

hand on his arm, and kissed him—roughly, vehemently, with lips that burnt.

'Oh, you fool!' she said, 'you fool!'

'What do you mean?' he said, stopping. 'I believe I *am* a fool, Louie, to leave you for a moment.'

'Nonsense! You are a fool to want to take me to Manchester, and I am a fool to think of going. There:—if I had never been born!—oh! go, for God's sake, go! and come back in an hour. I *must* have some time, I tell you—' and she gave a passionate stamp—'to think a bit, and put my things together.'

She pushed him out, and shut the door. With a great effort he mastered himself and went.

He made all arrangements for the two-horse sledge that was to take them to Fontainebleau. He called for his bill, and paid it. Then he hung about the entrance to the forest, looking with an unseeing eye at the tricks which the snow had been playing with the trees, at the gleams which a pale and struggling sun was shedding over the white world—till his watch told him it was time.

He walked briskly back to the cottage, opened the outer door, was astonished to hear neither voice nor movement, to see nothing of the charwoman Louie had spoken of—rushed to the studio and entered.

She sat in the tall chair, her hands dropping over the arms, her head hanging forward. The cold snow-light shone on her open and glazing eyes—on the red and black of her dress, on the life-stream dripping among the folds, on the sharp curved Algerian dagger at her feet. She was quite dead. Even in the midst of his words of hope, the thought of self-destruction—of her mother—had come upon her and absorbed her. That capacity for sudden intolerable despair which she had inherited, rose to its full height when she had driven David from her—guided her mad steps, her unshrinking hand.

He knelt by her—called for help, laid his ear to her heart, her lips. Then the awfulness of the shock, and of his self-reproach, the crumbling of all his hopes, became too much to bear. Consciousness left him, and when the woman of whom Louie had spoken did actually come in, a few minutes later, she found the brother lying against the sister's knee, his arms outstretched across her, while the dead Louie, with fixed and frowning brows, sat staring beyond him into eternity—a figure of wild fate—freed at last and for ever from that fierce burden of herself.

EPILOGUE

Alas!—Alas!

—But to part from David Grieve under the impression of this scene of wreck and moral defeat would be to misread and misjudge a life, destined, notwithstanding the stress of exceptional suffering it was called upon at one time to pass through, to singularly rich and fruitful issues. Time, kind inevitable Time, dulled the paralysing horror of his sister's death, and softened the memory of all that long torture of publicity, legal investigation, and the like, which had followed it. The natural healing 'in widest commonalty spread,' which flows from affection, nature, and the direction of the mind to high and liberating aims, came to him also as the months and years passed. His wife's death, his sister's tragedy, left indeed indelible marks; but, though scarred and changed, he was in the end neither crippled nor unhappy. The moral experience of life had built up in him a faith which endured, and the pangs of his own pity did but bring him at last to rest the more surely on a pity beyond man's. During the nights of semi-delirium which followed the scene at Barbizon, John, who watched him, heard him repeat again and again words which seemed to have a talismanic power over his restlessness. 'Neither do I condemn thee. *Come*, and sin no more.' They were fragments dropped from what was clearly a nightmare of anguish and struggle; but they testified to a *set* of character, they threw light on the hopes and convictions which ultimately repossessed themselves of the sound man.

Two years passed. It was Christmas Eve. The firm of Grieve & Co. in Prince's Street was shut for the holiday, and David Grieve, a mile or two away, was sitting over his study fire with a book. He closed it presently, and sat thinking.

There was a knock at his door. When he opened it he found Dora outside. It was Dora, in the quasi-sister's garb she had assumed of late—serge skirt, long black cloak, and bonnet tied with white muslin strings under the throat. In her parish visiting among the worst slums of Ancoats, she had found such a dress useful.

'I brought Sandy's present,' she said, looking round her cautiously. 'Is his stocking hung up?'

'No! or the rascal would never go to sleep to-night. He is nearly wild about his presents as it is. Give it to me. It shall go into my drawer, and I will arrange everything when I go to bed to-night.'

He looked at the puzzle-map she had brought with a childish

pleasure, and between them they locked it away carefully in a drawer of the writing-table.

'Do sit down and get warm,' he said to her, pushing forward a chair.

'Oh no! I must go back to the church. We shall be decorating till late to-night. But I had to be in Broughton, so I brought this on my way home.'

Then Sandy and I will escort you, if you will have us. He made me promise to take him to see the shops. I suppose Market Street is a sight.'

He went outside to shout to Sandy, who was having his tea, to get ready, and then came back to Dora. She was standing by the fire looking at an engagement tablet filled with entries, on the mantelpiece.

'Father Russell says they have been asking you again to stand for Parliament,' she said timidly, as he came in.

'Yes, there is a sudden vacancy. Old Jacob Cherritt is dead.'

'And you won't?'

He shook his head.

'No,' he said, after a pause. 'I am not their man; they would be altogether disappointed in me.'

She understood the sad reverie of the face, and said no more.

No. For new friends, new surroundings, efforts of another type, his power was now irrevocably gone; he shrank more than ever from the egotisms of competition. But within the old lines he had recovered an abundant energy. Among his workmen; amid the details now fortunate, now untoward of his labours for the solution of certain problems of industrial ethics; in the working of the remarkable pamphlet scheme dealing with social and religious fact, which was fast making his name famous in the ears of the England which thinks and labours; and in the self-devoted help of the unhappy,—he was developing more and more the idealist's qualities, and here and there—inevitably—the idealist's mistakes. His face, as middle life was beginning to shape it—with its subtle and sensitive beauty—was at once the index of his strength and his limitations.

He and Dora stood talking a while about certain public schemes that were in progress for the bettering of Ancoats. Then he said with sudden emphasis:

'Ah! if one could but jump a hundred years and see what England will be like! But these northern towns, and this northern life, on the whole fill one with hope. There is a strong social spirit and strong individualities to work on.'

Dora was silent. From her Churchwoman's point of view the prospect was not so bright.

'Well, people seem to think that co-operation is going to do everything,' she said vaguely.

'We all cry our own nostrums,' he said, laughing; 'what co-operation has done up here in the north is wonderful! It has been the making of thousands. But the world is not going to

give itself over wholly to committees. There will be room enough for the one-man-power at any rate for generations to come. What we want is leaders; but leaders who will feel themselves "members of one body," instruments of one social order.'

They stood together a minute in silence; then he went out to the stairs and called: 'Sandy, you monkey, come along!'

Sandy came shouting and leaping downstairs, as lithe and handsome as ever, and as much of a compound of the elf and the philosopher.

'I know Auntie Dora's brought me a present,' he said, looking up into her face,—'but father's locked it up!'

David chased him out of doors with contumely, and they all took the tram to Victoria Street.

Once there, Sandy was in the seventh heaven. The shops were ablaze with lights, and gay with every Christmas joy; the pavements were crowded with a buying and gaping throng. He pulled at his father's hand, exclaiming here and pointing there, till David, dragged hither and thither, had caught some of the boy's mirth and pleasure.

But Dora walked apart. Her heart was a little heavy and dull, her face weary. In reality, though David's deep and tender gratitude and friendship towards her could not express themselves too richly, she felt, as the years went on, more and more divided from him and Sandy. She was horrified at the things which David published, or said in public; she had long dropped any talk with the child on all those subjects which she cared for most. Young as he was, the boy showed a marvellous understanding in some ways of his father's mind, and there were moments when she felt a strange and dumb irritation towards them both.

Christmas too, in spite of her Christian fervour, had always its sadness for her. It reminded her of her father, and of the loneliness of her personal life.

'How father would have liked all this crowd!' she said once to David as they passed into Market Street.

David assented with instant sympathy, and they talked a little of the vanished wanderer as they walked along, she with a yearning passion which touched him profoundly.

He and Sandy escorted her up the Ancoats High Street, and at last they turned into her own road. Instantly Dora perceived a little crowd round her door, and, as soon as she was seen, a waving of hands, and a Babel of voices.

'What is it?' she cried, paling, and began to run.

David and Sandy followed. She had already flown upstairs; but the shawled mill-girls, round the door, flushed with excitement, shouted their news into his ear.

'It's her feyther, sir, as ha coom back after aw these years—an he's sittin' by the fire quite nat'ral like, Mary Styles says—and they put him in a mad-house in furrin parts, they did—an his hair's quite white—an oh! sir, yo mun just goo up an look.'

Pushed by eager hands, and still holding Sandy, David, though half unwilling, climbed the narrow stairs.

The door was half open. And there, in his old chair, sat Daddy, his snow-white hair falling on his shoulders, a childish excitement and delight on his blanched face. Dora was kneeling at his feet, her head on his knees, sobbing.

David took Sandy up in his arms.

'Be quiet, Sandy; don't say a word.'

And he carried him downstairs again, and into the midst of the eager crowd.

'I think,' he said, addressing them, 'I would go home if I were you—if you love her.'

They looked at his shining eyes and twitching lips, and understood.

'Aye, sir, aye, sir, yo're abeawt reet—we'st not trouble her, sir.'

He carried his boy home, Sandy raining questions in a tumult of excitement. Then when the child was put to bed he sat on in his lonely study, stirred to his sensitive depths by the thought of Dora's long waiting and sad sudden joy—by the realisation of the Christmas crowds and merriment—by the sharp memory of his own dead. Towards midnight, when all was still, he opened the locked drawer which held for him the few things which symbolised and summed up his past—a portrait of Lucy, by the river under the trees, taken by a travelling photographer, not more than six weeks before her death—a little collection of pictures of Sandy from babyhood onwards—Louie's breviary—his father's dying letter—a book which had belonged to Anerum, his vanished friend. But though he took thence his wife's picture, communing awhile, in a passion of yearning, with its weary plaintive eyes, he did not allow himself to sink for long into the languor of memory and grief. He knew the perils of his own nature, and there was in him a stern sense of the difficulty of living aright, and the awfulness of the claim made by God and man on the strength and will of the individual. It seemed to him that he had been 'taught of God' through natural affection, through repentance, through sorrow, through the constant energies of the intellect. Never had the Divine voice been clearer to him, or the Divine Fatherhood more real. Freely he had received—but only that he might freely give. On this Christmas night he renewed every past vow of the soul, and in so doing rose once more into that state and temper which is man's pledge and earnest of immortality—since already, here and now, it is the eternal life begun.

THE END

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