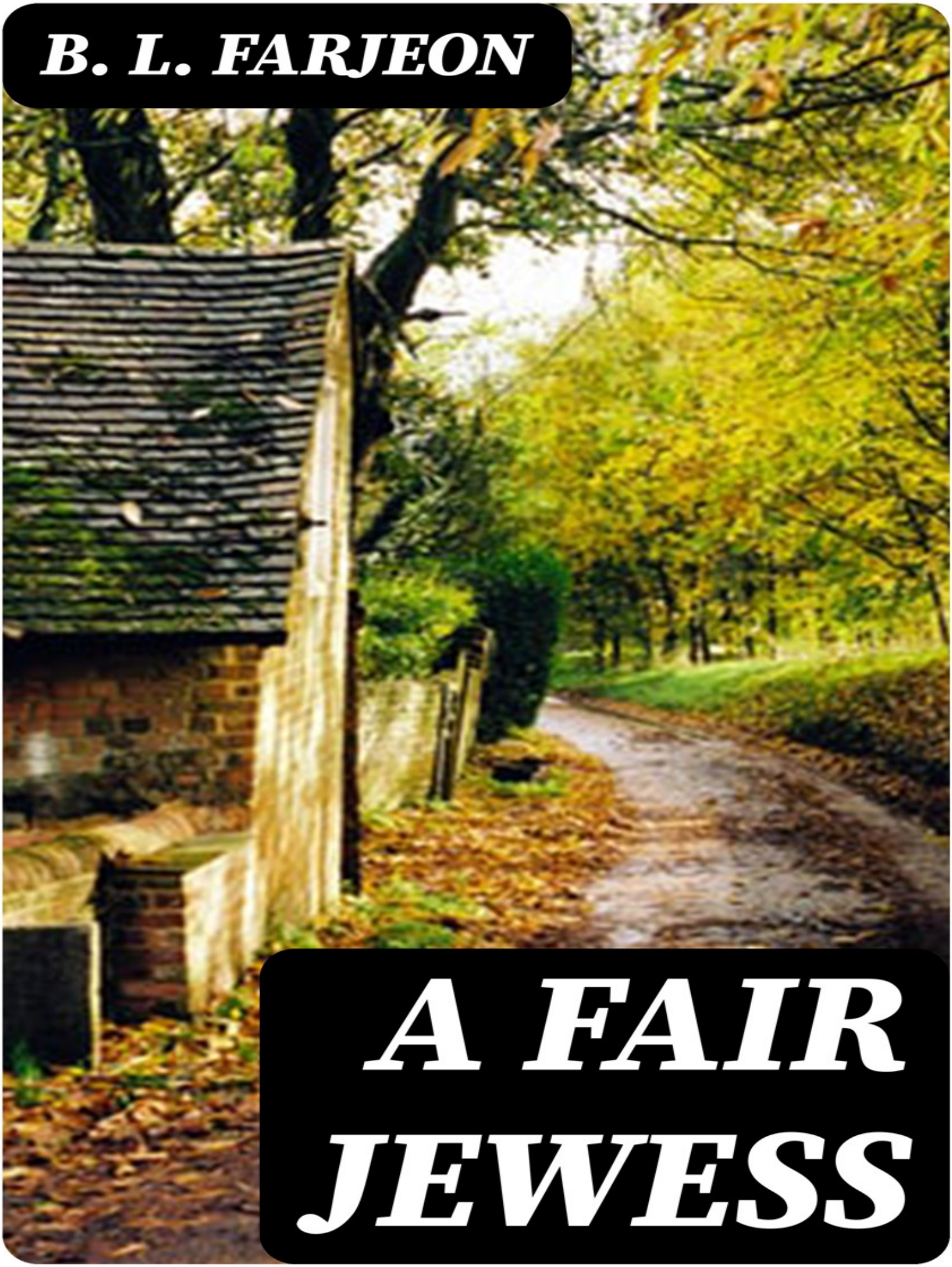
B. L. FARJEON



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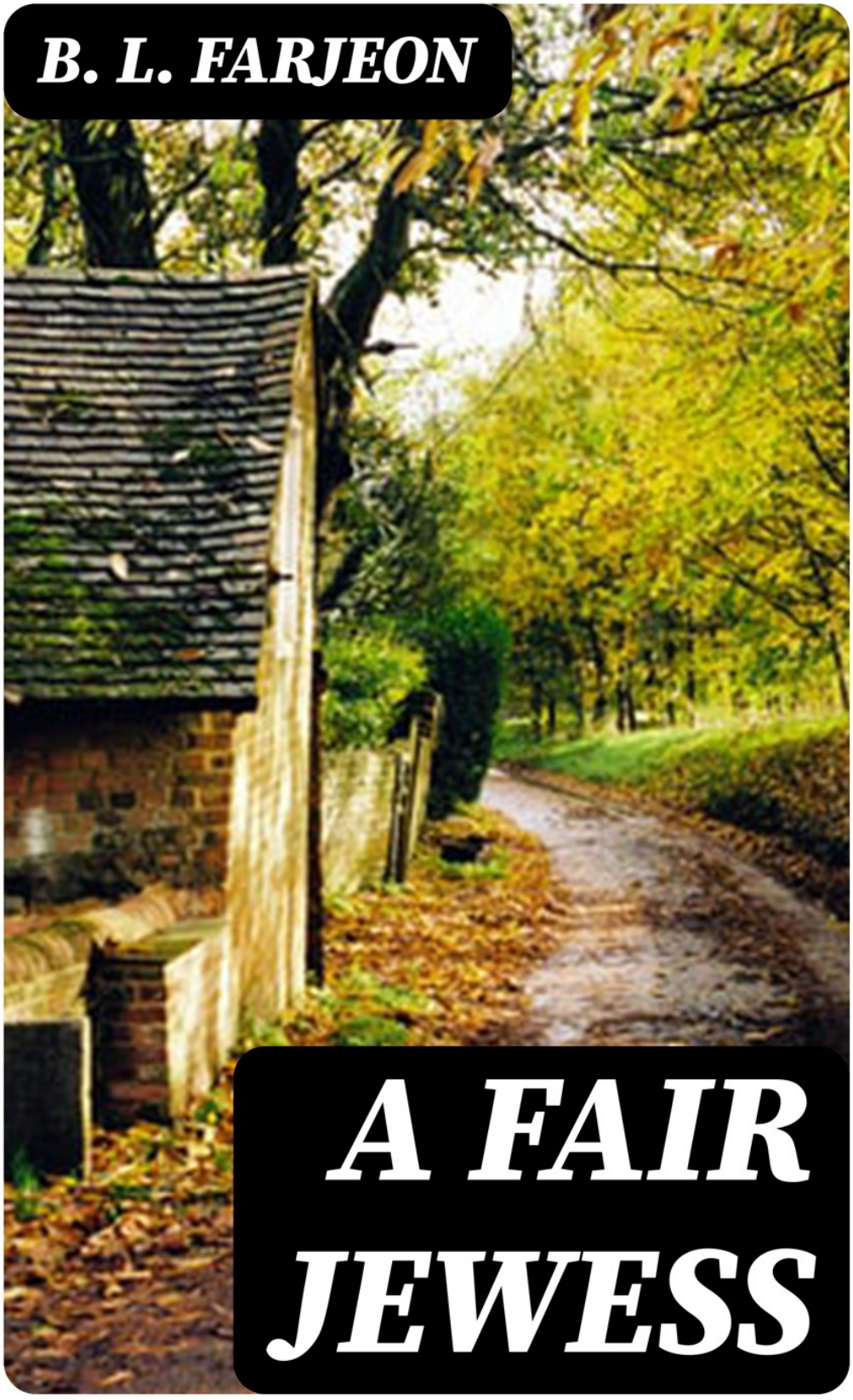

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CHAPTER I.

THE POOR DOCTOR.

On a bright, snowy night in December, some years ago, Dr. Spenlove, having been employed all the afternoon and evening in paying farewell visits to his patients, walked briskly toward his home through the narrowest and most squalid thoroughfares in Portsmouth.

The animation of his movements may be set down to the severity of the weather, and not to any inward cheerfulness of spirits, for as he passed familiar landmarks he looked at them with a certain regret which men devoid of sentiment would have pronounced an indication of a weak nature. In this opinion, however, they would have been wrong, for Dr. Spenlove's intended departure early the following morning from a field which had strong claims upon his sympathies was dictated by a law of inexorable necessity. He was a practitioner of considerable skill, and he had conscientiously striven to achieve a reputation in some measure commensurate with his abilities.

From a worldly point of view his efforts had been attended with mortifying failure; he had not only been unsuccessful in earning a bare livelihood, but he had completely exhausted the limited resources with which he had started upon his career; he had, moreover, endured severe privation, and an opening presenting itself in the wider field of London he had accepted it with gladness and reluctance. With gladness because he was an ambitious

man, and had desires apart from his profession; with reluctance because it pained him to bid farewell to patients in whom he took a genuine interest, and whom he would have liked to continue to befriend. He had, indeed, assisted many of them to the full extent of his power, and in some instances had gone beyond this limit, depriving himself of the necessaries of life to supply them with medicines and nourishing food, and robbing his nights of rest to minister to their woes. He bore about him distinguishing marks of the beautiful self-sacrifice.

On this last night of his residence among them his purse was empty, and inclement as was the weather he wore, on his road home, but one thin coat which was but a feeble protection from the freezing air which pierced to his skin, though every button was put to its proper use. A hacking cough, which caused him to pause occasionally, denoted that he was running a dangerous risk in being so insufficiently clad; but he seemed to make light of this, and smiled when the paroxysm was over. In no profession can be found displayed a more noble humanity and philanthropy than in that which Dr. Spenlove practiced, and needy as he was, and narrow as had been his means from the start, his young career already afforded a striking example of sweet and unselfish attributes. In the divine placing of human hosts the poor doctor and the poor priest shall be found marching in the van side by side.

During the whole of the day snow had been falling, and during the whole of the day Dr. Spenlove had had but one meal. He did not complain; he had been accustomed to live from hand to mouth, and well knew what it was to go to bed

hungry; and there was before him the prospect of brighter times.

But cheering as was this prospect his walk home through the falling snow was saddened by the scenes he had witnessed in the course of the day, and one especially dwelt in his mind.

"Poor creature!" he mused. "What will become of her and her baby? Oh, pitiless world! Does it not contain a single human being who will hold out a helping hand?"

Before one of the poorest houses in one of the poorest streets he paused, and, admitting himself with a private latchkey, unlocked a door on the ground floor, and entered a room which faced the street. There was a wire blind to the window, on which was inscribed, "Consultations from 9 till 11 A. M." This room, with a communicating bedroom at the back, comprised his professional and private residence.

Dr. Spenlove groped in the dark for the matches, and, lighting a candle, applied a match to a fire laid with scrupulous economy in the matter of coals. As he was thus employed his landlady knocked at the door and entered.

"Is it you, Mrs. Radcliffe?" he asked, not turning his head.

"Yes, sir. Let me do that, please."

The paper he had lit in the grate was smoldering away without kindling the wood; the landlady knelt down, and with a skillful touch the flame leaped up. Dr. Spenlove, unbuttoning his thin coat, spread out his hands to the warmth.

"Any callers, Mrs. Radcliffe?"

"A gentleman, sir, who seemed very anxious to see you. He did not leave his name or card, but said he would call

again this evening."

"Did he mention the hour?"

"Nine, sir."

Dr. Spenlove put his hand to his waistcoat pocket, and quickly withdrew it, with a smile of humor and self-pity. The landlady noticed the action, and dolefully shook her head.

"Very anxious to see me, you say, Mrs. Radcliffe?"

"Very anxious, indeed, sir. Dear, dear, you're wet through!"

"It is a bitter night," he said, coughing.

"You may well say that, sir. Bad weather for you to be out, with that nasty cough of yours."

"There are many people worse off than I am, without either fire or food."

"We all have our trials, sir. It's a hard world."

"Indeed, indeed," he said, thinking of the female patient whom he had last visited.

"Where's your overcoat, sir? I'll take it down to the kitchen; it'll dry sooner there." She looked around in vain for it.

"Never mind my overcoat, Mrs. Radcliffe."

"But you had it on when you went out, sir!"

"Did I? Don't trouble about it. It will dry quickly enough where it is."

He was now busily employed making a parcel of books and instruments which he had taken from different parts of the room, and which were the only articles of value belonging to himself it contained. The landlady stood for a moment or two watching his movements, and then she hurried down to her kitchen, and presently returned with a

cup of hot tea. As she passed through the passage with the cup in one hand and a candle in the other she glanced at the empty umbrella stand.

"His umbrella, too, as well as his overcoat," she muttered. "The man's heart's too big for his body."

She re-entered the room.

"I've brought you a cup of tea, sir, if you don't mind taking it."

"Not at all, Mrs. Radcliffe. It is very kind of you."

He drank the tea, which warmed him through and through.

"We're all sorry at your leaving us, sir," said the lady. "There's plenty that'll miss you."

"I am sorry, too," he replied, "but when needs must, you know. I can do no good to myself or others by remaining. If the gentleman calls again ask him to wait if his business is of importance. You had better tell him I am leaving Portsmouth to-morrow morning."

With his parcel under his arm he left the house, and trudging through the snow again halted at a pawnbroker's shop, lingering a while before he entered, as sensitive men do before putting the finishing touch to a humiliating act. Then, shrugging his shoulders and muttering, "I ought to be used to it by this time," he plunged into the shop, where he obtained upon his few last treasures as much as would pay his third-class fare to London and the two weeks' rent he owed his landlady. Thus safeguarded for a few hours at least, he left the shop, but instead of immediately retracing his steps to his lodgings he lingered once more irresolutely, with the air of a man who was at war with himself upon a

momentous question. The sixteen shillings due to his landlady was in his pocket, and undoubtedly it was simple honesty that it should be handed over to her without hesitation. But the hapless female patient who had occupied his thoughts during the last hour was at this moment in the throes of a desperate human crisis, and dark as was the present to her suffering soul the terrors which the future held in store for her were still more agonizing. She had a young baby at her breast; she had no food in her cupboard, not a loaf of bread, not a cup of milk; she had not a friend in the world to whom she could appeal for help. She, too, was in debt to her landlord, a hard man, who was waiting for another sun to rise to thrust her and her infant into the white and pitiless streets. It would have been done to-day but for the intervention of Dr. Spenlove, who had pawned his overcoat and umbrella to buy of the poor creature's landlord a respite of twenty-four hours. The sixteen shillings due to Mrs. Radcliffe would buy her another respite for a longer term, but when this was expired there was still the hopeless future to face. Dr. Spenlove thrust aside this latter consideration, and thought only of the ineffable relief it was in his power to bring to a heart racked with anguish and despair. He lost sight of the fact that the wretched woman would still be without food, and that she was too weak to work for it. Even when she was strong, and able to ply her needle throughout the whole of the day and the greater part of the night, her earnings had never exceeded six shillings a week; she had confessed as much to the good doctor, but for whose timely aid the workhouse would have been her only refuge. As he stood debating with himself the

sentiment of pity was strong within him, but he could not banish the voice of justice which whispered that the money was not his to dispose of. All the people with whom he was acquainted were poor, and his landlady was as poor as the rest; he knew that she often depended upon the payment of his rent to pay her own. It might be that just now she could afford to wait a while for what was due to her; if so he would dispose of the sixteen shillings as his benevolent instincts impelled him to do; he must, however, ascertain how the land lay before he acted. It may appear strange to many fortunate persons that issues so grave and vital should hang upon a sum of money which to them would not be worth a thought, but it would be a good lesson for them to learn that opportunities are not scarce for bringing heaven's brightest sunshine to overcharged hearts by the judicious bestowal of a few small coins out of the wealth which yields them all the material comforts of life.

Having made up his mind upon the important matter, Dr. Spenlove turned homeward, and as he walked he recalled the incidents in connection with the unhappy woman in which he had played a part. She was a stranger in the neighborhood, and had lived her lonely life in a garret for five months. No person with whom she came in contact knew anything of her or of her antecedents, and it was by chance that he became acquainted with her. Attending to his poor patients in the street in which she resided, he passed her one afternoon, and was attracted as much by her modest and ladylike appearance as by the evidence of extreme weakness which could hardly escape the observation of a man so kindly hearted as himself. He

perceived at once that she was of a superior class to those among whom she moved, and he was impressed by a peculiar expression on her face when his eyes rested on her. It was the expression of a hunted woman, of one who dreaded being recognized. He made inquiries about her, but no one could give him any information concerning her, and in the press of onerous cares and duties she passed out of his mind. Some weeks later he met her again, and his first impressions were renewed and strengthened, and pity stirred his heart as he observed from her garments that she was on the downward path of poverty. It was clear that she was frightened by his observance of her, for she hurried quickly on, but physical weakness frustrated her desire to avoid him; she staggered and would have fallen had he not ran forward and caught her. Weak as she was she struggled to release herself; he kept firm hold of her, however, animated by compassion and fortified by honest intention.

"You have nothing to fear from me," he said. "Allow me to assist you. I am Dr. Spenlove."

It was the first time he had addressed her, but his name was familiar to her as that of a gentleman to whom the whole neighborhood was under a debt of gratitude for numberless acts of goodness. She glanced timidly at his face, and a vague hope stirred her heart; she knew that the time was approaching when she would need such a friend. But the hope did not live long; it was crushed by a sudden fear.

"Do you know me, sir?"

"No," replied Dr. Spenlove in a cheerful tone. "You are a stranger to me, as I dare say I am to you."

"No, sir," she said; "I have heard of your kindness to many suffering people."

"Tush, tush!" he exclaimed. "A man deserves no credit for doing his duty. You feel stronger now, do you not? If you have no doctor you will allow me to come and see you. Do not hesitate; you need such advice as I can give you, and," he added gently, "I will send in my account when you are rich. Not till then, upon my honor; and meanwhile I promise to ask no questions."

"I am deeply grateful to you, sir."

From that day he attended her regularly, and she was strengthened and comforted by his considerate conduct toward her. She was known as Mrs. Turner, but it was strange if she were wife or widow that she should wear no wedding ring. As their intimacy ripened his first impression that she was a lady was confirmed, and although he was naturally curious about her history, he kept his promise by not asking her any questions which he felt it would be painful to her to answer. Even when he discovered that she was about to become a mother he made no inquiries concerning the father of her unborn child. On the day he bade her farewell her baby, a girl, was two weeks old, and a dark and terrible future lay before the hapless woman. His heart bled for her, but he was powerless to help her further. Weak and despairing, she sat in her chair, with her child at her wasted breast; her dark and
deep-sunken eyes seemed to be contemplating this future in hopeless terror.

"I am grieved to leave you so," he said, gazing sadly at her, "but it is out of my power to do what I would wish.

Unhappily I am almost as poor as yourself. You will try to get strong, will you not?"

"I don't know," she murmured.

"Remember," he said, taking her hand, "you have a duty to perform. What will you do when you are strong?"

"I don't know."

"Nay, nay," he urged, "you must not speak so despondently. Believe me, I do not wish to force your confidence, but I have gathered from chance words you have let drop that you lived in London. I am going there to-morrow. Can I call upon any person who would be likely to assist you?"

"There is no one."

"But surely you must have some friends or relations----"

"I have none. When you leave me I shall be without a friend in the world."

"God help you!" he sighed.

"Will he?"

The question was asked in the voice of one who had abandoned hope, who had lost faith in human goodness and eternal justice, and who was tasting the bitterness of death.

Dr. Spenlove remained with her an hour, striving to cheer her, to instill hope into her heart, but his words had no effect upon her, and, indeed, he felt at times that the platitudes to which he was giving utterance were little better than mockery. Was not this woman face to face with the practical issues of life and death in their most awful aspect, and was there any other than a practical remedy for them? She asked for bread, and he was offering her a stone. It was then he went from her room, and learned the full

truth from her landlord, who was only waiting till he was gone to turn her into the streets. We know by what means he bought a day's respite for her. Finally he left her, and bore away with him the darkest picture of human misery of which he had ever had experience.

CHAPTER II.

DR. SPENLOVE'S VISITOR.

His landlady, Mrs. Radcliffe, met him on the doorstep, and informed him that the gentleman who had called to see him in the afternoon had called again, and was in his room.

"A word, Mrs. Radcliffe," he said hurriedly. "I am going to ask a great favor of you. I owe you two weeks' rent."

"Yes, sir."

His heart sank within him; he divined immediately from her tone that she was in need of the money.

"Would it inconvenience you to wait a little while for it?"

"I must, sir, if you haven't got it," she replied, "but I am dreadfully hard pressed, and I reckoned on it. I'm behindhand myself, sir, and my landlord's been threatening me----"

"Say no more, Mrs. Radcliffe. Justice must be first served. I have the money; take it, for Heaven's sake. I must not rob the poor to help the poor."

He muttered the last words to himself as he thrust the sixteen shillings into her hand.

"I am so sorry, sir," said the distressed woman.

He interrupted her with, "There, there, I am ashamed that I asked you. I am sure no one has a kinder heart than you, and I am greatly obliged to you for all the attention you have shown me while I have been in your house. The gentleman is in my room, you say----"

It was a proof of Mrs. Radcliffe's kindness of heart that there was a bright fire blazing in the room, made with her own coals, and that the lamp had been replenished with her own oil. Dr. Spenlove was grateful to her, and he inwardly acknowledged that he could not have otherwise disposed of the few shillings which he had no right to call his own. His visitor rose as he entered, a well-dressed man some forty years of age, sturdily built, with touches of gray already in his hair and beard, and with signs in his face and on his forehead indicative of a strong will.

"Dr. Spenlove?" he asked.

"That is my name."

"Mine is Gordon. I have come to see you on a matter of great importance."

Dr. Spenlove motioned to the chair from which his visitor had risen, and he resumed his seat; but although he had said that he had come upon a matter of great importance, he seemed to be either in no hurry to open it or to be uncertain in which way to do so, for he sat for some moments in silence, smoothing his bearded chin and studying Dr. Spenlove's face with a stern and studious intentness.

"Can you spare me half an hour of your time?" he said at length.

"Longer, if you wish," said Dr. Spenlove.

"It may be longer if you offer no opposition to the service I wish you to render me; and perhaps it is as well to say that I am willing and can afford to pay for the service."

Dr. Spenlove bent his head.

"It is seldom," continued Mr. Gordon, "that I make mistakes, and the reason is not far to seek. I make inquiries, I clear the ground, I resolve upon a course of action, and I pursue it to its end without deviation. I will be quite frank with you, Dr. Spenlove; I am a hard, inflexible man; thrown upon the world when I was a lad, I pushed my way to fortune; I am self-made; I can speak fair English; I have received little education, none at all in a classical way, but I possess common sense, and I make it apply to my affairs. That is better than education if a man is resolved to get along in life--as I was resolved to do. When I was a young man I said, 'I will grow rich, or I will know the reason why.' I have grown rich. I do not say it as a boast--it is only fools who boast--but I am worth to-day a solid twenty thousand a year. I make this statement merely as a proof that I am in a position to carry out a plan in which I desire your assistance and co-operation."

"My dear sir," said Dr. Spenlove, who could not but perceive that his visitor was very much in earnest, "the qualities you mention are admirable in their way but I fear you have come to the wrong man. I am a doctor, and if you do not need my professional advice----"

"Stop a moment," interrupted Mr. Gordon; "I have come to the right man, and I do not need professional advice. I am as sound as a bell, and I have never had occasion to pay a doctor's fee. I know what I am about in the mission which brings me here. I have made inquiries concerning you, and have heard something of your career and its results; I have heard of your kindness and of the esteem in which you are held. You have influence with your patients; any counsel you might give them, apart from your prescriptions, would be received with respect and attention; and I believe I am not wrong when I say that you are to some extent a man of the world."

"To some slight extent only," corrected Dr. Spenlove, with a faint smile.

"Sufficient," proceeded Mr. Gordon, "for my purpose. You are not blind to the perils which lie before weak and helpless women--before, we will say, a woman who has no friends, who is living where she is not known, who is in a position of grave danger, who is entirely without means, and who, at the best, is unable by the work of her hands to support herself."

Dr. Spenlove looked sharply at his visitor. "You have such a woman in your mind, Mr. Gordon?"

"I have such a woman in my mind, Dr. Spenlove."

"A patient of mine?"

"A patient of yours."

There was but one who answered to this description whose future seemed so dark and hopeless. For the first time during this interview he began to be interested in his visitor. He motioned him to proceed.

"We are speaking in confidence, Dr. Spenlove."

"In perfect confidence, Mr. Gordon."

"Whether my errand here is successful or not, I ask that nothing that passes between us shall ever be divulged to a third person."

"I promise it."

"I will mention the name of the woman to whom I have referred, or, at least, the name by which she is known to you. Mrs. Turner."

"You mean her no harm, sir?"

"None. I am prepared to befriend her, to save her, if my conditions are accepted."

Dr. Spenlove drew a deep breath of relief. He would go to his new field of labors with a light heart if this unhappy woman was saved.

"You have come at a critical moment," he said, "and you have accurately described the position in which she is placed. But how can my mediation or the mediation of any man be necessary in such a case? She will hail you as her savior, and the savior of her babe. Hasten to her immediately, dear sir; or perhaps you do not know where she lives, and wish me to take you to her. I am ready; do not let us lose a moment, for every moment deepens her misery."

He did not observe the frown which passed into Mr. Gordon's face at his mention of the child; he was so eager that his hat was already on his head and his hand on the handle of the door. Mr. Gordon did not rise from his chair.

"You are in too great a hurry, Dr. Spenlove. Be seated, and listen to what I have to say. You ask how your mediation

can avail. I answer, in the event of her refusal to accept the conditions upon which I am ready to marry her."

"To marry her!" exclaimed Dr. Spenlove.

"To marry her," repeated Mr. Gordon. "She is not a married woman, and her real name need not be divulged. When you hear the story I am about to relate, when you hear the conditions, the only conditions, on which I will consent to lift her from the degrading depths into which she has fallen, you will understand why I desire your assistance. You will be able to make clear to her the effect of her consent or refusal upon her destiny and the destiny of her child; you will be able to use arguments which are in my mind, but to which I shall not give utterance. And remember, through all, that her child is a child of shame, and that I hold out to her the only prospect of that child being brought up in a reputable way and of herself being raised to respectability."

He paused a moment or two before he opened fresh matter.

"I was a poor lad, Dr. Spenlove, without parents, without a home, and when I was fourteen years of age I was working as an errand boy in London, and keeping myself upon a wage of four shillings a week. I lost this situation through the bankruptcy of my employer, and I was not successful in obtaining another. One day I saw on the walls a bill of a vessel going to Australia, and I applied at the agent's office with a vague idea that I might obtain a passage by working aboard ship in some capacity or other. I was a strong boy--starvation agrees with some lads--and a willing boy, and it happened that one of my stamp was wanted in the cook's

galley. I was engaged at a shilling a month, and I landed in Melbourne with four shillings in my pocket.

"How I lived till I became a man is neither here nor there, but when gold was discovered I lived well, for I got enough to buy a share in a cattle station, which now belongs entirely to me. In 1860, being then on the highroad to fortune, I made the acquaintance of a man whom I will call Mr. Charles, and of his only child, a girl of fourteen, whom I will call Mary. I was taken with Mr. Charles, and I was taken in by him as well, for he disappeared from the colony a couple of years afterward in my debt to the tune of two thousand pounds. He had the grace to write to me from London, saying he would pay me some day, and there the matter rested for seven years more, which brings me to two years ago.

"At that time I had occasion to visit England on business, and in London I hunted up my debtor, and we renewed our acquaintance. Mary was then a young woman of twenty-one, and had it not been for her it is more than likely I might have made things unpleasant for her father, who was leading the disreputable life of a gambler on race courses and in clubs of a low character. Dr. Spenlove, you must have gathered from the insight I have given you into my character that I am not a man of sentiment, and you will probably consider it all the more strange that I should have entertained feelings toward Mary which caused me to consider whether she would not make me a creditable wife. Of these feelings I prefer not to speak in a warmer strain, but shall leave you to place your own construction upon them. While I was debating with myself as to the course I

should pursue the matter was decided for me by the death of Mr. Charles. He died in disgrace and poverty, and Mary was left friendless and homeless.

"I stepped in to her rescue, and I made a proposal of marriage to her; at the same time I told her that I thought it advisable for her sake and mine that a little time should elapse before this proposal was carried into effect. I suggested that our marriage should take place in two years; meanwhile I would return to Australia, to build a suitable house and to prepare a home for her, and she would remain in England to fit herself for her new sphere of duties. She accepted me, and I arranged with a lady of refinement to receive her. To this lady both she and I were utter strangers, and it was settled between Mary and myself that she should enter her temporary home under an assumed name. It was my proposal that this pardonable deceit should be practiced; no person was wronged by it, and it would assist toward Mary's complete severance from old associations. Our future was in our own hands, and concerned nobody but ourselves.

"I returned to Australia and made my preparations. We corresponded once a month, and some few months ago I informed her of the date of my intended arrival in England. To that letter I received no reply, and when I landed and called at the lady's house I learned that she had fled. I set to work to discover the truth, and I have discovered it. I set to work to track her, and I have succeeded. Her story is a common story of betrayal and desertion, and I am not inclined to trouble you with it. She has not the remotest hope of assistance from the man who betrayed her; she has

not the remotest hope of assistance from a person in the world with the exception of myself.

"Dr. Spenlove, notwithstanding what has occurred, I am here in Portsmouth this night with the intention of carrying out the engagement into which I entered with her. I am here, prepared to marry her, on express conditions. The adoption of assumed names, the obscurity she has courted, the absolute silence which is certain to be observed by her, by me, by you, by the man who betrayed her, render me safe. It is known that I have come to England to be married, and she will be accepted as I present her when I return with her as my wife. I will have no discussion as to my motives for taking what the world would consider an unwise step, but you will understand that my feelings for the woman who has played me false must be of a deep and sincere nature, or I should not dream of taking it.

"It now only remains for me to state the conditions under which I am prepared to save her from even a more shameful degradation than that into which she has already fallen. I speak plainly; you know as well as I the fate that is in store for her if my offer is rejected."

CHAPTER III.

DR. SPENLOVE UNDERTAKES A DELICATE MISSION.

Mr. Gordon had spoken throughout in a cold, passionless tone, and with no accent of emotion in his voice. If anything could have been destructive of the idea that he loved the woman he wished to marry, it was his measured delivery of the story he had related; and yet there could be no question that there was some nobility in the nature of the sacrifice he was prepared to make for her sake. The contrast between the man and the woman struck Dr. Spenlove very forcibly; the man was hard and cold, the woman was sensitive and sympathetic. Had their circumstances been equal, and had Dr. Spenlove been an interested adviser, he would have had no hesitation in saying to her, "Do not marry this man; no touch of tenderness unites you; you can never kindle in his heart the fire which burns within your own; wedded to him a dull routine of years will be your portion." But he felt that he dared not encourage himself to pursue this line of argument. Although the most pregnant part of Mr. Gordon's errand had yet to be disclosed, it seemed to him that he would very likely presently be the arbiter of her destiny. "You will be able," Mr. Gordon had said, "to make clear to her the effect of her consent or refusal upon her destiny and the destiny of her child." Whatever the conditions, it would be his duty to urge her to accept the offer that would be made to her; otherwise he might be condemning her to a course of life he shuddered to contemplate. The responsibility would be too solemn for mere sentimental considerations. These were the thoughts that flashed through his mind in the momentary pause before Mr. Gordon spoke again.

"I believe," his visitor then said, "that I am in possession of the facts relating to Mrs. Turner's circumstances"--he

reverted to the name by which she was generally known--"but you will corroborate them perhaps. She is in want."

"She is in the lowest depths of poverty."

"Unless she pays the arrears of rent she will be turned into the streets to-morrow."

"That is the landlord's determination."

"She would have been turned out to-day but for your intervention."

"You are well informed, I see," observed Dr. Spenlove, rather nettled.

"I have conversed with the landlord and with others concerning her. She lives among the poor, who have troubles enough of their own to grapple with, and are unable, even if they were inclined, to render her the assistance of which she stands in need. She seems to have kept herself aloof from them, for which I commend her. Now, Dr. Spenlove, I will have no specter of shame and degradation to haunt her life and mine. Her past must be buried, and the grave must never be opened. To that I am resolved, and no power on earth can turn me from it."

"But her child," faltered Dr. Spenlove.

"She will have no child. She must part with her, and the parting must be final and irrevocable. The steps that I shall take to this end shall be so effectual that if by chance in the future they should happen to meet she shall not recognize her. I propose to have the child placed with a family who will adopt her as a child of their own; there will be little difficulty in finding such a family, to the head of which a sum of one hundred pounds will be paid yearly for maintenance. I name no limit as to time. So long as the child lives so long will the

payment be made through my lawyers. Should the child die before she reaches the age of twenty-one the sum of five hundred pounds will be paid to the people who undertake the charge; they will know nothing of me or of the mother; our names will not be divulged to them, and they will not be able to trace us. Should they evince a disposition to be troublesome in this respect the child will be taken from them by my lawyers, and another home provided for her. A hundred pounds a year is a liberal sum, and there will not be the least difficulty in carrying out the proposed arrangement. In proof that I desire the child to have every chance of leading a happy life I will engage to give her a marriage portion of five hundred pounds. Judge for yourself whether a woman in Mrs. Turner's circumstances would be acting wisely in rejecting my proposition."

"You have spoken in a most generous spirit," said Dr. Spenlove slowly, "so far as money goes, but you seem not to have taken into consideration a mother's feelings."

"I have not taken them into consideration; they are not part of my plan. I have looked at the matter only from two points of view--the worldly aspect of it, and my desire to carry out my personal wishes. I decline to regard it or to argue upon it from the point of view of a mother's feelings. I ask you to judge of it as a man of the world."

"Of which," said Dr. Spenlove, "as I have hinted to you, I am a poor example. Do you expect me to provide for the babe such a home as that you have described?"

"Not at all. It is my business to carry out my plan if she accepts the conditions."

"What, then, do you wish me to do?"

"To lay my proposition before her as nearly as possible in my own words; to impress upon her that it is her duty to agree to it for her own sake and for the sake of the child."

"Why not do so yourself?"

"I have not seen her. I will not see her while she holds in her arms her burden of shame. She shall come to me free and unencumbered, or she shall not come at all. I could not speak to her as I have spoken to you; I should not be able to command myself. She would plead to me, and I should answer her in bitterness and anger. Such a scene would set me so strongly against her that I should immediately relinquish my purpose. You can reason with her; you can show her the path in which her duty clearly lies. I do not deny that she is called upon to make a sacrifice, but it is a sacrifice which will lead to good, it is a sacrifice which every right-minded man would urge her to make. Indifferent man of the world as you proclaim yourself to be you cannot be blind to the almost sure fate in store for her in the position in which she is placed. Your experiences must have made you acquainted with the stories of women who have fallen as she has fallen, and you will know how many of them were raised from the depths, and how many of them fell into deeper shame. Dr. Spenlove, I have entirely finished what I came here to say."

"Before I undertake to do what you require of me," said Dr. Spenlove, who by this time understood the man he had to deal with, "I must ask you a question or two."

"If they relate to the present business," responded Mr. Gordon, "I will answer them."

"Failing me, will you employ some other person to act as your envoy to Mrs. Turner?"

"I shall employ no other, for the reason that there is no other whose counsel would be likely to influence her. And for another reason--I have disclosed to you what I will disclose to no other person."

"Would you leave her as she is?"

"I would leave her as she is. Early in the morning I should take my departure, and she would have to face the future unaided by me."

"If she will not listen to me, if she will not make the sacrifice, you will surely give her, out of your abundance, some little assistance to help her along?"

"Out of my abundance," replied Mr. Gordon sternly, "I will give her nothing, not the smallest coin. Make your mind easy upon one point, Dr. Spenlove. So far as a practical man like myself is likely to go I will do what I can to make her happy. She will live in a respectable atmosphere, she will be surrounded by respectable people, she will have all the comforts that money can purchase, and I shall never utter to her a word of reproach. Her past will be as dead to me as if it had never been."

Dr. Spenlove rose. "It is your desire that I shall go to her to-night?"

"It is. The matter must be settled without delay."

"If she asks for time to reflect----"

"I must have the answer to-night, yea or nay."

There was no more to be said. The man who had been wronged and deceived, and who had made an offer so strange and generous and cruel, was fixed and implacable.

"I may be absent for some time," said Dr. Spenlove. "Where shall I see you upon my return?"

"Here, if you will allow me to stay."

"You are welcome. My landlady will make you a bed on the sofa."

"Thank you; I need no bed. I can employ myself while you are away."

Dr. Spenlove stepped to the door, and turned on the threshold.

"One other question, Mr. Gordon. If I succeed, when will you require her to give up her child?"

"To-morrow evening. I will have a carriage ready at the door. On the following day Mrs. Turner and I will leave Portsmouth, and there is no probability after that that you and I will ever meet again."

Dr. Spenlove nodded, and left the house.

CHAPTER IV.

"ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE."

The snow was falling more heavily, and a strong wind blew the flakes into his face as he made his way to Mrs. Turner's garret. He walked as quickly as he could, but his progress was impeded by the force of the wind and by its driving the snow into his eyes. Despite these obstacles his

intuitive observance of what was passing around him and all his mental forces were in active play, and it was a proof of his kindly and unselfish nature that, in the light of the vital errand upon which he was engaged, he was oblivious of the sense of physical discomfort. Conflicting questions agitated his mind. No longer under the influence of the cold, cruel logic which distinguished Mr. Gordon's utterances, he once more asked himself whether he would be right in urging Mrs. Turner to renounce her maternal duties and obligations, and to part forever with the child of her blood. The human and the divine law were in conflict. On one side degradation and direst poverty from which there seemed no prospect of escape, and driving the mother perhaps to a course of life condemned alike by God and man; on the other side a life of material comfort and respectability for herself and child. A fortuitous accident--a chance for which he had prayed earlier in the night--had made him at once the arbiter and the judge; his hand was upon the wheel to steer these two helpless beings through the voyage upon which they were embarked, and upon him rested the responsibility. There was no case here of plowing through unknown waters over hidden rocks; he saw the ocean of life before him, he saw the rocks beneath. Amid those rocks lay the forms of lost, abandoned women who in their mortal career would surely have been saved had an offer of rescue come such as had come to the woman who chiefly occupied his thoughts. They would have been spared the suffering of despairing days, the horrors of despairing death; they would have been lifted from the gulf of shame and ignominy. New hopes, new joys, would have arisen to comfort them. The sacrifice they would