

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN David reached home that night he found a French letter awaiting him. It was from Louie, still dated from the country town near Toulouse, and announced the birth of her child—a daughter. The letter was scrawled apparently from her bed, and contained some passionate, abusive remarks about her husband, half finished, and hardly intelligible. She peremptorily called on David to send her some money at once. Her husband was a sot, and unfaithful to her. Even now with his first child, he had taken advantage of her being laid up to make love to other women. All the town cried shame on him. The priest visited her frequently, and was all on her side.

Then at the end she wrote a hasty description of the child. Its eyes were like his, David's, but it would have much handsomer eyelashes. It was by far the best-looking child in the place, and because everybody remarked on its likeness to her, she believed Montjoie had taken a dislike to it. She didn't care, but it made him look ridiculous. Why didn't he do some work, instead of letting her and her child live like pigs? He could get some, if his dirty pride would let him. It wasn't to be supposed, with this disgusting Commune going on in Paris, and everybody nearly ruined, that anyone would want statues—they had never even sold the Mænad—but somebody had wanted him to do a monument, cheap, the other day for a brother who had been killed in the war; and he wouldn't. He was too fine. That was like him all over.

It was as though he could hear her flinging out the reckless sentences. But he thought there were signs that she was pleased with the baby—and he suddenly remembered her tyrannous passion for the Mason child.

As to the money, he looked carefully into his accounts. For the last six months he had been gathering every possible saving together with a view to the History of Manchester, which he and John had planned to begin printing in the coming autumn. It went against him sorely to take from such a hoard for the purpose of helping Jules Montjoie to an idler and easier existence. The fate of his six hundred pounds burnt deep into a mind which at bottom was well furnished with all the old Yorkshire and Scotch frugality.

However, he sent his sister money, and he gave up in thought that fortnight's walking tour in the Lakes he had planned for his holiday. He must just stay at home and see to business.

Then next morning, as it happened, he woke up with a sudden hunger for the country—a vision before his eyes of the wide bosom of the Scout, of fresh airs and hurrying waters, of the sheep among the heather. His night had been restless; the whole of life seemed to be again in debate—Lucy's figure, Dora's talk,

chased and tormented him. Away to the April moorland! He sprang out of bed determined to take the first train to Clough End. He had not been out of Manchester for months, and it was luckily a Saturday. Here was this letter of Louie's too—he owed the news to Uncle Reuben. Since Reuben's visit to Manchester, a year before, there had been no communication between him and them. Six years! How would the farm—how would Aunt Hannah look? There was a drawing in him this morning towards the past, towards even the harsh forms and memories of it, such as often marks a time of emotion and crisis, the moment before a man takes a half-reluctant step towards a doubtful future.

But as he journeyed towards the Derbyshire border, he was not in truth thinking of Dora's counsels or of Lucy Purcell at all. Every now and then he lost himself in the mere intoxication of the spring, in the charm of the factory valleys, just flushing into green, through which the train was speeding. But in general his attention was held by the book in his hand. His time for reading had been much curtailed of late by the toils of his business. He caught covetously at every spare hour.

The book was Bishop Berkeley's 'Dialogues.'

With what a medley of thoughts and interests had he been concerned during the last four or five months! His old tastes and passions had revived as we have seen, but unequally, with morbid gaps and exceptions. In these days he had hardly opened a poet or a novelist. His whole being shrank from them, as though it had been one wound, and the books which had been to him the passionate friends of his most golden hours, which had moulded in him, as it were, the soul wherewith he had loved Elise, looked to him now like enemies as he passed them quickly by upon the shelves.

But some of his old studies—German, Greek, science especially—were the saving of him. Among some foreign books, for instance, which he had ordered for a customer he came upon a copy of some scientific essays by Littré. Among them was a survey of the state of astronomical knowledge written somewhere about 1835, with all the luminous charm which the great Positivist had at command. David was captured by it, by the flight of the scientific imagination through time and space, amid suns, planets and nebulae, the beginnings and the wrecks of worlds. When he laid it down with a sigh of pleasure, Ancrum, who was sitting opposite, looked up.

'You like your book, Davy?'

'Yes,' said the other slowly, staring out of the twilight window at the gloom which passes for sky in Manchester. Then with another long breath,—'It makes you a new heaven and a new earth!'

A similar impression, only even richer and more detailed, had been left upon him by a volume of Huxley's 'Lay Sermons.' The world of natural fact in its overpowering wealth and mystery was thus given back to him, as it were, under another aspect than

that torturing intoxicating aspect of art—one that fortified and calmed. All his scientific curiosities which had been so long laid to sleep revived. His first returning joy came from a sense of the inexhaustibleness and infinity of nature.

But very soon this renewed interest in science began to have the bearing and to issue in the mental activities which, all unknown to himself, had been from the beginning in his destiny. He could not now read it for itself alone. That new ethical and spiritual susceptibility, into which agony and loss had become slowly transformed, dominated and absorbed all else. For some time, beside his scientific books, there lay others from a class not hitherto very congenial to him, that which contains the great examples in our day, outside the poets, of the poetical or imaginative treatment of ethics—Emerson, Carlyle, Ruskin. At an age when most young minds of intelligence amongst us are first seized by these English masters, he had been wandering in French paths. 'Sartor Resartus,' Emerson's 'Essays,' 'The Seven Lamps,' came to him now with an indescribable freshness and force. Nay, a too great force! We enjoy the great prophets of literature most when we have not yet lived enough to realise all they tell us. When David, wandering at night with Teufelsdröckh through heaven and hell, felt at last the hard sobs rising in his throat, he suddenly put the book and others akin to it away from him. As with the poets so here. He must turn to something less eloquent—to paths of thought where truth shone with a drier and a calmer light.

But still the same problems! Since his Eden gates had closed upon him, he had been in the outer desert where man has wandered from the beginning, threatened with all the familiar phantoms, illusions, mist-voices of human thought. What was consciousness—knowledge—law? Was there any law—any knowledge—any *I*?

Naturally he had long ceased to find any final sustenance or pleasure in the Secularist literature, which had once convinced him so easily. Secularism up to a certain point, it began to seem to him, was a commonplace; beyond that point, a contradiction. If the race should ever take the counsel of the Secularists, or of that larger Positivist thought, of which English secularism is the popular reflection, the human intellect would be a poorer instrument with a narrower swing. So much was plain to him. For nothing can be more certain than that some of the finest powers and noblest work of the human mind have been developed by the struggle to know what the Secularist declares is neither knowable nor worth knowing.

Yet the histories of philosophy which he began to turn over were in truth no more fruitful to him than the talk of the *Reasoner*. They stimulated his powers of apprehension and analysis; and the great march of human debate from century to century touched his imagination. But in these summaries of the philosophical field his inmost life appropriated nothing. Once by

a sort of reaction he fell upon Hume again, pining for the old intellectual clearness of impression, though it were a clearness of limit and negation. But he had hardly begun the 'Treatise' or the 'Essays' before his soul rose against them, crying for he knew not what, only that it was for nothing they could give.

Then by chance a little Life of Berkeley, and upon it an old edition of the works, fell into his hands. As he was turning over the leaves, the 'Alciphron' so struck him that he turned to the first page of the first volume, and evening after evening read the whole through with a devouring energy that never flagged. When it was over he was a different being. The mind had crystallised afresh.

It was his first serious grapple with the fundamental problems of knowledge. And, to a nature which had been so tossed and bruised in the great unregarding tide of things, which had felt itself the mere chattel of a callous universe, of no account or dignity either to gods or men, what strange exaltation there was in the general *suggestion* of Berkeley's thought! The mind, the source of all that is; the impressions on the senses, merely the speech of the Eternal Mind to ours, a Visual Language, whereof man's understanding is perpetually advancing, which has been indeed contrived for his education; man, naturally immortal, king of himself and of the senses, inalienably one—if he would but open his eyes and see—with all that is Divine, true, eternal: the soul that had been crushed by grief and self-contempt revived at the mere touch of these vast possibilities like a trampled plant. Not that it absorbed them yet, made them its own; but they made a healing stimulating atmosphere in which it seemed once more possible for it to grow into a true manhood. The spiritual hypothesis of things was for the first time presented in such a way as to take imaginative hold without exciting or harrowing the feelings; he saw the world reversed, in a pure light of thought, as Berkeley saw it, and all the horizon of things fell back.

Now—on this April afternoon—as the neighbourhood of Manchester was left behind, as the long woodclad valleys and unpolluted streams began to prophesy of Derbyshire and the Peak, David, his face pressed against the window, fell into a dream with Berkeley and with nature. Oh for knowledge! for verification! He began dimly and passionately to see before him a life devoted to thought—a life in which science after science should become the docile instrument of a mind still pressing on and on into the shadowy realm, till, in Berkeley's language, the darkness part, and it 'recover the lost region of light'!

But in the very midst of this overwhelming vision he said suddenly to himself:

'There is another way—another answer—Dora's way and Ancrum's.'

Aye, the way of faith, which asks for no length of years in which to win the goal, which is there at once—in the beat of a

wing—safe on the breast of God! He thought of it as he had seen it illustrated in his friend and in Dora, with the mixture of attraction and repulsion which, in this connection, was now more or less habitual to him. The more he saw of Dora, the more he wondered—at her goodness and her ignorance. Her positive dislike to, and alienation from knowledge was amazing. At the first indication of certain currents of thought he could see her soul shrivelling and shrinking like a green leaf near flame. As he had gradually realised, she had with some difficulty forgiven him the attempt to cure Daddy's drinking through a doctor; that anyone should think sin could be reached by medicine—it was in effect to throw doubt on the necessity of God's grace! And she could not bear that he should give her information from the books he read about the Bible or early Christianity. His detached, though never hostile, tone was clearly intolerable to her. She could not and would not suffer it, would take any means of escaping it.

Then that Passion-week sermon she had taken him to hear; which had so moved her, with which she had so sweetly and persistently assumed his sympathy! The preacher had been a High Church Canon with a considerable reputation for eloquence. The one o'clock service had been crowded with business and professional men. David had never witnessed a more tempting opportunity. But how hollow and empty the whole result! What foolish sentimental emphasis, what unreality, what contempt for knowledge, yet what a show of it!—an elegant worthless jumble of Gibbon, Horace, St. Augustine, Wesley, Newman and Mill, mixed with the cheap picturesque—with moonlight on the Campagna, and sunset on Niagara—and leading, by the loosest rhetoric, to the most confident conclusions. He had the taste of it in his mouth still. Fresh from the wrestle of mind into which Berkeley had led him, he fell into a new and young indignation with sermon and preacher.

Yet, all the same, if you asked how man could best *live*, apart from thinking, how the soul could put its foot on the brute—where would Dora stand then? What if the true key to life lay not in knowledge, but in *will*? What if knowledge in the true sense was ultimately impossible to man, and if Christianity not only offered, but could give him the one thing truly needful—his own will, regenerate?

But with the first sight of the Clough End streets these high debates were shaken from the mind.

He ran up the Kinder road, with its villanous paving of cobbles and coal dust, its mills to the right, down below in the hollow, skirting the course of the river, and its rows of workmen's homes to the left climbing the hill—in a tremor of excitement. Six years! Would anyone recognize him? Ah! there was Jerry's 'public,' an evil-looking weather-stained hole; but another name swung on the sign; poor Jerry!—was he, too, gone the way of

orthodox and sceptic alike? And here was the Foundry—David could hardly prevent himself from marching into the yard littered with mysterious odds and ends of old iron which had been the treasure house of his childhood. But no Tom—and no familiar face anywhere.

Yes!—there was the shoemaker's cottage, where the prayer-meeting had been, and there, on the threshold, looking at the approaching figure, stood the shoemaker's wife, the strange woman with the mystical eyes. David greeted her as he came near. She stared at him from under a bony hand put up against the sun, but did not apparently recognise him; he, seized with sudden shyness, quickened his pace, and was soon out of her sight.

In a minute or two he was at the Dye-works, which mark the limit of the town, and the opening of the valley road. Every breath now was delight. The steep wooded hills to the left, the red-brown shoulder of the Scout in front, were still wrapt in torn and floating shreds of mist. But the sun was everywhere—above in the slowly triumphing blue, in the mist itself, and below, on the river and the fields. The great wood climbing to his left was all embroidered on the brown with palms and catkins, or broken with patches of greening larch, which had a faintly luminous relief amid the rest. And the dash of the river—and the scents of the fields! He leapt the wall of the lane, and ran down to the water's edge, watching a dipper among the stones in a passion of pleasure which had no words.

Then up and on again, through the rough uneven lane, higher and higher into the breast of the Scout. What if he met Jim Wigson on the way? What if Aunt Hannah, still unreconciled, turned him from the door? No matter! Rancour and grief have no hold on mortals walking in such an April world—in such an exquisite and sunlit beauty. On! let thought and nature be enough! Why complicate and cumber life with relations that do but give a foothold to pain, and offer less than they threaten?

There is smoke rising from Wigson's, and figures moving in the yard. Caution!—keep close under the wall. And here at last is Needham farm, at the top of its own steep pitch, with the sycamore trees in the lane beside it, the Red Brook sweeping round it to the right, the rough gate below, the purple Scout mist-wreathed behind. There are cows lowing in the yard, a horse grazes in the front field; through the little garden-gate a gleam of sun strikes on the struggling crocuses and daffodils which come up year after year, no man heeding them; there is a clucking of hens, a hurry of water, a flood of song from a lark poised above the field. The blue smoke rises into the misty air: the sun and the spring caress the rugged lonely place.

With a beating heart David opened the gate into the field, walked round the little garden, let himself into the yard, and with a hasty glance at the windows mounted the steps and knocked.

No answer. He knocked again. Surely Aunt Hannah must be about somewhere. Eleven o'clock; how quiet the house was!

This time there was a clatter of a chair on a flagged floor inside, and a person with a slow laboured step came and opened.

It was Reuben. He adjusted his spectacles with difficulty, and stared at the intruder.

'Uncle Reuben!—I thought it was such a fine day, I'd just run over and see the old place, and bring you some news,' said David, smiling and holding out his hand.

Reuben took it, stupefied. 'Davy,' he said, trembling. Then with a sudden movement he whipped the door to behind him, and shut it close.

'Whist!' he said, putting his old finger to his lip. 'T' servant's just settlin her i' t' kitchen. She's noa ready yet—she's been terr'ble bad th' neet. Coom yo here.' And he descended the steps with infinite care, and led David to the wood-shed.

'Is Aunt Hannah ill?' asked David, astonished.

Reuben leant against the wall of the shed, and took off his spectacles, as though to wipe them with his old and shaking hands. Then David saw a sort of convulsion pass across his ungainly face.

'Aye,' he said, looking down, 'aye, she's broken is Hannah. Yo didna know?'

'I've heard nothing.'

Reuben recounted the facts. Since her stroke of last spring, and the partial recovery which had followed upon it, there had been little apparent change, except perhaps in the direction of slowly increasing weakness. She was a wreck, and likely to remain so. Hardly anybody but Reuben could understand her now, and she rarely let him out of her sight. He could not get time to attend to the farm, was obliged to leave things to the hired man, and was in trouble often about his affairs.

'Bit yo see, she hasna t' reet use of her speäch,' he said, excusing himself humbly to this handsome city nephew. 'An' she conno gie ower snipin aw at onst. 'Twudna be human natur'. An' t' gell's worritin' an' I mun tell her what t' missis says.'

David asked if he might see her, or should he just turn back to the town? Reuben protested, his hospitality and family feeling aroused, his poor mind torn with conflicting motives.

'I believe she'd fratch if she didna see tha,' he said at last. 'A'll just goo ben, and ask.'

He went in, and David remained in the wood-shed, staring out at the familiar scene, at Louie's window, at the steps where he and she had fed the fowls together.

The door opened again, and Reuben reappeared on the steps, agitated and beckoning.

David went in, stepping softly, holding his blue cloth cap in his hand. In another instant he stood beside the old cushioned seat in the kitchen, looking down at Hannah.

This Hannah! this his childhood's enemy! this shawled and shrunken figure with the white parchment face and lantern cheeks!

He stooped to her and said something about why he had come. Reuben listened wondering.

'Louie's married and got a babby—dosto hear, Hannah? And he—t' lad—did yo iver see sich a yan for growin?'

He wished to be mildly jocular. Hannah's face did not move. She had just touched her nephew with her cold wasted hand. Now she beckoned to him to sit down at her right. He did so, and then for the first time he could believe that Hannah, the old Hannah, was there beside them. For as she slowly studied his dress, the Inverness cape then as now a favourite garb in Manchester, the hand holding the cap, refined since she saw it last by commerce with books and pens rather than hurdles and sheep, the broad shoulders, the dark head, her eye for the first time met his, full, and a weird thrill went through him. For that eye—dulled, and wavering—was still Hannah. The old hate was in it, the old grudge, all that had been at least for him and Louie the inmost and characteristic soul of their tyrant. He knew in an instant that she had in her mind the money of which he and his sister had robbed her, and beyond that the offences of their childhood, the infamy of their mother. If she could, she would have hurled them all upon him. As it was, she was silent, but that brooding eye, like a smouldering spark in her blanched face, spoke for her.

Reuben tried to talk. But a weight lay on him and David. The gaunt head in the coarse white nightcap turned now to one, now to the other, pursued them phantom-like. Presently he insisted that his nephew must dine, avoiding Hannah's look. David would much rather have gone without; but Reuben, affecting joviality, called the servant, and some food was brought. No attempt was made to include Hannah in the meal. David supposed that it was now necessary to feed her.

Reuben talked disjointedly of the neighbours and his stock, and asked a few questions, without listening to the answers, about David's affairs, and Louie's marriage. In Hannah's presence his poor dull wits were not his own; he could in truth think of nothing but her.

After the meal, however, when a draught of ale had put some heart in him, he got up with an air of resolution.

'I mun goo and see what that felly's been doin' wi' th' Huddersfield beästs,' he said; 'wilta coom wi' me, Davy? Mary!'

He called the little maid. Hannah suddenly said something incoherent which David could not understand. Reuben affected not to hear.

'Mary, gie your mistress her dinner, like a good gell. An' keep t' house-door open, soa 'at she can knock wi' t' stick if she wants owt.'

He stood before her restless and ashamed, afraid to look at

her. Then he suddenly stooped and kissed her on the forehead. David felt a lump in his throat. As he took leave of her the spell, as it were, of Reuben's piteous affection came upon him. He saw nothing but a dying and emaciated woman, and taking her hand in his, he said some kind natural words.

The hand dropped from his like a stone. As he stood at the door behind Reuben, the servant came forward with a plate of something which she put down inside the fender. As she did so, she awkwardly upset the fire-irons, which fell with a crash. Hannah started upright in her chair, with a rush of half-articulate words, grasping fiercely for her stick with glaring eyes. The servant, a wild moorland lass, fled terrified, and at the 'house' door turned and made a face at David.

Outside Reuben slowly mastered himself, and woke up to some real interest in Louie's doings. David told him her story frankly, so far as it could be separated from his own, and, pressed by Reuben's questions, even revealed at last the matter of the six hundred pounds. Reuben could not get over it. Sandy's 'six hunderd pund' which he had earned with the sweat of his brow, all handed over to that minx Louie, and wasted by her and a rascally French husband in a few months—it was more than he could bear.

'Aye, aye, marryin's varra weel,' he said impatiently. 'A grant tha it's a great sin coomin thegither without marryin. But Sandy's six hunderd pund! Noa, I conno abide sich wark.'

And he fell into sombre silence, out of which David could hardly rouse him. Except that he said once, 'And we that had kep' it so long. I'd better never ha gien it tha.' And clearly that was the bitter thought in his mind. The sacrifice that had taxed all his moral power, and, as he believed, brought physical ruin on Hannah, had been for nothing, or worse than nothing. Neither he nor David nor anyone was the better for it.

'I must go over the shoulder to Frimley,' said David at last. They had made a half-hearted inspection of the stock in the home fields, and were now passing through the gate on to the moor. 'I must see Margaret Dawson again before I take the train back.'

Reuben looked astonished and shook his head as though he did not remember anything about Margaret Dawson. He walked on beside his nephew for a while in silence. The Red Brook was leaping and dancing beside them, the mountain ashes were just bursting into leaf, the old smithy was ahead of them on the heathery slope, and to their left the Downfall, full and white, thundered over its yellow rocks.

But they had hardly crossed the Red Brook to mount the peak beyond when Reuben drew up.

'Noa'—he said restlessly—'noa. I mun goo back. T' gell's flighty and theer's aw maks o' mischief i' yoong things.' He stood and held his nephew by the hand, looking at him long and wistfully. As he did so a calmer expression stole for an instant into the poor troubled eyes.

'Very like a'st not see tha again, Davie. We niver know.

Livin's hard soomtimes—soa's deein, folks say. I'm often fret't of deein'—but I should na be. Theer's noan so mich peace here, and we *knao* that wi' the Lord theer's peace.'

He gave a long sigh—all his character was in it—so tortured was it and hesitating.

They parted, and the young man climbed the hill, looking back often to watch the bent figure on the lower path. The spell had somehow vanished from the sunshine, the thrill from the moorland air. Life was once more cruel, implacable.

He walked fast to Frimley, and made for the cottage of Margaret's brother. He remembered its position of old.

A woman was washing in the 'house' or outer kitchen. She received him graciously. The weekly money which in one way or another he had never failed to pay since he first undertook it, had made him well known to her and her husband. With a temper quite unlike that of the characteristic northerner, she showed no squeamishness at all about the matter. If it hadn't been for his help, they would just have sent Margaret to the workhouse, she said bluntly; for they had many mouths to feed, and couldn't have burdened themselves with an extra one. She was quite 'silly' and often troublesome.

'Is she here?' David asked.

'Aye, if yo goo ben, yo'll find her,' said the woman, carelessly pointing to an inner door. 'I conno ha her in here washin days, nor the children noather.'

David opened the door pointed out to him. He found himself in a rough weaving shed almost filled by a large hand-loom, with its forest of woodwork rising to the ceiling, its rolls of perforated pattern-paper, its great cylinders below, and many-coloured shuttles to either hand. But to-day it stood idle, the weaver was not at work. The room was stuffy but cold, and inexpressibly gloomy in this silence of the loom.

Where was Margaret? After a minute's search, there, beyond the loom, sitting by a fireless grate, was a little figure in a bedgown and nightcap, poking with a stick amid the embers, and as it seemed crooning to itself.

David made his way up to her, inexpressibly moved.

'Margaret!'

She did not know him in the least. She had a starved-looking cat on her lap, which she was huddling against her breast. The face had fallen away almost to nothing, so small and thin it was. She was dirty and unkempt. Her still brown hair, once so daintily neat, straggled out beneath her torn cap; her print bed-gown was pinned across her, her linsey skirt was in holes; everywhere the same tale of age neglected and unloved.

When David first stood before her she drew back with a terrified look, still clutching the cat tightly. But, as he smiled at her, with the tears in his eyes, speaking her name tenderly, her frightened look relaxed, and she remained staring at him with the shrinking furtive expression of a quite young child.

He knelt down beside her.

'Margaret—dear Margaret—don't you know me?'

She did not answer, but her wrinkled eyes, still blue and vaguely sweet, wavered under his, and it seemed to him that every now and then a shiver of cold ran through her old and frail body. He went on gently, trying to recall her wandering senses. In vain. In the middle she interrupted him with a piteous lip.

'They promised me a ribbon for 't,' she said, complainingly, in a hoarse, bronchitic voice, pointing to the animal she held, and to its lean neck adorned with a collar of plaited string, on which apparently she had just been busy, to judge from the odds and ends of string lying about.

At the same moment David became aware of a couple of children craning their heads round the corner of the loom to look, a loutish boy about eleven, and a girl rather younger. At sight of them, Margaret raised a cry of distress and alarm, with that helpless indefinable note in the voice which shows that personality, in the true sense, is no longer there.

'Go away!' David commanded.

The children did not stir, but grinned. He made a threatening movement. Then the boy, as quick as lightning, put his tongue out at Margaret, and caught hold of his sister, and they clattered off, their mother in the next room scolding them out into the street again.

And this the end of a creature all sacrifice, a life all affection!

He took her shivering hand in his.

'Margaret, listen to me. You shall be better looked after. I will see to that. No one shall be unkind to you any more. If they won't do it here, my—my—wife shall take care of you!'

He lifted her hand and kissed it, putting all the pity and bitter indignation of his heart into the action. Margaret, seeing his emotion, whimpered too; otherwise she was impassive.

He left her, went into the next room, and had a long energetic talk with Margaret's sister-in-law. The woman, half ashamed, half recalcitrant, in the end promised amendment. What business it was of his she could not imagine; but the small weekly addition which he offered to make to Margaret's payments, while it showed him a greater fool than before, made it impossible to put his meddling aside. She promised that Margaret should be brought into the warm, that she should have better clothes, and that the children should be kept from plaguing her.

Then he departed, and mounting the moor again, spent an hour or two wandering among the boggy fissures of the top, or sitting on the high edges of the heather, looking down over the dark and craggy splendour of the hill immediately around and beneath him, on and away through innumerable paling shades of distance to the blue Welsh border. His speculative fervour was all gone. Reuben, Hannah, Margaret, these figures of suffering and pain had brought him close to earth again. The longing for

a human hand in his, for a home, wife, children to spend himself upon, to put at least for a while between him and this unconquerable 'something which infects the world,' became in this long afternoon a physical pain not to be resisted. He thought more and more steadily of Lucy, schooling himself, idealising her.

It was the Sunday before Whitsunday. David was standing outside a trim six-roomed house in the upper part of the little Lancashire town of Wakely, waiting for Lucy Purcell.

She came at last, flushed and discomposed, pulling the door hastily to behind her.

They walked on a short distance, talking disconnectedly of the weather, the mud, and the way on to the moor, till she said suddenly:

'I wish people wouldn't be so good and so troublesome!'

'Did Robert wish to keep you at home?' inquired David, laughing.

'Well, he didn't want me to come out with—anybody but him,' she said, flushing. 'And it's so bad, because one can't be cross. I don't know how it is, but they're just the best people here that ever walked!'

She looked up at him seriously, an unusual energy in her slight face.

'What!—a town of saints?' asked David, mocking. It was so difficult to take Lucy seriously.

She tossed her head and insisted.

Talking very fast, and not very consecutively, she gave him an account, so far as she was able, of the life lived in this little town, a typical Lancashire town of the smaller and more homogeneous kind. All the people worked in two large spinning mills, or in a few smaller factories representing dependent industries, such as reed-making. Their work was pleasant to them. Lucy complained, with the natural resentment of the idle who see their place in the world jeopardised by the superfluous energy of the workers, that she could never get the mill girls to say that the mill hours were too long. The heat tried them, made appetites delicate, and lung mischief common. But the only thing which really troubled them was 'half-time.' Socially everybody knew everybody. They were passionately interested in each other's lives and in the town's affairs. And their religion, of a strong Protestant type expressed in various forms of Dissent, formed an ideal bond which kept the little society together, and made an authority which all acknowledged, an atmosphere in which all moved.

The picture she drew was, in truth, the picture of one of those social facts on which perhaps the future of England depends. She drew it girlishly, quite unconscious of its large bearings, gossiping about this person and that, with a free expenditure of very dogmatic opinion on the habits and ways which were not hers. But, on the whole, the picture emerged, and David had

never liked her talk so well. The little self-centred thing had somehow been made to wonder and admire; which is much for all of us.

And she, meanwhile, was instantly sensible that she was in a happy vein, that she pleased. Her eyes danced under her pretty spring hat. How proud she was to walk with him—that he had come all this way to see her! As she shyly glanced him up and down, she would have liked the village street to be full of gazers, and was almost loth to leave the public way for the loneliness of the moor. What other girl in Wakely had the prospect of such a young man to take her out? Oh! would he ever, ever 'ask her'—would he even come again?

At last, after a steep and muddy climb, through uninviting back ways, they were out upon the moor. An apology for a moor in David's eyes! For the hills which surround the valley of the Irwell, in which Wakely lies, are, for the most part, green and rolling ground, heatherless and cragless. Still, from the top they looked over a wide and wind-blown scene, the bolder moors of Rochdale behind them, and in front the long green basin in which the Irwell rises. Along the valley bottoms lay the mills, with their surrounding rows of small stone houses. Up on the backs of the moors crouched the old farms, which have watched the mills come, and will perhaps see them go; and here and there a grim-looking colliery marked a fold of the hill. The landscape on a spring day has a bracing bareness, which is not without exhilaration. The wind blows freshly, the sun lies broadly on the hills. England, on the whole at her busiest and best, spreads before you.

They were still on the top when it occurred to them that they had a long walk in prospect—for they talked of getting to the source of the Irwell—and that it was dinner-time. So they sat down under one of the mortarless stone walls which streak the moors, and David brought out the meal that was in his pockets. They ate with laughter and chat. Pigeons passed overhead, going and coming from an old farm about a hundred yards away; the sky above them had a lark for voice singing his loudest; and in the next field a peewit was wheeling and crying. The few trees in sight were struggling fast into leaf. Nature even in this cold north was gay to-day and young.

Suddenly, in the midst of their meal, by a natural caprice and reaction of the mind, as David sat looking down on slate roofs and bare winding valley, across the pale, rain-beaten grass of the moor, all the northern English detail vanished from his eyes. For one suffocating instant he saw nothing but a great picture gallery, its dimly storied walls and polished floor receding into the distance. In front Velazquez' 'Infanta,' and before it a figure bent over a canvas. Every line and tint stood out. He heard the light varying voice, caught the complex grace of the woman, the strenuous effort of the artist.

Enough! He closed his eyes for one bitter instant; then raised them again to England and to Lucy.

There under the wall, while they were still lingering in the sun, he asked Lucy Purcell to be his wife. And Lucy, hardly believing her own foolish ears, and in a whirl of bliss and exultation past expression, nevertheless put on a few maidenly airs and graces, coquetted a little, would not be kissed all at once, talked of her father and the war that must be faced, and finally surrendered, held up her scarlet cheek for her lord's caress, and then sat speechless, hand in hand with him.

But Nature had its way. They rambled on, crossing the stone stiles which link the bare green fields on the side of the moor. When a stile appeared, Lucy would send him on in front, so that she might mount decorously, and then descend trembling upon his hand.

Presently they came to a spot where the path crossed a little streamlet, and then climbed a few rough steps in a steep bank, and so across a stile at the top.

David ran up, leapt the stile, and waited. But he had time to study the distant course of their walk, as well as the burnt and lime-strewn grass about him, for no Lucy appeared. He leant over the wall, and to his amazement saw her sitting on one of the stone steps below, crying.

He was beside her in an instant. But he could not loosen the hands clasped over her eyes.

'Oh, why did you do it?—why did you do it? I'm not good enough—I never shall be good enough!'

For the first time since their formal kiss he put his arms round her. And as she, at last forced to look up, found herself close to the face which, in its dark refinement and power, seemed to her to-day so far, so wildly above her deserts, she saw it all quivering and changed. Never had little Lucy risen to such a moment; never again, perhaps, could she so rise. But in that instant of passionate humility she had dropped healing and life into a human heart.

Yet, was it Lucy he kissed?—Lucy he gathered in his arms? Or was it not rather Love itself?—the love he had sought, had missed, but must still seek—and seek?