and quiet too greatly to quarrel with my bishop—unless, indeed, he should attempt to impose upon my conscience. There was nothing of that kind here. I think I should have seen that he had made a mistake, and have passed it over.”

The Doctor, as he rode home, was, on the whole, better pleased with his visit than he had expected to be. He had been told that his letter was argumentative and true, and that in itself had been much.

At the end of the week he received a reply from the Bishop, and found that it was not, at any rate, written by the chaplain.

“MY DEAR DR. WORTLE,” said the reply; “your letter has pained me exceedingly, because I find that I have caused you a degree of annoyance which I am certainly very sorry I have inflicted. When I wrote to you in my letter—which I certainly did not intend as an admonition—about the metropolitan press, I only meant to tell you, for your own information, that the newspapers were making reference to your affair with Mr. Peacocke. I doubt whether I knew anything of the nature of *Everybody’s Business*. I am not sure even whether I had ever actually read the words to which you object so strongly. At any rate, they had had no weight with me. If I had read them—which I probably did very cursorily—they did not rest on my mind at all when I wrote to you. My object was to caution you, not at all as to your own conduct, but as to others who were speaking evil of you.

“As to the action of which you spoke so strongly when I had the pleasure of seeing you here, I am very glad that you

abandoned it, for your own sake and for mine, and the sake of all us generally to whom the peace of the Church is dear.

“As to the nature of the language in which you have found yourself compelled to write to me, I must remind you that it is unusual as coming from a clergyman to a bishop. I am, however, ready to admit that the circumstances of the case were unusual, and I can understand that you should have felt the matter severely. Under these circumstances, I trust that the affair may now be allowed to rest without any breach of those kind feelings which have hitherto existed between us.—Yours very faithfully,

“C. BROUGHTON.”

“It is a beastly letter,” the Doctor said to himself, when he had read it, “a beastly letter;” and then he put it away without saying any more about it to himself or to anyone else. It had appeared to him to be a “beastly letter,” because it had exactly the effect which the Bishop had intended. It did not eat “humble pie;” it did not give him the full satisfaction of a complete apology; and yet it left no room for a further rejoinder. It had declared that no censure had been intended, and expressed sorrow that annoyance had been caused. But yet to the Doctor’s thinking it was an unmanly letter. “Not intended as an admonition!” Then why had the Bishop written in that severely affectionate and episcopal style? He had intended it as an admonition, and the excuse was false. So thought the Doctor, and comprised all his criticism in the one epithet given above. After that he put the letter away, and determined to think no more about it.

“Will you come in and see Mrs. Peacocke after lunch?” the Doctor said to his wife the next morning. They paid their visit together; and after that, when the Doctor called on the lady, he was generally accompanied by Mrs. Wortle. So much had been effected by *Everybody’s Business*, and its abominations.

VI

THE JOURNEY

We will now follow Mr. Peacocke for a while upon his journey. He began his close connection with Robert Lefroy by paying the man's bill at the inn before he left Broughton, and after that found himself called upon to defray every trifle of expense incurred as they went along. Lefroy was very anxious to stay for a week in town. It would, no doubt, have been two weeks or a month had his companion given way;—but on this matter a line of conduct had been fixed by Mr. Peacocke in conjunction with the Doctor from which he never departed. "If you will not be guided by me, I will go without you," Mr. Peacocke had said, "and leave you to follow your own devices on your own resources."

"And what can you do by yourself?"

"Most probably I shall be able to learn all that I want to learn. It may be that I shall fail to learn anything either with you or without you. I am willing to make the attempt with you if you will come along at once;—but I will not be delayed for a single day. I shall go whether you go or stay." Then Lefroy had yielded, and had agreed to be put on board a German steamer starting from Southampton to New York.

But an hour or two before the steamer started he made a revelation. "This is all gammon, Peacocke," he said, when on board.

"What is all gammon?"

"My taking you across to the States."

"Why is it gammon?"

"Because Ferdinand died more than a year since;—almost immediately after you took her off."

"Why did you not tell me that at Bowick?"

"Because you were so uncommon uncivil. Was it likely I should have told you that when you cut up so uncommon rough?"

"An honest man would have told me the very moment that he saw me."

"When one's poor brother has died, one does not blurt it like that all at once."

"Your poor brother!"

“Why not my poor brother as well as anybody else’s? And her husband too! How was I to let it out in that sort of way? At any rate he is dead as Julius Caesar. I saw him buried—right away at ’Frisco.”

“Did he go to San Francisco?”

“Yes—we both went there right away from St. Louis. When we got up to St. Louis we were on our way with them other fellows. Nobody meant to disturb you; but Ferdy got drunk, and would go and have a spree, as he called it.”

“A spree, indeed!”

“But we were off by train to Kansas at five o’clock the next morning. The devil wouldn’t keep him sober, and he died of D.T. the day after we got him to ’Frisco. So there’s the truth of it, and you needn’t go to New York at all. Hand me the dollars. I’ll be off to the States; and you can go back and marry the widow—or leave her alone, just as you please.”

They were down below when this story was told, sitting on their portmanteaus in the little cabin in which they were to sleep. The prospect of the journey certainly had no attraction for Mr. Peacocke. His companion was most distasteful to him; the ship was abominable; the expense was most severe. How glad would he avoid it all if it were possible! “You know it all as well as if you were there,” said Robert, “and were standing on his grave.” He did believe it. The man in all probability had at the last moment told the true story. Why not go back and be married again? The Doctor could be got to believe it.

But then if it were not true? It was only for a moment that he doubted. “I must go to ’Frisco all the same,” he said.

“Why so?”

“Because I must in truth stand upon his grave. I must have proof that he has been buried there.”

“Then you may go by yourself,” said Robert Lefroy. He had said this more than once or twice already, and had been made to change his tone. He could go or stay as he pleased, but no money would be paid to him until Peacocke had in his possession positive proof of Ferdinand Lefroy’s death. So the two made their unpleasant journey to New York together. There was complaining on the way, even as to the amount of liquor that should be allowed. Peacocke would pay for nothing that he did not himself order. Lefroy had some small funds of his own, and was frequently drunk while on board. There were many troubles; but still they did at last reach New York.

Then there was a great question whether they would go on direct from thence to San Francisco, or delay themselves three or four days by going

round by St. Louis. Lefroy was anxious to go to St. Louis—and on that account Peacocke was almost resolved to take tickets direct through for San Francisco. Why should Lefroy wish to go to St. Louis? But then, if the story were altogether false, some truth might be learned at St. Louis; and it was at last decided that thither they would go. As they went on from town to town, changing carriages first at one place and then at another, Lefroy's manner became worse and worse, and his language more and more threatening. Peacocke was asked whether he thought a man was to be brought all that distance without being paid for his time. "You will be paid when you have performed your part of the bargain," said Peacocke.

"I'll see some part of the money at St. Louis," said Lefroy, "or I'll know the reason why. A thousand dollars! What are a thousand dollars? Hand out the money." This was said as they were sitting together in a corner or separated portion of the smoking-room of a little hotel at which they were waiting for a steamer which was to take them down the Mississippi to St. Louis. Peacocke looked round and saw that they were alone.

"I shall hand out nothing till I see your brother's grave," said Peacocke.

"You won't?"

"Not a dollar! What is the good of your going on like that? You ought to know me well enough by this time."

"But you do not know me well enough. You must have taken me for a very tame sort o' critter."

"Perhaps I have."

"Maybe you'll change your mind."

"Perhaps I shall. It is quite possible that you should murder me. But you will not get any money by that."

"Murder you. You ain't worth murdering." Then they sat in silence, waiting another hour and a half till the steamboat came. The reader will understand that it must have been a bad time for Mr. Peacocke.

They were on the steamer together for about twenty-four hours, during which Lefroy hardly spoke a word. As far as his companion could understand he was out of funds, because he remained sober during the greater part of the day, taking only what amount of liquor was provided for him. Before, however, they reached St. Louis, which they did late at night, he had made acquaintance with certain fellow-travellers, and was drunk and noisy when they got out upon the quay. Mr. Peacocke bore his position as well as he could, and accompanied him up to the hotel. It was

arranged that they should remain two days at St. Louis, and then start for San Francisco by the railway which runs across the State of Kansas. Before he went to bed Lefroy insisted on going into the large hall in which, as is usual in American hotels, men sit and loaf and smoke and read the newspapers. Here, though it was twelve o'clock, there was still a crowd; and Lefroy, after he had seated himself and lit his cigar, got up from his seat and addressed all the men around him.

"Here's a fellow," said he, "has come out from England to find out what's become of Ferdinand Lefroy."

"I knew Ferdinand Lefroy," said one man, "and I know you too, Master Robert."

"What has become of Ferdinand Lefroy?" asked Mr. Peacocke.

"He's gone where all the good fellows go," said another.

"You mean that he is dead?" asked Peacocke.

"Of course he's dead," said Robert. "I've been telling him so ever since we left England; but he is such a d—— unbelieving infidel that he wouldn't credit the man's own brother. He won't learn much here about him."

"Ferdinand Lefroy," said the first man, "died on the way as he was going out West. I was over the road the day after."

"You know nothing about it," said Robert. "He died at 'Frisco two days after we'd got him there."

"He died at Ogden Junction, where you turn down to Utah City."

"You didn't see him dead," said the other.

"If I remember right," continued the first man, "they'd taken him away to bury him somewhere just there in the neighbourhood. I didn't care much about him, and I didn't ask any particular questions. He was a drunken beast—better dead than alive."

"You've been drunk as often as him, I guess," said Robert.

"I never gave nobody the trouble to bury me at any rate," said the other.

"Do you mean to say positively of your own knowledge," asked Peacocke, "that Ferdinand Lefroy died at that station?"

"Ask him; he's his brother, and he ought to know best."

"I tell you," said Robert, earnestly, "that we carried him on to 'Frisco, and there he died. If you think you know best, you can go to Utah City and wait there till you hear all about it. I guess they'll make you one of their elders if you wait long enough." Then they all went to bed.

It was now clear to Mr. Peacocke that the man as to whose life or death he was so anxious had really died. The combined evidence of these

men, which had come out without any preconcerted arrangement, was proof to his mind. But there was no evidence which he could take back with him to England and use there as proof in a court of law, or even before the Bishop and Dr. Wortle. On the next morning, before Robert Lefroy was up, he got hold of the man who had been so positive that death had overtaken the poor wretch at the railway station which is distant from San Francisco two days' journey. Had the man died there, and been buried there, nothing would be known of him in San Francisco. The journey to San Francisco would be entirely thrown away, and he would be as badly off as ever.

"I wouldn't like to say for certain," said the man when he was interrogated. "I only tell you what they told me. As I was passing along somebody said as Ferdy Lefroy had been taken dead out of the cars on to the platform. Now you know as much about it as I do."

He was thus assured that at any rate the journey to San Francisco had not been altogether a fiction. The man had gone "West," as had been said, and nothing more would be known of him at St. Louis. He must still go on upon his journey and make such inquiry as might be possible at the Ogden Junction.

On the day but one following they started again, taking their tickets as far as Leavenworth. They were told by the officials that they would find a train at Leavenworth waiting to take them on across country into the regular San Francisco line. But, as is not unusual with railway officials in that part of the world, they were deceived. At Leavenworth they were forced to remain for four-and-twenty hours, and there they put themselves up at a miserable hotel in which they were obliged to occupy the same room. It was a rough, uncouth place, in which, as it seemed to Mr. Peacocke, the men were more uncourteous to him, and the things around more unlike to what he had met elsewhere, than in any other town of the Union. Robert Lefroy, since the first night at St. Louis, had become sullen rather than disobedient. He had not refused to go on when the moment came for starting, but had left it in doubt till the last moment whether he did or did not intend to prosecute his journey. When the ticket was taken for him he pretended to be altogether indifferent about it, and would himself give no help whatever in any of the usual troubles of travelling. But as far as this little town of Leavenworth he had been carried, and Peacocke now began to think it probable that he might succeed in taking him to San Francisco.

On that night he endeavoured to induce him to go first to bed, but in this he failed. Lefroy insisted on remaining down at the bar, where he

had ordered for himself some liquor for which Mr. Peacocke, in spite of all his efforts to the contrary, would have to pay. If the man would get drunk and lie there, he could not help himself. On this he was determined, that whether with or without the man, he would go on by the first train;—and so he took himself to his bed.

He had been there perhaps half-an-hour when his companion came into the room—certainly not drunk. He seated himself on his bed, and then, pulling to him a large travelling-bag which he used, he unpacked it altogether, laying all the things which it contained out upon the bed.

“What are you doing that for?” said Mr. Peacocke; “we have to start from here tomorrow morning at five.”

“I’m not going to start tomorrow at five, nor yet tomorrow at all, nor yet next day.”

“You are not?”

“Not if I know it. I have had enough of this game. I am not going further West for anyone. Hand out the money. You have been told everything about my brother, true and honest, as far as I know it. Hand out the money.”

“Not a dollar,” said Peacocke. “All that I have heard as yet will be of no service to me. As far as I can see, you will earn it; but you will have to come on a little further yet.”

“Not a foot; I ain’t agoing out of this room tomorrow.”

“Then I must go without you;—that’s all.”

“You may go and be ———. But you’ll have to shell out the money first, old fellow.”

“Not a dollar.”

“You won’t?”

“Certainly I will not. How often have I told you so.”

“Then I shall take it.”

“That you will find very difficult. In the first place, if you were to cut my throat—”

“Which is just what I intend to do.”

“If you were to cut my throat—which in itself will be difficult—you would only find the trifle of gold which I have got for our journey as far as ’Frisco. That won’t do you much good. The rest is in circular notes, which to you would be of no service whatever.”

“My God,” said the man suddenly, “I am not going to be done in this way.” And with that he drew out a bowie-knife which he had concealed among the things which he had extracted from the bag. “You don’t know the sort of country you’re in now. They don’t think much here of the life

of such a skunk as you. If you mean to live till tomorrow morning you must come to terms."

The room was a narrow chamber in which two beds ran along the wall, each with its foot to the other, having a narrow space between them and the other wall. Peacocke occupied the one nearest to the door. Lefroy now got up from the bed in the further corner, and with the bowie-knife in his hand rushed against the door as though to prevent his companion's escape. Peacocke, who was in bed undressed, sat up at once; but as he did so he brought a revolver out from under his pillow. "So you have been and armed yourself, have you?" said Robert Lefroy.

"Yes," said Peacocke;—"if you come nearer me with that knife I shall shoot you. Put it down."

"Likely I shall put it down at your bidding."

With the pistol still held at the other man's head, Peacocke slowly extracted himself from his bed. "Now," said he, "if you don't come away from the door I shall fire one barrel just to let them know in the house what sort of affair is going on. Put the knife down. You know that I shall not hurt you then."

After hesitating for a moment or two, Lefroy did put the knife down. "I didn't mean anything, old fellow," said he. "I only wanted to frighten you."

"Well; you have frightened me. Now, what's to come next?"

"No, I ain't;—not frightened you a bit. A pistol's always better than a knife any day. Well now, I'll tell ye how it all is." Saying this, he seated himself on his own bed, and began a long narration. He would not go further West than Leavenworth. Whether he got his money or whether he lost it, he would not travel a foot further. There were reasons which would make it disagreeable for him to go into California. But he made a proposition. If Peacocke would only give him money enough to support himself for the necessary time, he would remain at Leavenworth till his companion should return there, or would make his way to Chicago, and stay there till Peacocke should come to him. Then he proceeded to explain how absolute evidence might be obtained at San Francisco as to his brother's death. "That fellow was lying altogether," he said, "about my brother dying at the Ogden station. He was very bad there, no doubt, and we thought it was going to be all up with him. He had the horrors there, worse than I ever saw before, and I hope never to see the like again. But we did get him on to San Francisco; and when he was able to walk into the city on his own legs, I thought that, might be, he would

rally and come round. However, in two days he died;—and we buried him in the big cemetery just out of the town.”

“Did you put a stone over him?”

“Yes; there is a stone as large as life. You’ll find the name on it—Ferdinand Lefroy of Kilbrack, Louisiana. Kilbrack was the name of our plantation, where we should be living now as gentlemen ought, with three hundred niggers of our own, but for these accursed Northern hypocrites.”

“How can I find the stone?”

“There’s a chap there who knows, I guess, where all them graves are to be found. But it’s on the right hand, a long way down, near the far wall at the bottom, just where the ground takes a little dip to the north. It ain’t so long ago but what the letters on the stone will be as fresh as if they were cut yesterday.”

“Does no one in San Francisco know of his death?”

“There’s a chap named Burke at Johnson’s, the cigar-shop in Montgomery Street. He was brother to one of our party, and he went out to the funeral. Maybe you’ll find him, or, anyway, some traces of him.”

The two men sat up discussing the matter nearly the whole of the night, and Peacocke, before he started, had brought himself to accede to Lefroy’s last proposition. He did give the man money enough to support him for two or three weeks and also to take him to Chicago, promising at the same time that he would hand to him the thousand dollars at Chicago should he find him there at the appointed time, and should he also have found Ferdinand Lefroy’s grave at San Francisco in the manner described.

VII

“NOBODY HAS CONDEMNED YOU HERE”

Mrs. Wortle, when she perceived that her husband no longer called on Mrs. Peacocke alone, became herself more assiduous in her visits, till at last she too entertained a great liking for the woman. When Mr. Peacocke had been gone for nearly a month she had fallen into a habit of going across every day after the performance of her own domestic morning duties, and remaining in the schoolhouse for an hour. On one morning she found that Mrs. Peacocke had just received a letter from New York, in which her husband had narrated his adventures so far. He had written from Southampton, but not after the revelation which had been made to him there as to the death of Ferdinand. He might have so done, but the information given to him had, at the spur of the moment, seemed to be so doubtful that he had refrained. Then he had been able to think of it all during the voyage, and from New York he had written at great length, detailing everything. Mrs. Peacocke did not actually read out loud the letter, which was full of such terms of affection as are common between man and wife, knowing that her title to be called a wife was not admitted by Mrs. Wortle; but she read much of it, and told all the circumstances as they were related.

“Then,” said Mrs. Wortle, “he certainly is—no more.” There came a certain accession of sadness to her voice, as she reflected that, after all, she was talking to this woman of the death of her undoubted husband.

“Yes; he is dead—at last.” Mrs. Wortle uttered a deep sigh. It was dreadful to her to think that a woman should speak in that way of the death of her husband. “I know all that is going on in your mind,” said Mrs. Peacocke, looking up into her face.

“Do you?”

“Every thought. You are telling yourself how terrible it is that a woman should speak of the death of her husband without a tear in her eye, without a sob—without one word of sorrow.”

“It is very sad.”

“Of course it is sad. Has it not all been sad? But what would you have me do? It is not because he was always bad to me—because he marred all my early life, making it so foul a blotch that I hardly dare to look

back upon it from the quietness and comparative purity of these latter days. It is not because he has so treated me as to make me feel that it has been a misfortune to me to be born, that I now receive these tidings with joy. It is because of him who has always been good to me as the other was bad, who has made me wonder at the noble instincts of a man, as the other has made me shudder at his possible meanness."

"It has been very hard upon you," said Mrs. Wortle.

"And hard upon him, who is dearer to me than my own soul. Think of his conduct to me! How he went away to ascertain the truth when he first heard tidings which made him believe that I was free to become his! How he must have loved me then, when, after all my troubles, he took me to himself at the first moment that was possible! Think, too, what he has done for me since—and I for him! How I have marred his life, while he has striven to repair mine! Do I not owe him everything?"

"Everything," said Mrs. Wortle—"except to do what is wrong."

"I did do what was wrong. Would not you have done so under such circumstances? Would not you have obeyed the man who had been to you so true a husband while he believed himself entitled to the name? Wrong! I doubt whether it was wrong. It is hard to know sometimes what is right and what is wrong. What he told me to do, that to me was right. Had he told me to go away and leave him, I should have gone—and have died. I suppose that would have been right." She paused as though she expected an answer. But the subject was so difficult that Mrs. Wortle was unable to make one. "I have sometimes wished that he had done so. But as I think of it when I am alone, I feel how impossible that would have been to him. He could not have sent me away. That which you call right would have been impossible to him whom I regard as the most perfect of human beings. As far as I know him, he is faultless;—and yet, according to your judgment, he has committed a sin so deep that he must stand disgraced before the eyes of all men."

"I have not said so."

"It comes to that. I know how good you are; how much I owe to you. I know that Dr. Wortle and yourself have been so kind to us, that were I not grateful beyond expression I should be the meanest human creature. Do not suppose that I am angry or vexed with you because you condemn me. It is necessary that you should do so. But how can I condemn myself;—or how can I condemn him?"

"If you are both free now, it may be made right."

"But how about repentance? Will it be all right though I shall not have repented? I will never repent. There are laws in accordance with which I

will admit that I have done wrong; but had I not broken those laws when he bade me, I should have hated myself through all my life afterwards.”

“It was very different.”

“If you could know, Mrs. Wortle, how difficult it would have been to go away and leave him! It was not till he came to me and told me that he was going down to Texas, to see how it had been with my husband, that I ever knew what it was to love a man. He had never said a word. He tried not to look it. But I knew that I had his heart and that he had mine. From that moment I have thought of him day and night. When I gave him my hand then as he parted from me, I gave it him as his own. It has been his to do what he liked with it ever since, let who might live or who might die. Ought I not to rejoice that he is dead?” Mrs. Wortle could not answer the question. She could only shudder. “It was not by any will of my own,” continued the eager woman, “that I married Ferdinand Lefroy. Everything in our country was then destroyed. All that we loved and all that we valued had been taken away from us. War had destroyed everything. When I was just springing out of childhood, we were ruined. We had to go, all of us; women as well as men, girls as well as boys;—and be something else than we had been. I was told to marry him.”

“That was wrong.”

“When everything is in ruin about you, what room is there for ordinary well-doing? It seemed then that he would have some remnant of property. Our fathers had known each other long. The wretched man whom drink afterwards made so vile might have been as good a gentleman as another, if things had gone well with him. He could not have been a hero like him whom I will always call my husband; but it is not given to every man to be a hero.”

“Was he bad always from the first?”

“He always drank—from his wedding-day; and then Robert was with him, who was worse than he. Between them they were very bad. My life was a burden to me. It was terrible. It was a comfort to me even to be deserted and to be left. Then came this Englishman in my way; and it seemed to me, on a sudden, that the very nature of mankind was altered. He did not lie when he spoke. He was never debased by drink. He had other care than for himself. For himself, I think, he never cared. Since he has been here, in the school, have you found any cause of fault in him?”

“No, indeed.”

“No, indeed! nor ever will;—unless it be a fault to love a woman as he loves me. See what he is doing now—where he has gone—what he has to suffer, coupled as he is with that wretch! And all for my sake!”

“For both your sakes.”

“He would have been none the worse had he chosen to part with me. He was in no trouble. I was not his wife; and he need only—bid me go. There would have been no sin with him then—no wrong. Had he followed out your right and your wrong, and told me that, as we could not be man and wife, we must just part, he would have been in no trouble;—would he?”

“I don’t know how it would have been then,” said Mrs. Wortle, who was by this time sobbing aloud in tears.

“No; nor I, nor I. I should have been dead;—but he? He is a sinner now, so that he may not preach in your churches, or teach in your schools; so that your dear husband has to be ruined almost because he has been kind to him. He then might have preached in any church—have taught in any school. What am I to think that God will think of it? Will God condemn him?”

“We must leave that to Him,” sobbed Mrs. Wortle.

“Yes; but in thinking of our souls we must reflect a little as to what we believe to be probable. He, you say, has sinned—is sinning still in calling me his wife. Am I not to believe that if he were called to his long account he would stand there pure and bright, in glorious garments—one fit for heaven, because he has loved others better than he has loved himself, because he has done to others as he might have wished that they should do to him? I do believe it! Believe! I know it. And if so, what am I to think of his sin, or of my own? Not to obey him, not to love him, not to do in everything as he counsels me—that, to me, would be sin. To the best of my conscience he is my husband and my master. I will not go into the rooms of such as you, Mrs. Wortle, good and kind as you are; but it is not because I do not think myself fit. It is because I will not injure you in the estimation of those who do not know what is fit and what is unfit. I am not ashamed of myself. I owe it to him to blush for nothing that he has caused me to do. I have but two judges—the Lord in heaven, and he, my husband, upon earth.”

“Nobody has condemned you here.”

“Yes;—they have condemned me. But I am not angry at that. You do not think, Mrs. Wortle, that I can be angry with you—so kind as you have been, so generous, so forgiving;—the more kind because you think that we are determined, headstrong sinners? Oh no! It is natural that you should think so—but I think differently. Circumstances have so placed me that they have made me unfit for your society. If I had no decent gown to wear, or shoes to my feet, I should be unfit also;—but not on

that account disgraced in my own estimation. I comfort myself by thinking that I cannot be altogether bad when a man such as he has loved me and does love me.”

The two women, when they parted on that morning, kissed each other, which they had not done before; and Mrs. Wortle had been made to doubt whether, after all, the sin had been so very sinful. She did endeavour to ask herself whether she would not have done the same in the same circumstances. The woman, she thought, must have been right to have married the man whom she loved, when she heard that that first horrid husband was dead. There could, at any rate, have been no sin in that. And then, what ought she to have done when the dead man—dead as he was supposed to have been—burst into her room? Mrs. Wortle—who found it indeed extremely difficult to imagine herself to be in such a position—did at last acknowledge that, in such circumstances, she certainly would have done whatever Dr. Wortle had told her. She could not bring it nearer to herself than that. She could not suggest to herself two men as her own husbands. She could not imagine that the Doctor had been either the bad husband, who had unexpectedly come to life—or the good husband, who would not, in truth, be her husband at all; but she did determine, in her own mind, that, however all that might have been, she would clearly have done whatever the Doctor told her. She would have sworn to obey him, even though, when swearing, she should not have really married him. It was terrible to think of—so terrible that she could not quite think of it; but in struggling to think of it her heart was softened towards this other woman. After that day she never spoke further of the woman’s sin.

Of course she told it all to the Doctor—not indeed explaining the working of her own mind as to that suggestion that he should have been, in his first condition, a very bad man, and have been reported dead, and have come again, in a second shape, as a good man. She kept that to herself. But she did endeavour to describe the effect upon herself of the description the woman had given her of her own conduct.

“I don’t quite know how she could have done otherwise,” said Mrs. Wortle.

“Nor I either; I have always said so.”

“It would have been so very hard to go away, when he told her not.”

“It would have been very hard to go away,” said the Doctor, “if he had told her to do so. Where was she to go? What was she to do? They had been brought together by circumstances, in such a manner that it was, so to say, impossible that they should part. It is not often that one comes

across events like these, so altogether out of the ordinary course that the common rules of life seem to be insufficient for guidance. To most of us it never happens; and it is better for us that it should not happen. But when it does, one is forced to go beyond the common rules. It is that feeling which has made me give them my protection. It has been a great misfortune; but, placed as I was, I could not help myself. I could not turn them out. It was clearly his duty to go, and almost as clearly mine to give her shelter till he should come back.”

“A great misfortune, Jeffrey?”

“I am afraid so. Look at this.” Then he handed to her a letter from a nobleman living at a great distance—at a distance so great that Mrs. Stantiloup would hardly have reached him there—expressing his intention to withdraw his two boys from the school at Christmas.

“He doesn’t give this as a reason.”

“No; we are not acquainted with each other personally, and he could hardly have alluded to my conduct in this matter. It was easier for him to give a mere notice such as this. But not the less do I understand it. The intention was that the elder Mowbray should remain for another year, and the younger for two years. Of course he is at liberty to change his mind; nor do I feel myself entitled to complain. A school such as mine must depend on the credit of the establishment. He has heard, no doubt, something of the story which has injured our credit, and it is natural that he should take the boys away.”

“Do you think that the school will be put an end to?”

“It looks very like it.”

“Altogether?”

“I shall not care to drag it on as a failure. I am too old now to begin again with a new attempt if this collapses. I have no offers to fill up the vacancies. The parents of those who remain, of course, will know how it is going with the school. I shall not be disposed to let it die of itself. My idea at present is to carry it on without saying anything till the Christmas holidays, and then to give notice to the parents that the establishment will be closed at Midsummer.”

“Will it make you very unhappy?”

“No doubt it will. A man does not like to fail. I am not sure but what I am less able to bear such failure than most men.”

“But you have sometimes thought of giving it up.”

“Have I? I have not known it. Why should I give it up? Why should any man give up a profession while he has health and strength to carry it on?”

“You have another.”

“Yes; but it is not the one to which my energies have been chiefly applied. The work of a parish such as this can be done by one person. I have always had a curate. It is, moreover, nonsense to say that a man does not care most for that by which he makes his money. I am to give up over £2,000 a-year, which I have had not a trouble but a delight in making! It is like coming to the end of one’s life.”

“Oh, Jeffrey!”

“It has to be looked in the face, you know.”

“I wish—I wish they had never come.”

“What is the good of wishing? They came, and according to my way of thinking I did my duty by them. Much as I am grieved by this, I protest that I would do the same again were it again to be done. Do you think that I would be deterred from what I thought to be right by the machinations of a she-dragon such as that?”

“Has she done it?”

“Well, I think so,” said the Doctor, after some little hesitation. “I think it has been, in truth, her doing. There has been a grand opportunity for slander, and she has used it with uncommon skill. It was a wonderful chance in her favour. She has been enabled without actual lies—lies which could be proved to be lies—to spread abroad reports which have been absolutely damning. And she has succeeded in getting hold of the very people through whom she could injure me. Of course all this correspondence with the Bishop has helped. The Bishop hasn’t kept it as a secret. Why should he?”

“The Bishop has had nothing to do with the school,” said Mrs. Wortle.

“No; but the things have been mixed up together. Do you think it would have no effect with such a woman as Lady Anne Clifford, to be told that the Bishop had censured my conduct severely? If it had not been for Mrs. Stantiloup, the Bishop would have heard nothing about it. It is her doing. And it pains me to feel that I have to give her credit for her skill and her energy.”

“Her wickedness, you mean.”

“What does it signify whether she has been wicked or not in this matter?”

“Oh, Jeffrey!”

“Her wickedness is a matter of course. We all knew that beforehand. If a person has to be wicked, it is a great thing for him to be successful in his wickedness. He would have to pay the final penalty even if he failed.

To be wicked and to do nothing is to be mean all round. I am afraid that Mrs. Stantiloup will have succeeded in her wickedness.”

VII

LORD BRACY'S LETTER

The school and the parish went on through August and September, and up to the middle of October, very quietly. The quarrel between the Bishop and the Doctor had altogether subsided. People in the diocese had ceased to talk continually of Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke. There was still alive a certain interest as to what might be the ultimate fate of the poor lady; but other matters had come up, and she no longer formed the one topic of conversation at all meetings. The twenty boys at the school felt that, as their numbers had been diminished, so also had their reputation. They were less loud, and, as other boys would have said of them, less “cocky” than of yore. But they ate and drank and played, and, let us hope, learnt their lessons as usual. Mrs. Peacocke had from time to time received letters from her husband, the last up to the time of which we speak having been written at the Ogden Junction, at which Mr. Peacocke had stopped for four-and-twenty hours with the object of making inquiry as to the statement made to him at St. Louis. Here he learned enough to convince him that Robert Lefroy had told him the truth in regard to what had there occurred. The people about the station still remembered the condition of the man who had been taken out of the car when suffering from delirium tremens; and remembered also that the man had not died there, but had been carried on by the next train to San Francisco. One of the porters also declared that he had heard a few days afterwards that the sufferer had died almost immediately on his arrival at San Francisco. Information as far as this Mr. Peacocke had sent home to his wife, and had added his firm belief that he should find the man's grave in the cemetery, and be able to bring home with him testimony to which no authority in England, whether social, episcopal, or judicial, would refuse to give credit.

“Of course he will be married again,” said Mrs. Wortle to her husband.

“They shall be married here, and I will perform the ceremony. I don't think the Bishop himself would object to that; and I shouldn't care a straw if he did.”

“Will he go on with the school?” whispered Mrs. Wortle.

“Will the school go on? If the school goes on, he will go on, I suppose. About that you had better ask Mrs. Stantiloup.”

“I will ask nobody but you,” said the wife, putting up her face to kiss him. As this was going on, everything was said to comfort Mrs. Peacocke, and to give her hopes of new life. Mrs. Wortle told her how the Doctor had promised that he himself would marry them as soon as the forms of the Church and the legal requisitions would allow. Mrs. Peacocke accepted all that was said to her quietly and thankfully, but did not again allow herself to be roused to such excitement as she had shown on the one occasion recorded.

It was at this time that the Doctor received a letter which greatly affected his mode of thought at the time. He had certainly become hipped and low-spirited, if not despondent, and clearly showed to his wife, even though he was silent, that his mind was still intent on the injury which that wretched woman had done him by her virulence. But the letter of which we speak for a time removed this feeling, and gave him, as it were, a new life. The letter, which was from Lord Bracy, was as follows;—

“MY DEAR DOCTOR WORTLE.—Carstairs left us for Oxford yesterday, and before he went, startled his mother and me considerably by a piece of information. He tells us that he is over head and ears in love with your daughter. The communication was indeed made three days ago, but I told him that I should take a day or two to think of it before I wrote to you. He was very anxious, when he told me, to go off at once to Bowick, and to see you and your wife, and of course the young lady;—but this I stopped by the exercise of somewhat peremptory parental authority. Then he informed me that he had been to Bowick, and had found his ladylove at home, you and Mrs. Wortle having by chance been absent at the time. It seems that he declared himself to the young lady, who, in the exercise of a wise discretion, ran away from him and left him planted on the terrace. That is his account of what passed, and I do not in the least doubt its absolute truth. It is at any rate quite clear, from his own showing, that the young lady gave him no encouragement.

“Such having been the case, I do not think that I should have found it necessary to write to you at all had not Carstairs persevered with me till I promised to do so. He

was willing, he said, not to go to Bowick on condition that I would write to you on the subject. The meaning of this is, that had he not been very much in earnest, I should have considered it best to let the matter pass on as such matters do, and be forgotten. But he is very much in earnest. However foolish it is—or perhaps I had better say unusual—that a lad should be in love before he is twenty, it is, I suppose, possible. At any rate it seems to be the case with him, and he has convinced his mother that it would be cruel to ignore the fact.

“I may at once say that, as far as you and your girl are concerned, I should be quite satisfied that he should choose for himself such a marriage. I value rank, at any rate, as much as it is worth; but that he will have of his own, and does not need to strengthen it by intermarriage with another house of peculiarly old lineage. As far as that is concerned, I should be contented. As for money, I should not wish him to think of it in marrying. If it comes, *tant mieux*. If not, he will have enough of his own. I write to you, therefore, exactly as I should do if you had happened to be a brother peer instead of a clergyman.

“But I think that long engagements are very dangerous; and you probably will agree with me that they are likely to be more prejudicial to the girl than to the man. It may be that, as difficulties arise in the course of years, he can forget the affair, and that she cannot. He has many things of which to think; whereas she, perhaps, has only that one. She may have made that thing so vital to her that it cannot be got under and conquered; whereas, without any fault or heartlessness on his part, occupation has conquered it for him. In this case I fear that the engagement, if made, could not but be long. I should be sorry that he should not take his degree. And I do not think it wise to send a lad up to the University hampered with the serious feeling that he has already betrothed himself.

“I tell you all just as it is, and I leave it to your wisdom to suggest what had better be done. He wished me to promise that I would undertake to induce you to tell Miss Wortle of his conversation with me. He said that he had a right to demand so much as that, and that, though he would not for

the present go to Bowick, he should write to you. The young gentleman seems to have a will of his own—which I cannot say that I regret. What you will do as to the young lady—whether you will or will not tell her what I have written—I must leave to yourself. If you do, I am to send word to her from Lady Bracy to say that she shall be delighted to see her here. She had better, however, come when that inflammatory young gentleman shall be at Oxford. Yours very faithfully,

“BRACY.”

This letter certainly did a great deal to invigorate the Doctor, and to console him in his troubles. Even though the debated marriage might prove to be impossible, as it had been declared by the voices of all the Wortles one after another, still there was something in the tone in which it was discussed by the young man’s father which was in itself a relief. There was, at any rate, no contempt in the letter. “I may at once say that, as far as you and your girl are concerned, I shall be very well pleased.” That, at any rate, was satisfactory. And the more he looked at it the less he thought that it need be altogether impossible. If Lord Bracy liked it, and Lady Bracy liked it—and young Carstairs, as to whose liking there seemed to be no reason for any doubt—he did not see why it should be impossible. As to Mary—he could not conceive that she should make objection if all the others were agreed. How could she possibly fail to love the young man if encouraged to do so? Suitors who are good-looking, rich, of high rank, sweet-tempered, and at the same time thoroughly devoted, are not wont to be discarded. All the difficulty lay in the lad’s youth. After all, how many noblemen have done well in the world without taking a degree? Degrees, too, have been taken by married men. And, again, young men have been persistent before now, even to the extent of waiting three years. Long engagements are bad—no doubt. Everybody has always said so. But a long engagement may be better than none at all.

He at last made up his mind that he would speak to Mary; but he determined that he would consult his wife first. Consulting Mrs. Wortle, on his part, generally amounted to no more than instructing her. He found it sometimes necessary to talk her over, as he had done in that matter of visiting Mrs. Peacocke; but when he set himself to work he rarely failed. She had nowhere else to go for a certain foundation and

support. Therefore he hardly doubted much when he began his operation about this suggested engagement.

"I have got that letter this morning from Lord Bracy," he said, handing her the document.

"Oh dear! Has he heard about Carstairs?"

"You had better read it."

"He has told it all," she exclaimed, when she had finished the first sentence.

"He has told it all, certainly. But you had better read the letter through."

Then she seated herself and read it, almost trembling, however, as she went on with it. "Oh dear;—that is very nice what he says about you and Mary."

"It is all very nice as far as that goes. There is no reason why it should not be nice."

"It might have made him so angry!"

"Then he would have been very unreasonable."

"He acknowledges that Mary did not encourage him."

"Of course she did not encourage him. He would have been very unlike a gentleman had he thought so. But in truth, my dear, it is a very good letter. Of course there are difficulties."

"Oh;—it is impossible!"

"I do not see that at all. It must rest very much with him, no doubt;—with Carstairs; and I do not like to think that our girl's happiness should depend on any young man's constancy. But such dangers have to be encountered. You and I were engaged for three years before we were married, and we did not find it so very bad."

"It was very good. Oh, I was so happy at the time."

"Happier than you've been since?"

"Well; I don't know. It was very nice to know that you were my lover."

"Why shouldn't Mary think it very nice to have a lover?"

"But I knew that you would be true."

"Why shouldn't Carstairs be true?"

"Remember he is so young. You were in orders."

"I don't know that I was at all more likely to be true on that account. A clergyman can jilt a girl just as well as another. It depends on the nature of the man."

"And you were so good."

“I never came across a better youth than Carstairs. You see what his father says about his having a will of his own. When a young man shows a purpose of that kind he generally sticks to it.”

The upshot of it all was, that Mary was to be told, and that her father was to tell her.

“Yes, papa, he did come,” she said. “I told mamma all about me.”

“And she told me, of course. You did what was quite right, and I should not have thought it necessary to speak to you had not Lord Bracy written to me.”

“Lord Bracy has written!” said Mary. It seemed to her, as it had done to her mother, that Lord Bracy must have written angrily; but though she thought so, she plucked up her spirit gallantly, telling herself that though Lord Bracy might be angry with his own son, he could have no cause to be displeased with her.

“Yes; I have a letter, which you shall read. The young man seems to have been very much in earnest.”

“I don’t know,” said Mary, with some little exultation at her heart.

“It seems but the other day that he was a boy, and now he has become suddenly a man.” To this Mary said nothing; but she also had come to the conclusion that, in this respect, Lord Carstairs had lately changed—very much for the better. “Do you like him, Mary?”

“Like him, papa?”

“Well, my darling; how am I to put it? He is so much in earnest that he has got his father to write to me. He was coming over himself again before he went to Oxford; but he told his father what he was going to do, and the Earl stopped him. There’s the letter, and you may read it.”

Mary read the letter, taking herself apart to a corner of the room, and seemed to her father to take a long time in reading it. But there was very much on which she was called upon to make up her mind during those few minutes. Up to the present time—up to the moment in which her father had now summoned her into his study, she had resolved that it was “impossible.” She had become so clear on the subject that she would not ask herself the question whether she could love the young man. Would it not be wrong to love the young man? Would it not be a longing for the top brick of the chimney, which she ought to know was out of her reach? So she had decided it, and had therefore already taught herself to regard the declaration made to her as the ebullition of a young man’s folly. But not the less had she known how great had been the thing suggested to her—how excellent was this top brick of the chimney; and as to the young man himself, she could not but feel that, had matters been

different, she might have loved him. Now there had come a sudden change; but she did not at all know how far she might go to meet the change, nor what the change altogether meant. She had been made sure by her father's question that he had taught himself to hope. He would not have asked her whether she liked him—would not, at any rate, have asked that question in that voice—had he not been prepared to be good to her had she answered in the affirmative. But then this matter did not depend upon her father's wishes—or even on her father's judgment. It was necessary that, before she said another word, she should find out what Lord Bracy said about it. There she had Lord Bracy's letter in her hand, but her mind was so disturbed that she hardly knew how to read it aright at the spur of the moment.

"You understand what he says, Mary?"

"I think so, papa."

"It is a very kind letter."

"Very kind indeed. I should have thought that he would not have liked it at all."

"He makes no objection of that kind. To tell the truth, Mary, I should have thought it unreasonable had he done so. A gentleman can do no better than marry a lady. And though it is much to be a nobleman, it is more to be a gentleman."

"Some people think so much of it. And then his having been here as a pupil! I was very sorry when he spoke to me."

"All that is past and gone. The danger is that such an engagement would be long."

"Very long."

"You would be afraid of that, Mary?" Mary felt that this was hard upon her, and unfair. Were she to say that the danger of a long engagement did not seem to her to be very terrible, she would at once be giving up everything. She would have declared then that she did love the young man; or, at any rate, that she intended to do so. She would have succumbed at the first hint that such succumbing was possible to her. And yet she had not known that she was very much afraid of a long engagement. She would, she thought, have been much more afraid had a speedy marriage been proposed to her. Upon the whole, she did not know whether it would not be nice to go on knowing that the young man loved her, and to rest secure on her faith in him. She was sure of this—that the reading of Lord Bracy's letter had in some way made her happy, though she was unwilling at once to express her happiness to her father. She was quite sure that she could make no immediate reply to that question,

whether she was afraid of a long engagement. "I must answer Lord Bracy's letter, you know," said the Doctor.

"Yes, papa."

"And what shall I say to him?"

"I don't know, papa."

"And yet you must tell me what to say, my darling."

"Must I, papa?"

"Certainly! Who else can tell me? But I will not answer it today. I will put it off till Monday." It was Saturday morning on which the letter was being discussed—a day of which a considerable portion was generally appropriated to the preparation of a sermon. "In the meantime you had better talk to mamma; and on Monday we will settle what is to be said to Lord Bracy."

IX

AT CHICAGO

Mr. Peacocke went on alone to San Francisco from the Ogden Junction, and there obtained full information on the matter which had brought him upon this long and disagreeable journey. He had no difficulty in obtaining the evidence which he required. He had not been twenty-four hours in the place before he was, in truth, standing on the stone which had been placed over the body of Ferdinand Lefroy, as he had declared to Robert Lefroy that he would stand before he would be satisfied. On the stone was cut simply the names, Ferdinand Lefroy of Kilbrack, Louisiana; and to these were added the dates of the days on which the man had been born and on which he died. Of this stone he had a photograph made, of which he took copies with him; and he obtained also from the minister who had buried the body and from the custodian who had charge of the cemetery certificates of the interment. Armed with these he could no longer doubt himself, or suppose that others would doubt, that Ferdinand Lefroy was dead.

Having thus perfected his object, and feeling but little interest in a town to which he had been brought by such painful circumstances, he turned round, and on the second day after his arrival, again started for Chicago. Had it been possible, he would fain have avoided any further meeting with Robert Lefroy. Short as had been his stay at San Francisco he had learnt that Robert, after his brother's death, had been concerned in buying mining shares and paying for them with forged notes. It was not supposed that he himself had been engaged in the forgery, but that he had come into the city with men who had been employed for years on this operation, and had bought shares and endeavoured to sell them on the following day. He had, however, managed to leave the place before the police had got hold of him, and had escaped, so that no one had been able to say at what station he had got upon the railway. Nor did anyone in San Francisco know where Robert Lefroy was now to be found. His companions had been taken, tried, and convicted, and were now in the State prison—where also would Robert Lefroy soon be if any of the officers of the State could get hold of him. Luckily Mr. Peacocke had said little or nothing of the man in making his own inquiries. Much as he

had hated and dreaded the man; much as he had suffered from his companionship—good reason as he had to dislike the whole family—he felt himself bound by their late companionship not to betray him. The man had assisted Mr. Peacocke simply for money; but still he had assisted him. Mr. Peacocke therefore held his peace and said nothing. But he would have been thankful to have been able to send the money that was now due to him without having again to see him. That, however, was impossible.

On reaching Chicago he went to an hotel far removed from that which Lefroy had designated. Lefroy had explained to him something of the geography of the town, and had explained that for himself he preferred a “modest, quiet hotel.” The modest, quiet hotel was called Mrs. Jones’s boardinghouse, and was in one of the suburbs far from the main street. “You needn’t say as you’re coming to me,” Lefroy had said to him; “nor need you let on as you know anything of Mrs. Jones at all. People are so curious; and it may be that a gentleman sometimes likes to lie *perdu*.” Mr. Peacocke, although he had but small sympathy for the taste of a gentleman who likes to lie *perdu*, nevertheless did as he was bid, and found his way to Mrs. Jones’s boardinghouse without telling anyone whither he was going.

Before he started he prepared himself with a thousand dollars in banknotes, feeling that this wretched man had earned them in accordance with their compact. His only desire now was to hand over the money as quickly as possible, and to hurry away out of Chicago. He felt as though he himself were almost guilty of some crime in having to deal with this man, in having to give him money secretly, and in carrying out to the end an arrangement of which no one else was to know the details. How would it be with him if the police of Chicago should come upon him as a friend, and probably an accomplice, of one who was “wanted” on account of forgery at San Francisco? But he had no help for himself, and at Mrs. Jones’s he found his wife’s brother-in-law seated in the bar of the public-house—that everlasting resort for American loungers—with a cigar as usual stuck in his mouth, loafing away his time as only American frequenters of such establishments know how to do. In England such a man would probably be found in such a place with a glass of some alcoholic mixture beside him, but such is never the case with an American. If he wants a drink he goes to the bar and takes it standing—will perhaps take two or three, one after another; but when he has settled himself down to loaf, he satisfies himself with chewing a cigar, and covering a circle around him with the results. With this

amusement he will remain contented hour after hour;—nay, throughout the entire day if no harder work be demanded of him. So was Robert Lefroy found now. When Peacocke entered the hall or room the man did not rise from his chair, but accosted him as though they had parted only an hour since. “So, old fellow, you’ve got back all alive.”

“I have reached this place at any rate.”

“Well; that’s getting back, ain’t it?”

“I have come back from San Francisco.”

“H’sh!” exclaimed Lefroy, looking round the room, in which, however, there was no one but themselves. “You needn’t tell everybody where you’ve been.”

“I have nothing to conceal.”

“That is more than anybody knows of himself. It’s a good maxim to keep your own affairs quiet till they’re wanted. In this country everybody is spry enough to learn all about everything. I never see any good in letting them know without a reason. Well;—what did you do when you got there?”

“It was all as you told me.”

“Didn’t I say so? What was the good of bringing me all this way, when, if you’d only believed me, you might have saved me the trouble. Ain’t I to be paid for that?”

“You are to be paid. I have come here to pay you.”

“That’s what you owe for the knowledge. But for coming? Ain’t I to be paid extra for the journey?”

“You are to have a thousand dollars.”

“H’sh!—you speak of money as though everyone has a business to know that you have got your pockets full. What’s a thousand dollars, seeing all that I have done for you!”

“It’s all that you’re going to get. It’s all, indeed, that I have got to give you.”

“Gammon.”

“It’s all, at any rate, that you’re going to get. Will you have it now?”

“You found the tomb, did you?”

“Yes; I found the tomb. Here is a photograph of it. You can keep a copy if you like it.”

“What do I want of a copy,” said the man, taking the photograph in his hand. “He was always more trouble than he was worth—was Ferdy. It’s a pity she didn’t marry me. I’d ’ve made a woman of her.” Peacocke shuddered as he heard this, but he said nothing. “You may as well give us the picter;—it’ll do to hang up somewhere if ever I have a room of my

own. How plain it is. Ferdinand Lefroy—of Kilbrack! Kilbrack indeed! It's little either of us was the better for Kilbrack. Some of them psalm-singing rogues from New England has it now;—or perhaps a right-down nigger. I shouldn't wonder. One of our own lot, maybe! Oh; that's the money, is it?—A thousand dollars; all that I'm to have for coming to England and telling you, and bringing you back, and showing you where you could get this pretty picter made." Then he took the money, a thick roll of notes, and crammed them into his pocket.

"You'd better count them."

"It ain't worth the while with such a trifle as that."

"Let me count them then."

"You'll never have that plunder in your fists again, my fine fellow."

"I do not want it."

"And now about my expenses out to England, on purpose to tell you all this. You can go and make her your wife now—or can leave her, just as you please. You couldn't have done neither if I hadn't gone out to you."

"You have got what was promised."

"But my expenses—going out?"

"I have promised you nothing for your expenses going out—and will pay you nothing."

"You won't?"

"Not a dollar more."

"You won't?"

"Certainly not. I do not suppose that you expect it for a moment, although you are so persistent in asking for it."

"And you think you've got the better of me, do you? You think you've carried me along with you, just to do your bidding and take whatever you please to give me? That's your idea of me?"

"There was a clear bargain between us. I have not got the better of you at all."

"I rather think not, Peacocke. I rather think not. You'll have to get up earlier before you get the better of Robert Lefroy. You don't expect to get this money back again—do you?"

"Certainly not—any more than I should expect a pound of meat out of a dog's jaw." Mr. Peacocke, as he said this, was waxing angry.

"I don't suppose you do;—but you expected that I was to earn it by doing your bidding;—didn't you?"

"And you have."

“Yes, I have; but how? You never heard of my cousin, did you;—Ferdinand Lefroy of Kilbrack, Louisiana?”

“Heard of whom?”

“My cousin; Ferdinand Lefroy. He was very well known in his own State, and in California too, till he died. He was a good fellow, but given to drink. We used to tell him that if he would marry it would be better for him;—but he never would;—he never did.” Robert Lefroy as he said this put his left hand into his trousers-pocket over the notes which he had placed there, and drew a small revolver out of his pocket with the other hand. “I am better prepared now,” he said, “than when you had your six-shooter under your pillow at Leavenworth.”

“I do not believe a word of it. It’s a lie,” said Peacocke.

“Very well. You’re a chap that’s fond of travelling, and have got plenty of money. You’d better go down to Louisiana and make your way straight from New Orleans to Kilbrack. It ain’t above forty miles to the southwest, and there’s a rail goes within fifteen miles of it. You’ll learn there all about Ferdinand Lefroy as was our cousin—him as never got married up to the day he died of drink and was buried at San Francisco. They’ll be very glad, I shouldn’t wonder, to see that pretty little picter of yours, because they was always uncommon fond of cousin Ferdy at Kilbrack. And I’ll tell you what; you’ll be sure to come across my brother Ferdy in them parts, and can tell him how you’ve seen me. You can give him all the latest news, too, about his own wife. He’ll be glad to hear about her, poor woman.” Mr. Peacocke listened to this without saying a word since that last exclamation of his. It might be true. Why should it not be true? If in truth there had been these two cousins of the same name, what could be more likely than that his money should be lured out of him by such a fraud as this? But yet—yet, as he came to think of it all, it could not be true. The chance of carrying such a scheme to a successful issue would have been too small to induce the man to act upon it from the day of his first appearance at Bowick. Nor was it probable that there should have been another Ferdinand Lefroy unknown to his wife; and the existence of such a one, if known to his wife, would certainly have been made known to him.

“It’s a lie,” said he, “from beginning to end.”

“Very well; very well. I’ll take care to make the truth known by letter to Dr. Wortle and the Bishop and all them pious swells over there. To think that such a chap as you, a minister of the gospel, living with another man’s wife and looking as though butter wouldn’t melt in your mouth! I tell you what; I’ve got a little money in my pocket now, and I

don't mind going over to England again and explaining the whole truth to the Bishop myself. I could make him understand how that photograph ain't worth nothing, and how I explained to you myself as the lady's righteous husband is all alive, keeping house on his own property down in Louisiana. Do you think we Lefroys hadn't any place beside Kilbrack among us?"

"Certainly you are a liar," said Peacocke.

"Very well. Prove it."

"Did you not tell me that your brother was buried at San Francisco?"

"Oh, as for that, that don't matter. It don't count for much whether I told a crammer or not. That picter counts for nothing. It ain't my word you were going on as evidence. You is able to prove that Ferdy Lefroy was buried at 'Frisco. True enough. I buried him. I can prove that. And I would never have treated you this way, and not have said a word as to how the dead man was only a cousin, if you'd treated me civil over there in England. But you didn't."

"I am going to treat you worse now," said Peacocke, looking him in the face.

"What are you going to do now? It's I that have the revolver this time." As he said this he turned the weapon round in his hand.

"I don't want to shoot you—nor yet to frighten you, as I did in the bedroom at Leavenworth. Not but what I have a pistol too." And he slowly drew his out of his pocket. At this moment two men sauntered in and took their places in the further corner of the room. "I don't think there is to be any shooting between us."

"There may," said Lefroy.

"The police would have you."

"So they would—for a time. What does that matter to me? Isn't a fellow to protect himself when a fellow like you comes to him armed?"

"But they would soon know that you are the swindler who escaped from San Francisco eighteen months ago. Do you think it wouldn't be found out that it was you who paid for the shares in forged notes?"

"I never did. That's one of your lies."

"Very well. Now you know what I know; and you had better tell me over again who it is that lies buried under the stone that's been photographed there."

"What are you men doing with them pistols?" said one of the strangers, walking across the room, and standing over the backs of their chairs.

"We are alooking at 'em," said Lefroy.

“If you’re agoing to do anything of that kind you’d better go and do it elsewhere,” said the stranger.

“Just so,” said Lefroy. “That’s what I was thinking myself.”

“But we are not going to do anything,” said Mr. Peacocke. “I have not the slightest idea of shooting the gentleman; and he has just as little of shooting me.”

“Then what do you sit with ’em out in your hands in that fashion for?” said the stranger. “It’s a decent widow woman as keeps this house, and I won’t see her set upon. Put ’em up.” Whereupon Lefroy did return his pistol to his pocket—upon which Mr. Peacocke did the same. Then the stranger slowly walked back to his seat at the other side of the room.

“So they told you that lie; did they—at ’Frisco?” asked Lefroy.

“That was what I heard over there when I was inquiring about your brother’s death.”

“You’d believe anything if you’d believe that.”

“I’d believe anything if I’d believe in your cousin.” Upon this Lefroy laughed, but made no further allusion to the romance which he had craftily invented on the spur of the moment. After that the two men sat without a word between them for a quarter of an hour, when the Englishman got up to take his leave. “Our business is over now,” he said, “and I will bid you goodbye.”

“I’ll tell you what I’m athinking,” said Lefroy. Mr. Peacocke stood with his hand ready for a final adieu, but he said nothing. “I’ve half a mind to go back with you to England. There ain’t nothing to keep me here.”

“What could you do there?”

“I’d be evidence for you, as to Ferdy’s death, you know.”

“I have evidence. I do not want you.”

“I’ll go, nevertheless.”

“And spend all your money on the journey.”

“You’d help;—wouldn’t you now?”

“Not a dollar,” said Peacocke, turning away and leaving the room. As he did so he heard the wretch laughing loud at the excellence of his own joke.

Before he made his journey back again to England he only once more saw Robert Lefroy. As he was seating himself in the railway car that was to take him to Buffalo the man came up to him with an affected look of solicitude. “Peacocke,” he said, “there was only nine hundred dollars in that roll.”

“There were a thousand. I counted them half-an-hour before I handed them to you.”

“There was only nine hundred when I got ’em.”

“There were all that you will get. What kind of notes were they you had when you paid for the shares at ’Frisco?” This question he asked out loud, before all the passengers. Then Robert Lefroy left the car, and Mr. Peacocke never saw him or heard from him again.

CONCLUSION

X

THE DOCTOR'S ANSWER

When the Monday came there was much to be done and to be thought of at Bowick. Mrs. Peacocke on that day received a letter from San Francisco, giving her all the details of the evidence that her husband had obtained, and enclosing a copy of the photograph. There was now no reason why she should not become the true and honest wife of the man whom she had all along regarded as her husband in the sight of God. The writer declared that he would so quickly follow his letter that he might be expected home within a week, or, at the longest, ten days, from the date at which she would receive it. Immediately on his arrival at Liverpool, he would, of course, give her notice by telegraph.

When this letter reached her, she at once sent a message across to Mrs. Wortle. Would Mrs. Wortle kindly come and see her? Mrs. Wortle was, of course, bound to do as she was asked, and started at once. But she was, in truth, but little able to give counsel on any subject outside the one which was at the moment nearest to her heart. At one o'clock, when the boys went to their dinner, Mary was to instruct her father as to the purport of the letter which was to be sent to Lord Bracy—and Mary had not as yet come to any decision. She could not go to her father for aid;—she could not, at any rate, go to him until the appointed hour should come; and she was, therefore, entirely thrown upon her mother. Had she been old enough to understand the effect and the power of character, she would have known that, at the last moment, her father would certainly decide for her—and had her experience of the world been greater, she might have been quite sure that her father would decide in her favour. But as it was, she was quivering and shaking in the dark, leaning on her mother's very inefficient aid, nearly overcome with the feeling that by one o'clock she must be ready to say something quite decided.

And in the midst of this her mother was taken away from her, just at ten o'clock. There was not, in truth, much that the two ladies could say to each other. Mrs. Peacocke felt it to be necessary to let the Doctor know that Mr. Peacocke would be back almost at once, and took this means of doing so. "In a week!" said Mrs. Wortle, as though painfully surprised by the suddenness of the coming arrival.

“In a week or ten days. He was to follow his letter as quickly as possible from San Francisco.”

“And he has found it all out?”

“Yes; he has learned everything, I think. Look at this!” And Mrs. Peacocke handed to her friend the photograph of the tombstone.

“Dear me!” said Mrs. Wortle. “Ferdinand Lefroy! And this was his grave?”

“That is his grave,” said Mrs. Peacocke, turning her face away.

“It is very sad; very sad indeed;—but you had to learn it, you know.”

“It will not be sad for him, I hope,” said Mrs. Peacocke. “In all this, I endeavour to think of him rather than of myself. When I am forced to think of myself, it seems to me that my life has been so blighted and destroyed that it must be indifferent what happens to me now. What has happened to me has been so bad that I can hardly be injured further. But if there can be a good time coming for him—something at least of relief, something perhaps of comfort—then I shall be satisfied.”

“Why should there not be comfort for you both?”

“I am almost as dead to hope as I am to shame. Some year or two ago I should have thought it impossible to bear the eyes of people looking at me, as though my life had been sinful and impure. I seem now to care nothing for all that. I can look them back again with bold eyes and a brazen face, and tell them that their hardness is at any rate as bad as my impurity.”

“We have not looked at you like that,” said Mrs. Wortle.

“No; and therefore I send to you in my trouble, and tell you all this. The strangest thing of all to me is that I should have come across one man so generous as your husband, and one woman so softhearted as yourself.” There was nothing further to be said then. Mrs. Wortle was instructed to tell her husband that Mr. Peacocke was to be expected in a week or ten days, and then hurried back to give what assistance she could in the much more important difficulties of her own daughter.

Of course they were much more important to her. Was her girl to become the wife of a young lord—to be a future countess? Was she destined to be the mother-in-law of an earl? Of course this was much more important to her. And then through it all—being as she was a dear, good, Christian, motherly woman—she was well aware that there was something, in truth, much more important even than that. Though she thought much of the earl-ship, and the countess-ship, and the great revenue, and the big house at Carstairs, and the fine park with its magnificent avenues, and the carriage in which her daughter would be

rolled about to London parties, and the diamonds which she would wear when she should be presented to the Queen as the bride of the young Lord Carstairs, yet she knew very well that she ought not in such an emergency as the present to think of these things as being of primary importance. What would tend most to her girl's happiness—and welfare in this world and the next? It was of that she ought to think—of that only. If some answer were now returned to Lord Bracy, giving his lordship to understand that they, the Wortles, were anxious to encourage the idea, then in fact her girl would be tied to an engagement whether the young lord should hold himself to be so tied or no! And how would it be with her girl if the engagement should be allowed to run on in a doubtful way for years, and then be dropped by reason of the young man's indifference? How would it be with her if, after perhaps three or four years, a letter should come saying that the young lord had changed his mind, and had engaged himself to some nobler bride? Was it not her duty, as a mother, to save her child from the too probable occurrence of some crushing grief such as this? All of it was clear to her mind;—but then it was clear also that, if this opportunity of greatness were thrown away, no such chance in all probability would ever come again. Thus she was so tossed to and fro between a prospect of glorious prosperity for her child on one side, and the fear of terrible misfortune for her child on the other, that she was altogether unable to give any salutary advice. She, at any rate, ought to have known that her advice would at last be of no importance. Her experience ought to have told her that the Doctor would certainly settle the matter himself. Had it been her own happiness that was in question, her own conduct, her own greatness, she would not have dreamed of having an opinion of her own. She would have consulted the Doctor, and simply have done as he directed. But all this was for her child, and in a vague, vacillating way she felt that for her child she ought to be ready with counsel of her own.

“Mamma,” said Mary, when her mother came back from Mrs. Peacocke, “what am I to say when he sends for me?”

“If you think that you can love him, my dear—”

“Oh, mamma, you shouldn't ask me!”

“My dear!”

“I do like him—very much.”

“If so—”

“But I never thought of it before;—and then, if he—if he—”

“If he what, my dear?”

“If he were to change his mind?”

“Ah, yes;—there it is. It isn’t as though you could be married in three months’ time.”

“Oh, mamma! I shouldn’t like that at all.”

“Or even in six.”

“Oh, no.”

“Of course he is very young.”

“Yes, mamma.”

“And when a young man is so very young, I suppose he doesn’t quite know his own mind.”

“No, mamma. But—”

“Well, my dear.”

“His father says that he has got—such a strong will of his own,” said poor Mary, who was anxious, unconsciously anxious, to put in a good word on her own side of the question, without making her own desire too visible.

“He always had that. When there was any game to be played, he always liked to have his own way. But then men like that are just as likely to change as others.”

“Are they, mamma?”

“But I do think that he is a lad of very high principle.”

“Papa has always said that of him.”

“And of fine generous feeling. He would not change like a weathercock.”

“If you think he would change at all, I would rather—rather—rather—. Oh, mamma, why did you tell me?”

“My darling, my child, my angel! What am I to tell you? I do think of all the young men I ever knew he is the nicest, and the sweetest, and the most thoroughly good and affectionate.”

“Oh, mamma, do you?” said Mary, rushing at her mother and kissing her and embracing her.

“But if there were to be no regular engagement, and you were to let him have your heart—and then things were to go wrong!”

Mary left the embracings, gave up the kissings, and seated herself on the sofa alone. In this way the morning was passed;—and when Mary was summoned to her father’s study, the mother and daughter had not arrived between them at any decision.

“Well, my dear,” said the Doctor, smiling, “what am I to say to the Earl?”

“Must you write today, papa?”

"I think so. His letter is one that should not be left longer unanswered. Were we to do so, he would only think that we didn't know what to say for ourselves."

"Would he, papa?"

"He would fancy that we are half-ashamed to accept what has been offered to us, and yet anxious to take it."

"I am not ashamed of anything."

"No, my dear; you have no reason."

"Nor have you, papa."

"Nor have I. That is quite true. I have never been wont to be ashamed of myself;—nor do I think that you ever will have cause to be ashamed of yourself. Therefore, why should we hesitate? Shall I help you, my darling, in coming to a decision on the matter?"

"Yes, papa."

"If I can understand your heart on this matter, it has never as yet been given to this young man."

"No, papa." This Mary said not altogether with that complete power of asseveration which the negative is sometimes made to bear.

"But there must be a beginning to such things. A man throws himself into it headlong—as my Lord Carstairs seems to have done. At least all the best young men do." Mary at this point felt a great longing to get up and kiss her father; but she restrained herself. "A young woman, on the other hand, if she is such as I think you are, waits till she is asked. Then it has to begin." The Doctor, as he said this, smiled his sweetest smile.

"Yes, papa."

"And when it has begun, she does not like to blurt it out at once, even to her loving old father."

"Papa!"

"That's about it, isn't it? Haven't I hit it off?" He paused, as though for a reply, but she was not as yet able to make him any. "Come here, my dear." She came and stood by him, so that he could put his arm round her waist. "If it be as I suppose, you are better disposed to this young man than you are likely to be to any other, just at present."

"Oh yes, papa."

"To all others you are quite indifferent?"

"Yes—indeed, papa."

"I am sure you are. But not quite indifferent to this one? Give me a kiss, my darling, and I will take that for your speech." Then she kissed him—giving him her very best kiss. "And now, my child, what shall I say to the Earl?"

“I don’t know, papa.”

“Nor do I, quite. I never do know what to say till I’ve got the pen in my hand. But you’ll commission me to write as I may think best?”

“Oh yes, papa.”

“And I may presume that I know your mind?”

“Yes, papa.”

“Very well. Then you had better leave me, so that I can go to work with the paper straight before me, and my pen fixed in my fingers. I can never begin to think till I find myself in that position.” Then she left him, and went back to her mother.

“Well, my dear,” said Mrs. Wortle.

“He is going to write to Lord Bracy.”

“But what does he mean to say?”

“I don’t know at all, mamma.”

“Not know!”

“I think he means to tell Lord Bracy that he has got no objection.”

Then Mrs. Wortle was sure that the Doctor meant to face all the dangers, and that therefore it would behove her to face them also.

The Doctor, when he was left alone, sat a while thinking of the matter before he put himself into the position fitted for composition which he had described to his daughter. He acknowledged to himself that there was a difficulty in making a fit reply to the letter which he had to answer. When his mind was set on sending an indignant epistle to the Bishop, the words flew from him like lightning out of the thunderclouds. But now he had to think much of it before he could make any light to come which should not bear a different colour from that which he intended. “Of course such a marriage would suit my child, and would suit me,” he wished to say;—“not only, or not chiefly, because your son is a nobleman, and will be an earl and a man of great property. That goes a long way with us. We are too true to deny it. We hate humbug, and want you to know simply the truth about us. The title and the money go far—but not half so far as the opinion which we entertain of the young man’s own good gifts. I would not give my girl to the greatest and richest nobleman under the British Crown, if I did not think that he would love her and be good to her, and treat her as a husband should treat his wife. But believing this young man to have good gifts such as these, and a fine disposition, I am willing, on my girl’s behalf—and she also is willing—to encounter the acknowledged danger of a long engagement in the hope of realising all the good things which would, if things went fortunately,

thus come within her reach.” This was what he wanted to say to the Earl, but he found it very difficult to say it in language that should be natural.

“MY DEAR LORD BRACY—When I learned, through Mary’s mother, that Carstairs had been here in our absence and made a declaration of love to our girl, I was, I must confess, annoyed. I felt, in the first place, that he was too young to have taken in hand such a business as that; and, in the next, that you might not unnaturally have been angry that your son, who had come here simply for tuition, should have fallen into a matter of love. I imagine that you will understand exactly what were my feelings. There was, however, nothing to be said about it. The evil, so far as it was an evil, had been done, and Carstairs was going away to Oxford, where, possibly, he might forget the whole affair. I did not, at any rate, think it necessary to make a complaint to you of his coming.

“To all this your letter has given altogether a different aspect. I think that I am as little likely as another to spend my time or thoughts in looking for external advantages, but I am as much alive as another to the great honour to myself and advantage to my child of the marriage which is suggested to her. I do not know how any more secure prospect of happiness could be opened to her than that which such a marriage offers. I have thought myself bound to give her your letter to read because her heart and her imagination have naturally been affected by what your son said to her. I think I may say of my girl that none sweeter, none more innocent, none less likely to be overanxious for such a prospect could exist. But her heart has been touched; and though she had not dreamt of him but as an acquaintance till he came here and told his own tale, and though she then altogether declined to entertain his proposal when it was made, now that she has learnt so much more through you, she is no longer indifferent. This, I think, you will find to be natural.

“I and her mother also are of course alive to the dangers of a long engagement, and the more so because your son has still before him a considerable portion of his education. Had he asked advice either of you or of me he would of course

have been counselled not to think of marriage as yet. But the very passion which has prompted him to take this action upon himself shows—as you yourself say of him—that he has a stronger will than is usual to be found at his years. As it is so, it is probable that he may remain constant to this as to a fixed idea.

“I think you will now understand my mind and Mary’s and her mother’s.”

Lord Bracy as he read this declared to himself that though the Doctor’s mind was very clear, Mrs. Wortle, as far as he knew, had no mind in the matter at all.

“I would suggest that the affair should remain as it is, and that each of the young people should be made to understand that any future engagement must depend, not simply on the persistency of one of them, but on the joint persistency of the two.

“If, after this, Lady Bracy should be pleased to receive Mary at Carstairs, I need not say that Mary will be delighted to make the visit.—Believe me, my dear Lord Bracy, yours most faithfully.

“JEFFREY WORTLE.”

The Earl, when he read this, though there was not a word in it to which he could take exception, was not altogether pleased. “Of course it will be an engagement,” he said to his wife.

“Of course it will,” said the Countess. “But then Carstairs is so very much in earnest. He would have done it for himself if you hadn’t done it for him.”

“At any rate the Doctor is a gentleman,” the Earl said, comforting himself.

XI

MR. PEACOCKE'S RETURN

The Earl's rejoinder to the Doctor was very short: "So let it be." There was not another word in the body of the letter; but there was appended to it a postscript almost equally short; "Lady Bracy will write to Mary and settle with her some period for her visit." And so it came to be understood by the Doctor, by Mrs. Wortle, and by Mary herself, that Mary was engaged to Lord Carstairs.

The Doctor, having so far arranged the matter, said little or nothing more on the subject, but turned his mind at once to that other affair of Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke. It was evident to his wife, who probably alone understood the buoyancy of his spirit and its corresponding susceptibility to depression, that he at once went about Mr. Peacocke's affairs with renewed courage. Mr. Peacocke should resume his duties as soon as he was remarried, and let them see what Mrs. Stantiloup or the Bishop would dare to say then! It was impossible, he thought, that parents would be such asses as to suppose that their boys' morals could be affected to evil by connection with a man so true, so gallant, and so manly as this. He did not at this time say anything further as to abandoning the school, but seemed to imagine that the vacancies would get themselves filled up as in the course of nature. He ate his dinner again as though he liked it, and abused the Liberals, and was anxious about the grapes and peaches, as was always the case with him when things were going well. All this, as Mrs. Wortle understood, had come to him from the brilliancy of Mary's prospects.

But though he held his tongue on the subject, Mrs. Wortle did not. She found it absolutely impossible not to talk of it when she was alone with Mary, or alone with the Doctor. As he counselled her not to make Mary think too much about it, she was obliged to hold her peace when both were with her; but with either of them alone she was always full of it. To the Doctor she communicated all her fears and all her doubts, showing only too plainly that she would be altogether brokenhearted if anything should interfere with the grandeur and prosperity which seemed to be partly within reach, but not altogether within reach of her darling child. If he, Carstairs, should prove to be a recreant young lord! If Aristotle and

Socrates should put love out of his heart! If those other wicked young lords at Christ-Church were to teach him that it was a foolish thing for a young lord to become engaged to his tutor's daughter before he had taken his degree! If some better born young lady were to come in his way and drive Mary out of his heart! No more lovely or better girl could be found to do so;—of that she was sure. To the latter assertion the Doctor agreed, telling her that, as it was so, she ought to have a stronger trust in her daughter's charms—telling her also, with somewhat sterner voice, that she should not allow herself to be so disturbed by the glories of the Bracy coronet. In this there was, I think, some hypocrisy. Had the Doctor been as simple as his wife in showing her own heart, it would probably have been found that he was as much set upon the coronet as she.

Then Mrs. Wortle would carry the Doctor's wisdom to her daughter. "Papa says, my dear, that you shouldn't think of it too much."

"I do think of him, mamma. I do love him now, and of course I think of him."

"Of course you do, my dear;—of course you do. How should you not think of him when he is all in all to you? But papa means that it can hardly be called an engagement yet."

"I don't know what it should be called; but of course I love him. He can change it if he likes."

"But you shouldn't think of it, knowing his rank and wealth."

"I never did, mamma; but he is what he is, and I must think of him."

Poor Mrs. Wortle did not know what special advice to give when this declaration was made. To have held her tongue would have been the wisest, but that was impossible to her. Out of the full heart the mouth speaks, and her heart was very full of Lord Carstairs and of Carstairs House, and of the diamonds which her daughter would certainly be called upon to wear before the Queen—if only that young man would do his duty.

Poor Mary herself probably had the worst of it. No provision was made either for her to see her lover or to write to him. The only interview which had ever taken place between them as lovers was that on which she had run by him into the house, leaving him, as the Earl had said, planted on the terrace. She had never been able to whisper one single soft word into his ear, to give him even one touch of her fingers in token of her affection. She did not in the least know when she might be allowed to see him—whether it had not been settled among the elders that they were not to see each other as real lovers till he should have taken his

degree—which would be almost in a future world, so distant seemed the time. It had been already settled that she was to go to Carstairs in the middle of November and stay till the middle of December; but it was altogether settled that her lover was not to be at Carstairs during the time. He was to be at Oxford then, and would be thinking only of his Greek and Latin—or perhaps amusing himself, in utter forgetfulness that he had a heart belonging to him at Bowick Parsonage. In this way Mary, though no doubt she thought the most of it all, had less opportunity of talking of it than either her father or her mother.

In the meantime Mr. Peacocke was coming home. The Doctor, as soon as he heard that the day was fixed, or nearly fixed, being then, as has been explained, in full good humour with all the world except Mrs. Stantiloup and the Bishop, bethought himself as to what steps might best be taken in the very delicate matter in which he was called upon to give advice. He had declared at first that they should be married at his own parish church; but he felt that there would be difficulties in this. “She must go up to London and meet him there,” he said to Mrs. Wortle. “And he must not show himself here till he brings her down as his actual wife.” Then there was very much to be done in arranging all this. And something to be done also in making those who had been his friends, and perhaps more in making those who had been his enemies, understand exactly how the matter stood. Had no injury been inflicted upon him, as though he had done evil to the world in general in befriending Mr. Peacocke, he would have been quite willing to pass the matter over in silence among his friends; but as it was he could not afford to hide his own light under a bushel. He was being punished almost to the extent of ruin by the cruel injustice which had been done him by the evil tongue of Mrs. Stantiloup, and, as he thought, by the folly of the Bishop. He must now let those who had concerned themselves know as accurately as he could what he had done in the matter, and what had been the effect of his doing. He wrote a letter, therefore, which was not, however, to be posted till after the Peacocke marriage had been celebrated, copies of which he prepared with his own hand in order that he might send them to the Bishop and to Lady Anne Clifford, and to Mr. Talbot and—not, indeed, to Mrs. Stantiloup, but to Mrs. Stantiloup’s husband. There was a copy also made for Mr. Momson, though in his heart he despised Mr. Momson thoroughly. In this letter he declared the great respect which he had entertained, since he had first known them, both for Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke, and the distress which he had felt when Mr. Peacocke had found himself obliged to explain to him the facts—the facts which

need not be repeated, because the reader is so well acquainted with them. “Mr. Peacocke,” he went on to say, “has since been to America, and has found that the man whom he believed to be dead when he married his wife, has died since his calamitous reappearance. Mr. Peacocke has seen the man’s grave, with the stone on it bearing his name, and has brought back with him certificates and evidence as to his burial.

“Under these circumstances, I have no hesitation in re-employing both him and his wife; and I think that you will agree that I could not do less. I think you will agree, also, that in the whole transaction I have done nothing of which the parent of any boy entrusted to me has a right to complain.”

Having done this, he went up to London, and made arrangements for having the marriage celebrated there as soon as possible after the arrival of Mr. Peacocke. And on his return to Bowick, he went off to Mr. Puddicombe with a copy of his letter in his pocket. He had not addressed a copy to his friend, nor had he intended that one should be sent to him. Mr. Puddicombe had not interfered in regard to the boys, and had, on the whole, shown himself to be a true friend. There was no need for him to advocate his cause to Mr. Puddicombe. But it was right, he thought, that that gentleman should know what he did; and it might be that he hoped that he would at length obtain some praise from Mr. Puddicombe. But Mr. Puddicombe did not like the letter. “It does not tell the truth,” he said.

“Not the truth!”

“Not the whole truth.”

“As how! Where have I concealed anything?”

“If I understand the question rightly, they who have thought proper to take their children away from your school because of Mr. Peacocke, have done so because that gentleman continued to live with that lady when they both knew that they were not man and wife.”

“That wasn’t my doing.”

“You condoned it. I am not condemning you. You condoned it, and now you defend yourself in this letter. But in your defence you do not really touch the offence as to which you are, according to your own showing, accused. In telling the whole story, you should say; ‘They did live together though they were not married;—and, under all the circumstances, I did not think that they were on that account unfit to be left in charge of my boys.’”

“But I sent him away immediately—to America.”

“You allowed the lady to remain.”

“Then what would you have me say?” demanded the Doctor.

“Nothing,” said Mr. Puddicombe;—“not a word. Live it down in silence. There will be those, like myself, who, though they could not dare to say that in morals you were strictly correct, will love you the better for what you did.” The Doctor turned his face towards the dry, hard-looking man and showed that there was a tear in each of his eyes. “There are few of us not so infirm as sometimes to love best that which is not best. But when a man is asked a downright question, he is bound to answer the truth.”

“You would say nothing in your own defence.”

“Not a word. You know the French proverb: ‘Who excuses himself is his own accuser.’ The truth generally makes its way. As far as I can see, a slander never lives long.”

“Ten of my boys are gone!” said the Doctor, who had not hitherto spoken a word of this to anyone out of his own family;—“ten out of twenty.”

“That will only be a temporary loss.”

“That is nothing—nothing. It is the idea that the school should be failing.”

“They will come again. I do not believe that that letter would bring a boy. I am almost inclined to say, Dr. Wortle, that a man should never defend himself.”

“He should never have to defend himself.”

“It is much the same thing. But I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Dr. Wortle—if it will suit your plans. I will go up with you and will assist at the marriage. I do not for a moment think that you will require any countenance, or that if you did, that I could give it you.”

“No man that I know so efficiently.”

“But it may be that Mr. Peacocke will like to find that the clergymen from his neighbourhood are standing with him.” And so it was settled, that when the day should come on which the Doctor would take Mrs. Peacocke up with him to London, Mr. Puddicombe was to accompany them.

The Doctor when he left Mr. Puddicombe’s parsonage had by no means pledged himself not to send the letters. When a man has written a letter, and has taken some trouble with it, and more specially when he has copied it several times himself so as to have made many letters of it—when he has argued his point successfully to himself, and has triumphed in his own mind, as was likely to be the case with Dr. Wortle in all that he did, he does not like to make waste paper of his letters. As

he rode home he tried to persuade himself that he might yet use them. He could not quite admit his friend's point. Mr. Peacocke, no doubt, had known his own condition, and him a strict moralist might condemn. But he—he—Dr. Wortle—had known nothing. All that he had done was not to condemn the other man when he did know!

Nevertheless as he rode into his own yard, he made up his mind that he would burn the letters. He had shown them to no one else. He had not even mentioned them to his wife. He could burn them without condemning himself in the opinion of anyone. And he burned them. When Mr. Puddicombe found him at the station at Broughton as they were about to proceed to London with Mrs. Peacocke, he simply whispered the fate of the letters. "After what you said I destroyed what I had written."

"Perhaps it was as well," said Mr. Puddicombe.

When the telegram came to say that Mr. Peacocke was at Liverpool, Mrs. Peacocke was anxious immediately to rush up to London. But she was restrained by the Doctor—or rather by Mrs. Wortle under the Doctor's orders. "No, my dear; no. You must not go till all will be ready for you to meet him in the church. The Doctor says so."

"Am I not to see him till he comes up to the altar?"

On this there was another consultation between Mrs. Wortle and the Doctor, at which she explained how impossible it would be for the woman to go through the ceremony with due serenity and propriety of manner unless she should be first allowed to throw herself into his arms, and to welcome him back to her. "Yes," she said, "he can come and see you at the hotel on the evening before, and again in the morning—so that if there be a word to say you can say it. Then when it is over he will bring you down here. The Doctor and Mr. Puddicombe will come down by a later train. Of course it is painful," said Mrs. Wortle, "but you must bear up." To her it seemed to be so painful that she was quite sure that she could not have borne it. To be married for the third time, and for the second time to the same husband! To Mrs. Peacocke, as she thought of it, the pain did not so much rest in that, as in the condition of life which these things had forced upon her.

"I must go up to town tomorrow, and must be away for two days," said the Doctor out loud in the school, speaking immediately to one of the ushers, but so that all the boys present might hear him. "I trust that we shall have Mr. Peacocke with us the day after tomorrow."

"We shall be very glad of that," said the usher.

“And Mrs. Peacocke will come and eat her dinner again like before?” asked a little boy.

“I hope so, Charley.”

“We shall like that, because she has to eat it all by herself now.”

All the school, down even to Charley, the smallest boy in it, knew all about it. Mr. Peacocke had gone to America, and Mrs. Peacocke was going up to London to be married once more to her own husband—and the Doctor and Mr. Puddicombe were both going to marry them. The usher of course knew the details more clearly than that—as did probably the bigger boys. There had even been a rumour of the photograph which had been seen by one of the maidservants—who had, it is to be feared, given the information to the French teacher. So much, however, the Doctor had felt it wise to explain, not thinking it well that Mr. Peacocke should make his reappearance among them without notice.

On the afternoon of the next day but one, Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke were driven up to the school in one of the Broughton flys. She went quickly up into her own house, when Mr. Peacocke walked into the school. The boys clustered round him, and the three assistants, and every word said to him was kind and friendly;—but in the whole course of his troubles there had never been a moment to him more difficult than this—in which he found it so nearly impossible to say anything or to say nothing. “Yes, I have been over very many miles since I saw you last.” This was an answer to young Talbot, who asked him whether he had not been a great traveller whilst he was away.

“In America,” suggested the French usher, who had heard of the photograph, and knew very well where it had been taken.

“Yes, in America.”

“All the way to San Francisco,” suggested Charley.

“All the way to San Francisco, Charley—and back again.”

“Yes; I know you’re come back again,” said Charley, “because I see you here.”

“There are only twenty boys this half,” said one of the twenty.

“Then I shall have more time to attend to you now.”

“I suppose so,” said the lad, not seeming to find any special consolation in that view of the matter.

Painful as this first reintroduction had been, there was not much more in it than that. No questions were asked, and no explanations expected. It may be that Mrs. Stantiloup was affected with fresh moral horrors when she heard of the return, and that the Bishop said that the Doctor was foolish and headstrong as ever. It may be that there was a good deal of

talk about it in the Close at Broughton. But at the school there was very little more said about it than what has been stated above.

XII

MARY'S SUCCESS

In this last chapter of our short story I will venture to run rapidly over a few months so as to explain how the affairs of Bowick arranged themselves up to the end of the current year. I cannot pretend that the reader shall know, as he ought to be made to know, the future fate and fortunes of our personages. They must be left still struggling. But then is not such always in truth the case, even when the happy marriage has been celebrated?—even when, in the course of two rapid years, two normal children make their appearance to gladden the hearts of their parents?

Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke fell into their accustomed duties in the diminished school, apparently without difficulty. As the Doctor had not sent those ill-judged letters he of course received no replies, and was neither troubled by further criticism nor consoled by praise as to his conduct. Indeed, it almost seemed to him as though the thing, now that it was done, excited less observation than it deserved. He heard no more of the metropolitan press, and was surprised to find that the *Broughton Gazette* inserted only a very short paragraph, in which it stated that “they had been given to understand that Mr. and Mrs. Peacocke had resumed their usual duties at the Bowick School, after the performance of an interesting ceremony in London, at which Dr. Wortle and Mr. Puddicombe had assisted.” The press, as far as the Doctor was aware, said nothing more on the subject. And if remarks injurious to his conduct were made by the Stantiloups and the Momsons, they did not reach his ears. Very soon after the return of the Peacockes there was a grand dinner-party at the palace, to which the Doctor and his wife were invited. It was not a clerical dinner-party, and so the honour was the greater. The aristocracy of the neighbourhood were there, including Lady Anne Clifford, who was devoted, with almost repentant affection, to her old friend. And Lady Margaret Momson was there, the only clergyman’s wife besides his own, who declared to him with unblushing audacity that she had never regretted anything so much in her life as that Augustus should have been taken away from the school. It was evident that there

had been an intention at the palace to make what amends the palace could for the injuries it had done.

“Did Lady Anne say anything about the boys?” asked Mrs. Wortle, as they were going home.

“She was going to, but I would not let her. I managed to show her that I did not wish it, and she was clever enough to stop.”

“I shouldn’t wonder if she sent them back,” said Mrs. Wortle.

“She won’t do that. Indeed, I doubt whether I should take them. But if it should come to pass that she should wish to send them back, you may be sure that others will come. In such a matter she is very good as a weathercock, showing how the wind blows.” In this way the dinner-party at the palace was in a degree comforting and consolatory.

But an incident which of all was most comforting and most consolatory to one of the inhabitants of the parsonage took place two or three days after the dinner-party. On going out of his own hall-door one Saturday afternoon, immediately after lunch, whom should the Doctor see driving himself into the yard in a hired gig from Broughton—but young Lord Carstairs. There had been no promise, or absolute compact made, but it certainly had seemed to be understood by all of them that Carstairs was not to show himself at Bowick till at some long distant period, when he should have finished all the trouble of his education. It was understood even that he was not to be at Carstairs during Mary’s visit—so imperative was it that the young people should not meet. And now here he was getting out of a gig in the Rectory yard! “Halloa! Carstairs, is that you?”

“Yes, Dr. Wortle—here I am.”

“We hardly expected to see you, my boy.”

“No—I suppose not. But when I heard that Mr. Peacocke had come back, and all about his marriage, you know, I could not but come over to see him. He and I have always been such great friends.”

“Oh—to see Mr. Peacocke?”

“I thought he’d think it unkind if I didn’t look him up. He has made it all right; hasn’t he?”

“Yes;—he has made it all right, I think. A finer fellow never lived. But he’ll tell you all about it. He travelled with a pistol in his pocket, and seemed to want it too. I suppose you must come in and see the ladies after we have been to Peacocke?”

“I suppose I can just see them,” said the young lord, as though moved by equal anxiety as to the mother and as to the daughter.

“I’ll leave word that you are here, and then we’ll go into the school.” So the Doctor found a servant, and sent what message he thought fit into the house.

“Lord Carstairs here?”

“Yes, indeed, Miss! He’s with your papa, going across to the school. He told me to take word in to Missus that he supposes his lordship will stay to dinner.” The maid who carried the tidings, and who had received no commission to convey them to Miss Mary, was, no doubt, too much interested in an affair of love, not to take them first to the one that would be most concerned with them.

That very morning Mary had been bemoaning herself as to her hard condition. Of what use was it to her to have a lover, if she was never to see him, never to hear from him—only to be told about him—that she was not to think of him more than she could help? She was already beginning to think that a long engagement carried on after this fashion would have more of suffering in it than she had anticipated. It seemed to her that while she was, and always would be, thinking of him, he never, never would continue to think of her. If it could be only a word once a month it would be something—just one or two written words under an envelope—even that would have sufficed to keep her hope alive! But never to see him;—never to hear from him! Her mother had told her that very morning that there was to be no meeting—probably for three years, till he should have done with Oxford. And here he was in the house—and her papa had sent in word to say that he was to eat his dinner there! It so astonished her that she felt that she would be afraid to meet him. Before she had had a minute to think of it all, her mother was with her. “Carstairs, love, is here!”

“Oh mamma, what has brought him?”

“He has gone into the school with your papa to see Mr. Peacocke. He always was very fond of Mr. Peacocke.” For a moment something of a feeling of jealousy crossed her heart—but only for a moment. He would not surely have come to Bowick if he had begun to be indifferent to her already! “Papa says that he will probably stay to dinner.”

“Then I am to see him?”

“Yes;—of course you must see him.”

“I didn’t know, mamma.”

“Don’t you wish to see him?”

“Oh yes, mamma. If he were to come and go, and we were not to meet at all, I should think it was all over then. Only—I don’t know what to say to him.”

“You must take that as it comes, my dear.”

Two hours afterwards they were walking, the two of them alone together, out in the Bowick woods. When once the law—which had been rather understood than spoken—had been infringed and set at naught, there was no longer any use in endeavouring to maintain a semblance of its restriction. The two young people had met in the presence both of the father and mother, and the lover had had her in his arms before either of them could interfere. There had been a little scream from Mary, but it may probably be said of her that she was at the moment the happiest young lady in the diocese.

“Does your father know you are here?” said the Doctor, as he led the young lord back from the school into the house.

“He knows I’m coming, for I wrote and told my mother. I always tell everything; but it’s sometimes best to make up your mind before you get an answer.” Then the Doctor made up his mind that Lord Carstairs would have his own way in anything that he wished to accomplish.

“Won’t the Earl be angry?” Mrs. Wortle asked.

“No;—not angry. He knows the world too well not to be quite sure that something of the kind would happen. And he is too fond of his son not to think well of anything that he does. It wasn’t to be supposed that they should never meet. After all that has passed I am bound to make him welcome if he chooses to come here, and as Mary’s lover to give him the best welcome that I can. He won’t stay, I suppose, because he has got no clothes.”

“But he has;—John brought in a portmanteau and a dressing-bag out of the gig.” So that was settled.

In the meantime Lord Carstairs had taken Mary out for a walk into the wood, and she, as she walked beside him, hardly knew whether she was going on her head or her heels. This, indeed, it was to have a lover. In the morning she was thinking that when three years were past he would hardly care to see her ever again. And now they were together among the falling leaves, and sitting about under the branches as though there was nothing in the world to separate them. Up to that day there had never been a word between them but such as is common to mere acquaintances, and now he was calling her every instant by her Christian name, and telling her all his secrets.

“We have such jolly woods at Carstairs,” he said; “but we shan’t be able to sit down when we’re there, because it will be winter. We shall be hunting, and you must come out and see us.”

“But you won’t be there when I am,” she said, timidly.

“Won’t I? That’s all you know about it. I can manage better than that.”

“You’ll be at Oxford.”

“You must stay over Christmas, Mary; that’s what you must do. You musn’t think of going till January.”

“But Lady Bracy won’t want me.”

“Yes, she will. We must make her want you. At any rate they’ll understand this; if you don’t stay for me, I shall come home even if it’s in the middle of term. I’ll arrange that. You don’t suppose I’m not going to be there when you make your first visit to the old place.”

All this was being in Paradise. She felt when she walked home with him, and when she was alone afterwards in her own room, that, in truth, she had only liked him before. Now she loved him. Now she was beginning to know him, and to feel that she would really—really die of a broken heart if anything were to rob her of him. But she could let him go now, without a feeling of discomfort, if she thought that she was to see him again when she was at Carstairs.

But this was not the last walk in the woods, even on this occasion. He remained two days at Bowick, so necessary was it for him to renew his intimacy with Mr. Peacocke. He explained that he had got two days’ leave from the tutor of his College, and that two days, in College parlance, always meant three. He would be back on the third day, in time for “gates”; and that was all which the strictest college discipline would require of him. It need hardly be said of him that the most of his time he spent with Mary; but he did manage to devote an hour or two to his old friend, the school-assistant.

Mr. Peacocke told his whole story, and Carstairs, whose morals were perhaps not quite so strict as those of Mr. Puddicombe, gave him all his sympathy. “To think that a man can be such a brute as that,” he said, when he heard that Ferdinand Lefroy had shown himself to his wife at St. Louis—“only on a spree.”

“There is no knowing to what depth utter ruin may reduce a man who has been born to better things. He falls into idleness, and then comforts himself with drink. So it seems to have been with him.”

“And that other fellow;—do you think he meant to shoot you?”

“Never. But he meant to frighten me. And when he brought out his knife in the bedroom at Leavenworth he did. My pistol was not loaded.”

“Why not?”

“Because little as I wish to be murdered, I should prefer that to murdering anyone else. But he didn’t mean it. His only object was to get as much out of me as he could. As for me, I couldn’t give him more

because I hadn't got it." After that they made a league of friendship, and Mr. Peacocke promised that he would, on some distant occasion, take his wife with him on a visit to Carstairs.

It was about a month after this that Mary was packed up and sent on her journey to Carstairs. When that took place, the Doctor was in supreme good-humour. There had come a letter from the father of the two Mowbrays, saying that he had again changed his mind. He had, he said, heard a story told two ways. He trusted Dr. Wortle would understand him and forgive him, when he declared that he had believed both the stories. If after this the Doctor chose to refuse to take his boys back again, he would have, he acknowledged, no ground for offence. But if the Doctor would take them, he would entrust them to the Doctor's care with the greatest satisfaction in the world—as he had done before.

For a while the Doctor had hesitated; but here, perhaps for the first time in her life, his wife was allowed to persuade him. "They are such leading people," she said.

"Who cares for that? I have never gone in for that." This, however, was hardly true. "When I have been sure that a man is a gentleman, I have taken his son without inquiring much farther. It was mean of him to withdraw after I had acceded to his request."

"But he withdraws his withdrawal in such a flattering way!" Then the Doctor assented, and the two boys were allowed to come. Lady Anne Clifford hearing this, learning that the Doctor was so far willing to relent, became very piteous and implored forgiveness. The noble relatives were all willing now. It had not been her fault. As far as she was concerned herself she had always been anxious that her boys should remain at Bowick. And so the two Cliffords came back to their old beds in the old room.

Mary, when she first arrived at Carstairs, hardly knew how to carry herself. Lady Bracy was very cordial and the Earl friendly, but for the first two days nothing was said about Carstairs. There was no open acknowledgment of her position. But then she had expected none; and though her tongue was burning to talk, of course she did not say a word. But before a week was over Lady Bracy had begun, and by the end of the fortnight Lord Bracy had given her a beautiful brooch. "That means," said Lady Bracy in the confidence of her own little sitting-room upstairs, "that he looks upon you as his daughter."

"Does it?"

"Yes, my dear, yes." Then they fell to kissing each other, and did nothing but talk about Carstairs and all his perfections, and his

unalterable love, and how these three years could be made to wear themselves away, till the conversation—simmering over as such conversation is wont to do—gave the whole household to understand that Miss Wortle was staying there as Lord Carstairs's future bride.

Of course she stayed over the Christmas, or went back to Bowick for a week, and then returned to Carstairs, so that she might tell her mother everything, and hear of the six new boys who were to come after the holidays. "Papa couldn't take both the Buncombes," said Mrs. Wortle in her triumph, "and one must remain till midsummer. Sir George did say that it must be two or none, but he had to give way. I wanted papa to have another bed in the east room, but he wouldn't hear of it."

Mary went back for the Christmas and Carstairs came; and the house was full, and everybody knew of the engagement. She walked with him, and rode with him, and danced with him, and talked secrets with him—as though there were no Oxford, no degree before him. No doubt it was very imprudent, but the Earl and the Countess knew all about it. What might be, or would be, or was the end of such folly, it is not my purpose here to tell. I fear that there was trouble before them. It may, however, be possible that the degree should be given up on the score of love, and Lord Carstairs should marry his bride—at any rate when he came of age.

As to the school, it certainly suffered nothing by the Doctor's generosity, and when last I heard of Mr. Peacocke, the Bishop had offered to grant him a licence for the curacy. Whether he accepted it I have not yet heard, but I am inclined to think that in this matter he will adhere to his old determination.



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