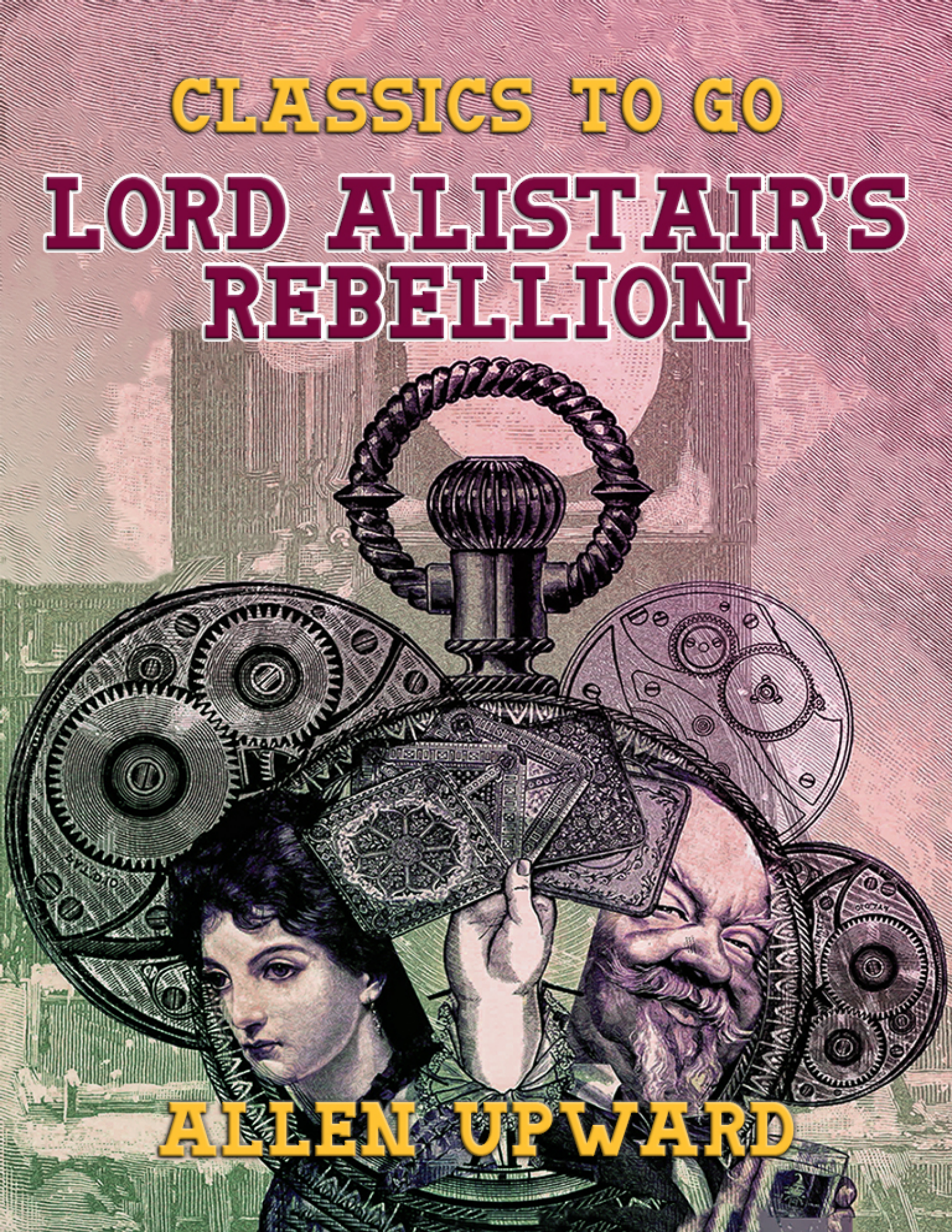
CLASSICS TO GO

LORD ALISTAIR'S REBELLION



ALLEN UPWARD

Lord Alistair's Rebellion

Allen Upward

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CHAPTER I
WESTMINSTER BRIDGE

NIGHT clad the imperial city in a black robe stitched with fire.

The misty river rolled in from the sea through its illuminated bridges with the subdued swish of some great snake writhing its way through hoops of gold.

Out in the fog-haunted region between the bridges the movement of the red and green-eyed steam-tugs, clutching invisible barges and dragging them away into the darkness, seemed like a shadow-show in which grotesque demons were hunting the souls of men.

The two banks of the river offered a contrast full of significance.

Along the left bank white lamps that slit the dusk with the hard, bright glare of diamonds were strung like beads at measured spaces apart. A broad, smooth-paven road rattled with the wheels of traffic, and the long bend of the river revealed a sweep of stately buildings representing the power and splendour of a great civilization.

Education, law, science, government, police, had their homes side by side along that mighty façade, which thus became an entablature on which the characters of civilization were legibly impressed. Beside the ancient universities of the law stood the headquarters of the vast machinery for the teaching of the populace—that is to say, for the taming of successive generations of barbarians. The power of wealth was expressed in luxurious hotels and club-houses, in the mansion of the noble and the estate-office of the millionaire. The revenues of empire flowed in and out

through the gates of one majestic pile; from another the guardians of the social order waged war against the restless ranks of crime. Last in place towered the huge palace of the imperial Legislature, supreme over all.

Across the river the low mass of the southern shore lay in obscurity. All that could be distinguished over there was a dark roof-line broken by a few tall, smokeless chimneys, rising above the water like the walls and towers of a beleaguered city encompassed by its moat. The solitary illumination on that side of the river was afforded by a high square building which broke the gloom from instant to instant with huge letters of yellow fire, spelling out uncouth, barbaric syllables in what might have been the jargon of some subterranean race of men. Seen across the river mist the tower flared out like those burning mosques beheld from afar by the voyager in the Underworld as he drew near to the city of Dis.

All night the square, ugly minaret continued to flash its monstrous hieroglyphs upon the darkness, as though the dwellers on the southern shore were signalling a message from their camp. And from time to time, when the rattle of the wheels on the hither side stayed for a moment, there was borne across the water the low, sullen hum as of a vast multitude swarming in the narrow streets and stunted houses of the hidden region beyond.

Thus the two banks of the river faced each other with something of a mutual threat.

On one side of the gulf, that low, sombre roof-line with its fitful torch-fires; on the other side, the broad illuminated rampart of civilization, crowned by its imperial keep.

A light more brilliant than the rest streamed from the summit of the ponderous clock-tower that guards the foot of Westminster Bridge.

This was the answering signal of the northern shore to that sullen camp across the river. It burned there to proclaim that the sovereign power of empire was at work beneath, judging over five hundred millions of men, and two and a half continents. All the forces of the mightiest society the world has yet beheld were focused here in the High Court of Parliament, the Board of the Anglo-Roman Raj.

Here the decrees were shaped in obedience to which invincible fleets crossed the ocean; armies were transported from one hemisphere to the conquest of another; kings were dethroned in Africa and other kings were crowned in Asia; warlike republics were extinguished under the Southern Pole, and tottering dynasties propped up in the shadow of the Himalayas; whole races of men, speaking strange tongues, and reckoning time by other constellations, had their laws and manners and religions changed for them; immemorial savagery was thrust into the forcing-house of civilization, and immemorial civilizations were rooted up; from this centre the hardy freemen of the Baltic North spread the ancient Mediterranean culture and Semitic folklore wherever the Raj extended round the globe.

Here throbbed the great piston-rod which drove the myriad wheels of government and slowly stamped deeper age after age the same Roman-Semitic imprint upon the subjugated populace at home.

Night after night, as the dwellers on the southern shore gazed across at the majestic citadel of the Raj, they saw that beacon burning, the symbol of the unresting watchfulness of their rulers against the assaults of foes within and without. That steady flame shone out defiance alike to the foreign invader and the traitor within the gates; to the rebels who scoured the African veldt, and the more dangerous rebels who skulked through the streets and alleys of the imperial capital. On all alike, on the encroaching Tsar

as on the plotting Maharajah, on far-off savages and on felons crouching at the gates, the Genius of the Raj was seen to keep its never-closing eye.

More than a mile away, round the curving bank of the river, where the warehouses of Mammon clustered thickly round the temple of Jehovah, there rose another Symbol, invisible in the night, soaring high above the intervening territory of squalor.

This Symbol was intended to represent a Roman gibbet, the gibbet on which a Redeemer had been put to death two thousand years ago, in a remote corner of that ancient Mediterranean realm of which this modern civilization was heir.

In the night these two Symbols confronted each other, the Flame and the Cross, as though they were the warring ensigns of Ahura-Mazda, the Spirit of Light, and Anru-Mainya, the Spirit of Darkness.

On the midmost arch of Westminster Bridge a young man stood alone, leaning over the parapet, and sounding with his eyes the black depth of the water below.

His whole air and appearance were out of harmony with the spot where he found himself, and suggested that he must have strayed there from some gayer quarter of the town. An opera hat was thrust back on his head, and a silk-lined overcoat, thrown open in front, allowed his waistcoat, of white satin, to become soiled by contact with the grime of the bridge. He held a cane of rich and fanciful design in one hand; the other hand, resting loosely on the ironwork of the balustrade, showed more than one curious and valuable ring.

He leaned on the bridge dully, his head drooping as though he were tired. Although his face was that of a man not yet thirty years of age, it bore marks which showed that he had

lived too eagerly, without heed to life’s immitigable laws. Already the forehead was crossed with faint lines, though there was no thinning of the black hair that curled above. The beauty of the face was marred by the flush of intemperance, and the sensuous underlip contradicted the refinement of the sensitive nostrils. The dark, restless eyes and delicate chin completed the impression of passion and weakness which was left by the whole face.

On the pavement of St. James’s such a figure would have seemed at home. Seen where it was, like a tropical bird blown ashore on some bleaker landscape, it provoked the curiosity of the passers-by.

Some of them took offence at the unusual sight. A group of roughs returning from some haunt of vice on the north side to their dens across the river eyed the well-dressed loiterer with envious contempt, and tried to hustle him as they went by. Their leader, a hulking Irishman, encouraged them in a coarse speech, which still breathed faintly of the sea-scented glens of Connemara.

Something in the voice or in the words startled the lounger. He turned his head quickly, and gave the ruffian a questioning look, under which he slunk to one side, and passed on with his friends. In the dark streets where their homes lay they might not have been abashed so easily. But their courage for violence ebbed on the well-lighted bridge. Few crimes are committed at high noon.

A policeman sauntering on to the bridge shortly afterwards caught sight of the stranger, and seemed to become interested in his doings. Instead of pursuing his way when he had reached the farther end of the bridge, the officer halted, and stood about on the pavement by St. Thomas’s Hospital, keeping his eyes fixed on the figure that overhung the balustrade so persistently.

Two shop-boys coming along in their turn had their sense of humour tickled by the young man’s forlorn attitude. One of them gave vent to a ribald jest.

“Look,” he said aloud to his comrade, “there’s Jesus Christ.”

So closely wrapped in his own thoughts was the lounger that it was many seconds after they had been uttered before the words succeeded in penetrating to his consciousness. The last sound of the youths’ trampling feet had died away at the end of the bridge before he woke up sufficiently to ask himself with a resentful air: “What made him say that?”

He found himself unable to dismiss the jeer from his mind, in which it went on echoing with such tormenting insistence that at last he stood up and shook himself, unconsciously making a physical effort to change the pattern in the brain’s kaleidoscope.

But the suggestion which so irritated him was not to be got rid of in that fashion. It chimed in too well with the whole tenor of his meditation since he had found his way on to the bridge. The half-formed questions which had been baffling his attempts to give them definite shape now all at once began to come together and settle down into one question, precipitated, as it were, by that profane mockery.

“Why,” he reflected, with a growing sense of anger at the comparison—“why did he call me that?”

It was not because he attributed any serious intention to the jester that he argued thus with himself. He was in that mood when everything around us appears mysterious and fraught with some revelation to which we only need a key. The words of the shop-boy became for him a hint from the night itself, like the cryptic utterances of the characters in a play of Maeterlinck’s.

“What likeness is there between Christ and me?” he went on, putting the problem before himself more distinctly.

What likeness, indeed, between this spoilt child of civilization, to whom the world seemed to have given of its best, for whom Christianity could be no more than a legend, and that buffeted Redeemer hanging on his gibbet in the Syrian sun of two thousand years ago?

And yet an insult cannot rankle unless it is barbed with truth. From the inner cells of memory, where they had been stored up in past days by a religious mother, certain words and phrases were already coming forth, as though moved by some subtle affinity, to answer that uncomfortable question.

Despised and rejected of men—they ran something like that. And again: *Stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted*. There were other words which should have followed, surely, but he tried in vain to draw them forth.

Despised and rejected of men. The flush darkened on the young man's cheek as he flung back his head with a rebellious and angry glance at the river's northern bank, where the shining walls and towers of the city of Ormuzd seemed to overhang the gulf—the glance which an exile gives at the city which has driven him forth.

He had fled to the spot, stunned by one of those buffets which life is ever waiting to deal to those who have not learnt their lesson aright. And his ears still smarted with the scream of the newsboys who were proclaiming in every street that Lord Alistair Stuart had failed.

In London men like Alistair Stuart fail every day, and go under, leaving scarcely a ripple on the smooth surface of a society which hastens to forget all disagreeable things. But Lord Alistair's catastrophe had been able to eclipse for one night the comedy of politics and the tragedy of war. For he happened to be one of the few in whom the world is interested, and when the world is interested in a man it will

not suffer him to go down to sheol in peace. Its hisses are the reaction of its cheers, and those who court its notice put their lives to the hazard, like Esther when she went to touch the sceptre of Ahasuerus.

The world knew Alistair Stuart in two characters—as the brother and heir-presumptive of the Duke of Trent and Colonsay, and as the lover of Molly Finucane.

To the outer world, for which newspapers are written and formal histories compiled, he was the brother of one of its most important citizens. The Duke of Trent was distinguished not only by his rank, but by his service to the State. By an ironical coincidence the same *Gazette* which revealed the fact that Lord Alistair Stuart had filed his petition also contained the notification that his brother had kissed hands as Secretary of State. It was impossible that the moralists of the pulpit and the press should overlook the striking example of the idle and industrious apprentice, and the younger brother’s disgrace was deepened by the elder’s triumph.

In that inner world whose newspapers are the boudoirs and the smoking-rooms, and which goes for its history to memoirs and chronicles of the back-stairs, the name of Alistair Stuart had gained celebrity in connection with a personage of whom the pulpit might not know, and the press might not tell.

Molly Finucane had achieved one of those reputations which have given certain women a place in history. In the ancient world she might have had princes to fight for her, and poets to sing her praise. In the modern world she was a figure of evil, regarded with a feeling like that which inspired the legends of the succubi. An element of mystery attached to her extraordinary career. It was said that she could neither dance nor sing, that she was astonishingly ignorant, and that her speech and ways smelt of the gutter. Even beauty

was denied her. The men whom she had ruined themselves could not explain the secret of her power over them; she overcame her victims like a malarial fever. Some men could meet her day after day without succumbing; others lost themselves from the first; others again began by despising her as an ugly little street-girl, and ended by giving her their wives' jewels.

How many had perished in the maelstrom of desire which she created none could say. But there was a ghastly story of the young Earl of St. Luc, who had put an end to his life at the age of twenty because his trustees refused him the means to set up an establishment for Molly Finucane. An ineffaceable impression had been made by the two contrasted pictures of the desolate mother weeping over her boy's dead body, as it was dragged all stained and dripping from the moat surrounding the ancient keep of the St. Lucs, and of the wide-mouthed, stupid Irish girl, planted in a reek of tobacco smoke on a table crowded by tipsy youths, repeating to them in her cracked, shameless voice the latest and most brutally coarse refrain of the street.

It was a year, perhaps two years, since the tongue of scandal had first singled out the name of Alistair Stuart from among the rest of those who singed their wings in this fatal flame. Gradually it became known that Molly Finucane had given him a devotion which no other man had ever been able to buy with gold or blood or tears. For his sake she had refused at the last moment to take possession of the miniature palace furnished for her by the great Brazilian broker, Mendes; who had simply shrugged his shoulders and ordered the house to be kept vacant and ready for her. Stuart and she had gone to live together in a faded corner of Chelsea, in a house surrounded by elms with black trunks and yellow leaves.

The house in Chelsea loomed large in the mind of the new generation. It was regarded as a citadel of sin, as the headquarters of a cult which gloried in its moral degeneracy. Alistair Stuart assumed the character of a high-priest among the pagans, as they chose to call themselves—poets whose verses echoed still more faintly the faint autumnal sighs of Verlaine; wits whose epigrams were brilliant with the phosphorescence of corruption; men in whom genius was a vice, and vice an affectation. Hatred of the middle classes was the watchword of this sect, which was recruited from penniless younger sons, from university failures, from a whole class for whom the Protestant Church has no refuge, but who in Catholic countries end often in the monastery. They waged war on the Victorian Age, on its religion, on its art, on its commercialism, but, above all, on its Puritanism.

In the eyes of this brotherhood of the unfit bankruptcy was rather meritorious than disgraceful, and the fifty thousand pounds which Stuart had spent without possessing represented so much spoil taken from the Philistines. Stuart’s own first proceeding after he had signed the warrant for his civil degradation had been to send forth invitations for a supper to celebrate the event.

His bankruptcy had been in one sense voluntary. Although he had cut himself off from intercourse with his family when he took the house in Chelsea, he knew that Trent would have helped him to make terms with his creditors. But he knew also that Trent would have required him to give up Molly Finucane. He had filed his petition with a light heart, in the belief that the disgrace would fall more heavily on his brother than on himself.

For the éclat resulting from his act he had been prepared, but not for the effect of the éclat on his own mind.

He had been on his way to a club in Piccadilly overlooking the Green Park, which served as a meeting-ground for those

members of the cult who kept on terms with respectability. Almost on the club steps he was arrested by the sight of his name in large letters on a news-bill, bringing the sharp reminder that he had forfeited his right of entry.

It was a shock to him to find that his exploit had suddenly lost its charm. He bought a paper as he walked on, and read of his brother's promotion to the Cabinet. The unforeseen coincidence intensified his discomfiture. This brother of his, whom he had always looked on as a dullard and a prig, whom he had so often sneered at among his own friends, was standing there crowned in front of the footlights, while he, Alistair, was being hissed off the stage. In a flash he saw the ruin he had made of his life, and was dismayed.

And as he wandered miserably through the streets the question that had risen and struggled for expression in his mind was—Why? Why had his brother so far surpassed him in the race? Why were the honours and rewards of life bestowed on some and not on others? Why had he, Alistair, steered his bark upon the rocks?

Standing there between that visible theatre of his brother's triumph, on the north side of the river, and the unknown hooligan realm upon the south, with which there stole upon him a daunting sense of affinity, he pondered the question; and while he pondered it, the feeling grew upon him that it would not be answered by itself, that it was a part of a more tremendous issue, that the meaning of life was involved in it, and the eternal mystery of the world.

Alistair looked back for some clue to the tangled skein of his career; and by-and-by the vista of the past took on distinctness, like one of those marvellous canvases of Rembrandt from whose dingy surface there gradually peeps out a whole magical landscape charged with light.

CHAPTER II
BIOGRAPHICAL

THE lustre of the rain was over the grey lochs and green Hebrides.

The broad sound that stretched between the Island of Oig and the mainland was crinkled in furrows, on whose torn edges the foam-spit flickered like driving snowflakes. Whenever the indigo folds of the rolling rain parted for a minute the white beaches of Kesteven gleamed out like a picked bone. Away to the southward, where the fishing-boats were slowly reaching round the Mull of Oig, their taut sails glistened like new-washed tiles in the sunshine; then, as they twisted about and came up into the wind, the light emptied out of their sails like water being spilt, and each boat in turn became a murky phantom gliding forward along leaden grooves.

When the rain-wreaths closed round again, the mainland was blotted out with its hills and pine-forests, and the fishing-boats were no longer anything but blurred hints of things behind a screen. The mist wrapped the Island of Oig round with a great stillness, as though it had been removed a thousand miles off into the midst of the sea.

When at last the heavy cloud phalanxes broke and drifted overhead, and the lochs and isles lay in clear day, something new had crossed into the magic ring of the horizon.

Down in the south-east, in the far-off corner of the landscape, where the pale rose-purple of the hills melted into the dark slate-purple of the waves, a low black smudge had come like a flake of soot on a glorious stained-glass

window. Seen at first as a mere speck on the picture, it swiftly spread and grew till it became a great dingy smear trailing across the heavens. And there was something about this new presence in the landscape which made it seem strange and hostile to the rest. It was as though a harsh, unexpected note had been struck in the middle of a symphony. All the other things there—the clouds and the sunlight, the hills and the sea—seemed to have grown used to one another during the ages, and to keep up a stately accord together; but this smoke giant forced himself in amongst them, like an upstart that had not learnt their ways—an ugly gnome of the underworld breaking into the haunts of the fairies and the nixies.

Beneath the inky banner a small black steamer lifted its hull above the wave-line and came on obstinately, beating defiance with its paddles to the mother elements. The fishing-boats that for thousands of years had put in and out from the little haven of Oig had never done aught but coax the elemental forces in order to turn them to service. For them the winds and the tides had been instruments on which they searched, as it were, for the right chords. But this masterful intruder snapped the strings in careless discord; compared with the others, it seemed to be a burglar breaking the locks of Nature with a crowbar instead of opening them with a key.

Fussing and fretting as it came, the steamboat struck right through the fleet of fishing-boats, and hurried on. It churned its way noisily into the harbour, driving small rowing-boats to right and left like frightened birds, and took up its berth against the pier with the air of an invading column taking up its quarters in a surrendered town. At the same time everything seemed to wake up to meet it: the old men who leant all day against the harbour wall started out of their dreams to handle the ropes flung to them from the steamer’s deck; the harbour master and the factor of the

company hastened along the quay, and all the folk of the little town issued from their houses and swarmed down to the water’s edge. The whole Island of Oig roused itself from its six days’ peace, and began to bustle for its life.

Having taken fast hold of the pier with its rope tentacles, the masterful black monster rapped out a wooden gangway, down which there walked quickly a passenger who looked as much estranged from the surroundings as the floating machine which had transported him from the mainland.

The strangeness was not so much in his black clothes as in his gait and bearing. He walked jerkily, with short, quick steps, casting glances to right and left through his spectacles, as though he were moving through a crowd, on the lookout for hindrances. His feet struck the ground in the helpless, violent fashion of one who wore boots and used his feet merely as the ferrules of his legs on the pavement, instead of as claws to grasp the ground with. The muscles of his neck had suffered a similar atrophy; a long course of high collars and top-heavy hats had drilled his head into a fixed pose, and it moved on the socket of the neck stiffly and jerkily within certain narrow limits. That his eyes had also become cramped by gazing at books instead of fields and clouds was shown plainly enough, for this man of the town wore glasses. He had only to open his mouth to speak, and you saw that his very teeth were no longer Nature’s handiwork.

The townsman’s speech was as outlandish in the Island of Oig as were his dress and gait. He stopped half-way down the pier, before a group of boys, who had left their play to come and see the steamer, and put a question in English.

“Can one of you boys direct me to the house of Mr. Duncan Gilderoy?”

Now, nearly everyone on the Island of Oig bore the name of Gilderoy; and this was all the more noteworthy because Gilderoy was not their real name, but one which the whole clan to which the islanders belonged had taken to hide their own, in order to escape the enmity of other and more powerful clans on the mainland, which had sworn to wipe them out. This wholesale exchange had taken place more than three hundred years before, and only a few of the very old islanders, living in the most out-of-the-way corners of the isle, any longer remembered what their real name was; and they were not believed by the rest, because the story sounded so strange beside the sober narratives of events told in the books written by people in Edinburgh, and called the “History of Scotland.” Therefore, though the *Pax Britannica* was now established in Oig, the inhabitants still clung to their cloak-name, so that all of them but those whose families had come into the island since the sixteenth century called themselves Gilderoy. And of these Gilderoys every third man had been baptized Duncan, because Duncan was the lucky name of the island, and it was well known that if you were baptized by that name you could not be drowned, unless the nixies made a mistake;—though even that was not known to the present generation, who had been brought up on the Edinburgh books, and who therefore thought they had their children baptized Duncan because it was the custom.

So when the outlander put his question the boys stood dumb at first, staring at him and wondering at his stupidity. The invader on his part wondered at theirs.

“Don’t you speak English?” he demanded crossly, as though ignorance of that tongue were wrong in itself, a sign of natural depravity which even the benighted heathen must know in their hearts they ought to be ashamed of.

The boys seemed to feel the force of the rebuke. They turned their eyes to one who stood in the forefront of the little group, as if calling on him to defend them. The leader answered instantly:

“What Duncan Gilderoy is that?”

He spoke the outlander’s tongue as easily as the outlander himself, though each of them sounded his words in a way that seemed a little strange in the other’s ears. The man from the mainland crowded his words in that habit of hurried speech which towns beget. The boy intoned his words with a slight shrillness caught from the winds and waves that battle round the Hebrides. The boy had already learnt from the stranger’s speech that he was an Englishman; the Englishman thought he learnt from the boy’s that he was not a Scotchman. To the Englishman a Scotchman was a person who spoke the dialect of old Northumbria. He had expected to find the islanders of Oig speaking either Gaelic or the speech of Burns.

“Are you English?” he exclaimed.

The boy flushed darkly.

“No,” he said, and held his tongue.

This time the invader looked at him closer. He was a handsome boy of eleven or twelve years of age, tall, and rather slender, and although he wore old, worn clothes, he did not look in the least humble or ashamed of them, a thing which struck the Londoner’s mind as reckless and a little bad. Below his kilt of dark green tartan, variegated with stripes of black and white, the boy’s legs and feet were bare, like those of his companions. Above the kilt he had on a shabby jacket of black velvet with tarnished silver buttons, and a round bonnet set on the back of his black curls made a frame for his face.

The man repeated his first question in another form.

“Do you know Mr. Duncan Gilderoy?”

“Do you mean Duncan Gilderoy of the Old House? Or is it the minister?” asked the boy.

“No, it’s not the minister. He is a farmer, and they told me his house was just outside the town.”

He said “town,” because he had heard it called that on the steamer. But his London eye called it “village.” Two rows of squat houses struggling up from the harbour’s edge to a small kirk just under the ridge of the hill—that was all he could see.

“Then that is Duncan Gilderoy of the Old House,” put in another of the boys.

The man turned to him.

“Has he a young gentleman living with him, named Stuart?” he asked.

All eyes were turned to the boy who had been the first to speak. This boy gave a distrustful, searching glance at the stranger.

“If that is the Duncan Gilderoy you want, I can take you to him,” he said, rather unwillingly.

“Come on, then.”

The other boys fell back, staring hard, as their comrade walked off beside the man in the English clothes. The man carried a small travelling-bag in one hand, and before they had gone many yards he offered it to his guide.

“Would you like to earn a sixpence?” he said pleasantly.

The boy flushed again and frowned angrily. Then he stopped dead, and, turning round, shouted back to the group they had just left:

“Here, Jock, carry his bag, and he’ll give you sixpence.”

Jock proved to be the boy who had guessed which Duncan Gilderoy the stranger wanted. He darted from the rest, and ran up to seize the bag, and then, having taken possession of it, fell in on the other side of its owner.

The Londoner felt he had made a mistake of some kind. The boy who had refused an offer of sixpence commanded his respect. Gazing at him again, it began to dawn upon him that this bare-footed young Highlander carried himself with dignity, and that he held up his head in a way that is not taught in Board-schools. The next moment the boy, aware that he was being studied, lowered his head with a defensive instinct, and glanced at the man out of the corner of his dark eyes. The glance was at once sly and naïve, like that of some bright, wicked bird.

“And what is your name, my boy?” the Englishman asked, with a touch of middle-class patronage. He could not quite get the bare feet out of his mind.

“I am Alistair Stuart.”

The stranger uttered a sound of surprise.

“The Stuart who lives with Mr. Duncan Gilderoy?”

“Yes.” The answer came unwillingly again.

“Then you are the boy I have come here for.”

“I knew that,” said Stuart. And a slightly cunning look came into his eyes.

The man was baffled. He could not quite make up his mind whether the boy had been playing a practical joke on him from the first, or had been merely too dull to explain himself. Londoner-like, he leant a little towards the second supposition, for he was managing clerk to a firm of solicitors in Theobald’s Road, and firmly believed that human nature contained no depths which he had not sounded to their very bottom. He believed that all men were animated by one

supreme motive, the making of money, that they were distracted and impeded in their progress towards the goal by the counter-attractions of woman and wine, and that he was the wisest who best withstood these allurements, and kept his gaze steadily fixed on that yellow bull's-eye of endeavour. He regarded the law as the rules of the game, and knew to a hair exactly how far it was possible to go without breaking them. There was only one irrational element in the man's life: he was a Wesleyan, and holding it for certain that the doctrine of that sect amounted to an immediate communication to himself from his Maker, of whom he was a good deal afraid, he paid in reluctantly but largely to the Church funds, which he regarded as a species of blackmail levied by God on business men.

The three walked up through the narrow street together. The street was paved with cobble-stones, and ascended in layers or great steps, with one or more houses to a step. The houses themselves would have been called hovels in London, and looking at them, the law-clerk considered that he was walking through a slum. He wondered almost mournfully how human creatures could submit to pass their lives in such miserable conditions. The sight of the bare-footed lads and lasses with their red cheeks and shapely legs woke actual pity in his breast; for he was naturally kind, and his kindness could only find expression in the benevolent wish to take control of all these lives which he understood so little, and shape them into the image of his own.

Stuart had been looking forward to the coming of this man ever since he could remember. He had always known that Duncan Gilderoy was only his foster-father, and that his life would not be lived out on Oig. They had told him that his father and mother lived in France, and that his father was too ill to have his children with him. He could not recollect these legendary parents, who were only known to him by

portraits which he religiously cherished, and by letters which came to him regularly from his mother. His father, from whom he received only occasional messages, was the object of a devotion that filled his whole heart; his yearning for that unknown father’s love was one of those passions of childhood which are never told, and which are never forgotten. There was more of awe than love in his thoughts about his mother; she was an Englishwoman, and the tenderness that her letters expressed was overlaid with pious monitions and references to Bible texts. He learned that he had an elder brother, James, who was being educated at a school in England under the casual supervision of the head of the family, who had never noticed Alistair. At some time or other—he was doubtful when—the perception had come that the character of his upbringing was at least partly due to lack of money. The islands and moorlands, the castles and broad acres that made up the great inheritance of Trent and Colonsay were all tributary to certain men of law in London and in Edinburgh, whom the clansmen of Oig hated as a conquered nation hates the invader encamped upon its soil.

Alistair knew also—for these things were the history and politics of Oig—that his father stood next in succession to the dukedom, and that his brother’s favour with the reigning Duke was in right of his exalted destiny as heir.

Thus the boy, reared in the society of herdsmen and fishers, who were to him as kinsmen of a lower rank, had had always before his eyes the vision of the great world in which he was one day to play a part. Civilization shone for him afar off, as it shines for the native of some colonial wilderness, in all the hues of hope and wonder. How often had he climbed to the top of the cliff that overlooked the Sound of Oig, and laid himself down on the wind-mown grass, looking and longing for the first peep of that sooty feather which he had taken for the signal of emancipation.

No instinct had ever warned him that the little noisy packet was a slaveship, the galley of the great Anglo-Roman Raj, coming to make him captive, and carry him off to be tamed and trained into a citizen of the Raj, to speak its tongue and wear its dress, and learn its manners, and its laws, till the innermost pulse of his being should be timed to the Anglo-Roman time, and the ancient Pictish blood in his veins should forget its source, and run as if through Anglo-Roman ducts.

Looking back across his life to this point of departure, it seemed to Alistair that he had found the clue of his tangled skein, and that he might in time achieve a complete answer to the riddle of his fate. For a moment the longing of his heart returned to that green islet in its grey sea, and he bitterly regretted that he had not been left to live out his life there among the clansmen whom he loved, and by whom he was beloved, who esteemed him as a prince among them, and would have still esteemed and shielded him had he become the outlaw of the Raj. He was an exile—surely it was this, he told himself—he was an outlander adrift amongst a race to which he did not belong; which he never could understand, and by which he never could be understood.

The first great misunderstanding with his captors had come when he was a boy. There was a Velasquez-looking portrait on the walls of Colonsay House of a lad of fifteen, long-legged and slim, with eyes like the night—a night haunted by the slumber of wild beasts that the first footfall will disturb. The dress of this boy was touched with the girlish delicacy that betrays a mother’s darling: the collar was of lace, the jacket was of velvet, the straw hat, thrust back from his forehead, was costlier than lace or velvet. At night he slept in silk, in a tapestried chamber. His days were passed within the stately walls, or in roaming through the glorious demesne, of one of the historic homes of England,

watched over with all the care that love and wealth could afford.

He had lived with his mother ever since his father’s death. It was not until she had clasped him in her arms that she had told him of his loss, and she had never suspected the bitterness of the boy’s grief. The father whom he had never known remained a sacred memory still, all the more sacred because his mother never talked to him about the dead. By this time the old Duke was dead as well, and James had succeeded him, so that the days of hardship were over, and the inheritance was being nursed back into something like its former splendour.

A fond yearning to regain some of the lost years of their childhood had caused their mother to keep both her boys beside her, giving them a tutor instead of a school. But she had another motive which she tried to believe was paramount—the desire to bring them early into her own religious fold.

During four years Alistair had had his mind steeped day after day in the emotional atmosphere of primitive Christianity. This was his mother’s native air, and she could not have been brought to believe that it might be drawn with difficulty and pain by any human creature. If the knowledge had been forced upon her that such a training was unwholesome for either of her sons, her universe would have become a maze without a plan; her God would have been shattered like Dagon.

To both the boys this training came as part of the yoke which age imposes on youth. Boyhood is always surrendering its secret convictions at the bidding of authority; the process called education is one long defeat of the barbarians by the legions. Their mother heard them repeat the phrases which she had taught them, and believed in her work.

A cold temper and unimaginative mind enabled the elder boy to take this religion in the formal spirit in which it has been taken by a great part of mankind for two thousand years. As a theory of the universe it received his unquestioning assent; as a life-motive it left him practically untouched. He became the unconscious hypocrite whom the Gospel was written to make us loathe, and who has governed the Church ever since the Gospel was written.

On Alistair his mother’s teaching had another effect. A poet’s sensitiveness on the score of words made him shrink at times from the familiar language of his mother’s creed. But his temperament responded readily to the exciting influence of religious emotion, and the cunning which usually accompanies hysteria taught him to use this faculty for his own protection. When he had been naughty during the day—and Alistair was already marked out as the naughty one of the two brothers—it was his mother’s habit to come into his room after he had gone to bed, and try to soften him. She knelt beside the bed, and talked and prayed with him till the boy melted in a confession of wrongdoing, and the two made it up with kisses and tears.

These scenes had endeared Alistair to his mother, whose tenderness for her younger son aroused the elder’s secret jealousy. They had been ruinous to the boy himself, whom they made an emotional debauchee. He spent his sincerity in spasms of repentance which left him worse than before. There were yet other consequences: the nervous organization is a sensitive instrument, which ignorant fingers do not touch for nothing.

For a year past Alistair had inspired his mother with hopes that he was ripening for the change of mind which she called conversion. He had become more serious; his gaiety was sometimes dashed with melancholy; he wrote verses which she treasured up as evidences of the direction his

intelligence was taking. The verses were echoes of the poets whom she had placed in his hands, and her favourite poets were Miss Havergal and Dr. Bonar. He had taken to wandering much by himself in the park; sometimes on returning from these rambles he posed her with strange questions about the nature of the Deity and the contradictions that abound in every positive system of the universe.

The mother drew happy auguries. Like Hannah, she dedicated her son to the Lord, and wrote to the Archbishop who was his godfather, to interest him in the boy.

All this time one half of life had been carefully hidden from Alistair. Of the great mystery of life he knew less than an animal knows. For him, as for all his generation, the divine lore which was once communicated in solemn temples and amid consecrated groves, which is still given the character of a revelation among the worshipping millions beneath the Himalayas, lay under the blight of the great ascetic frenzy which spread round the Mediterranean zone two thousand years ago. The temple had long been a stew, the revelation a vulgar jest bandied about on furtive lips; the groves were cut down, the torches were blown out, the musical instruments were broken, and the rite of initiation had passed from the holy places into the sewers. The road of darkness was esteemed the road of safety; and Alistair walked upon it in ignorance alike of the law of Heaven and of the taboo of man.

The Garden of Eden is like that flying island of Arabian geography which descends unawares in front of the adventurer, and tempts him to tread its enamelled turf, surrendering his senses to the hymeneal music of its birds, and the perfume of its myriad flowers. The earth was changed for Alistair by a keeper’s daughter, a girl of his own age, with a face fair as an apple-blossom, in whose heart

the seed of ambition had been early sown by a vain mother’s hand. All through one summer-tide they met by stealth among the woods of Trent; while she, intoxicated by the young lord’s notice, listened with uncomprehending ears to that passionate romance which youth pours out at the first touch of love: and for him the sunshine sprinkled all the air with orange-blossoms through the green network overhead, the silver birch-stems rose like rejoicing fountains in the glimmering shade, the hum of insects lapped his enamoured ear like the vague music of a shell, the very ground distilled a rapturous scent, and all his pulses sang within him as his life swept into the great throb of the universal world.

The retribution which followed on discovery tortured him still in the remembrance. What such a discovery must have cost a mother like his, he could not gauge. He only knew that every sacred feeling in his own breast had been outraged, the innermost sanctuary had been profaned, the delicate blossoms had been uprooted and trampled in the mire. He had a recollection of hideous scenes, of questions that were intolerable insults, of a visit from the Archbishop, who came too late to mediate, and, finally, of a term of penal servitude passed in an institution abroad, from which Alistair returned a Roman Catholic.

In his mother’s eyes this was a moral bankruptcy. Fresh influences were brought to bear on the perverted one; the rest of his youth was passed in drifting from one guardianship to another, under a perpetual cloud, and manhood found him without faith and without a career.

That his mother had loved him throughout Alistair knew well, though even he did not know how much she loved him. Perhaps the love between them had been strengthened by the tragedy of the past. It seemed to Alistair now to have been the old story of the hen that has hatched out a

duckling from the shell. He thought of his mother with a painful mingling of wrath and tenderness, believing her to have been cruel to him, and knowing that she had been cruel to herself for his sake. The mother whom his instinct taught him to demand was one of those mothers of the passionate races, who live only to be the slaves of their sons, to hear their confessions, to soothe their remorse, to abet them in their worst crimes. His grievance against his own mother was that she had not taken him for what he was. The changeling had been tormented in the hope of giving it a human soul.

When he came of age he took the problem out of her hands. “You do not understand me,” he told her one day; “I must live my own life.”

His brother, Trent, had granted him an allowance of a thousand a year, which his tradesmen raised to five thousand. The contents of every shop in London were at the command of the brother of the Duke of Trent and Colonsay, on condition that the brother of the Duke paid double for them. The shopkeepers began by cheating him, as though they foresaw that he would end by cheating them.

Stuart hardly knew that he was extravagant. Most of the ways in which he spent money were ways in which he heard other men praised for spending it. He collected miniatures; he bought old cabinets, which were repaired for him by skilful workmen; he published tiny volumes with his own poems, in which a strain of southern passion mingled with the dreamy melancholy of the northern seas. His pleasures were those of a poet, not a man about town. He lent money to those about him, to the poets whose names were unknown to the readers of magazines, to the painters whose pictures were abhorred by the Royal Academy, to the musicians who could not make bright tunes. Such men have

no right to live; but Stuart fed them at his table, and rejoiced in the incense of their praise.

It was the difference between Lord Alistair Stuart and the men who surrounded him which had first fascinated Molly Finucane. He had been for her a mystery which she was bent on exploring. When after a time she found that this intellectual side of her lover's character was out of her reach, she became jealous, and sought to choke it. It was of such as she that a certain acquaintance of Stuart's in those days wrote that all men kill the thing they love.

In her own way, and with what truth was left to her, Molly Finucane did love Alistair Stuart. That was the part of it which others could not be expected to allow for. The life in the house in Chelsea had been as regular as that of any married pair. The only visitors received were Stuart's friends. Molly had discarded all her old associates as completely as though she had been really married—always with the exception of Mendes, whom Alistair sometimes asked to dinner. She had practised what in her eyes was economy, playing the novel part of housekeeper, enjoying the strange experience of giving orders to tradesmen, and calculating the prices of household stuff. Unfortunately, she could not shake off at once the habits of reckless expense which she had been taught. Her nature had come to crave for excitement as an opium-eater's craves for the drug, and the only amusements she knew were costly ones. The play, for Molly, meant a brougham, a little dinner at a smart restaurant, a private box, and a supper at some Bohemian night-club—in short, the spending of five or ten pounds. She went to the theatres and music-halls very often. On the nights when she did not go she felt disastrously bored, and wished herself dead. Then she had to have flowers every day, and a new bracelet or some such trifle every week, or she felt herself neglected. She had acquired the fatal idea that the love of men was only to be gauged by the money