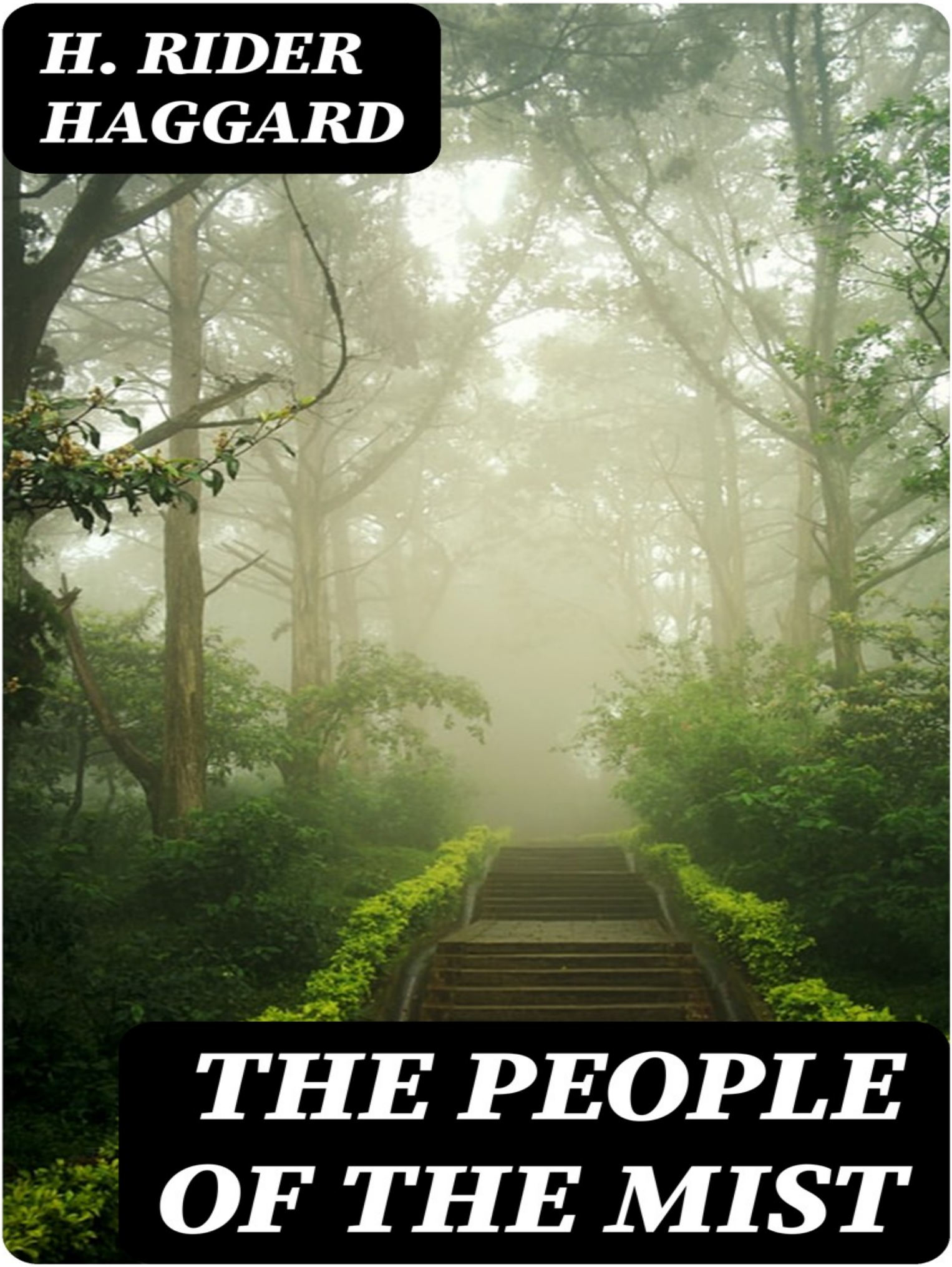
H. RIDER HAGGARD
THE PEOPLE OF THE MIST


H. RIDER HAGGARD
THE PEOPLE OF THE MIST

H. Rider Haggard

The People of the Mist

EAN 8596547061168

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I
THE SINS OF THE FATHER ARE VISITED ON THE CHILDREN
CHAPTER II
THE SWEARING OF THE OATH
CHAPTER III
AFTER SEVEN YEARS
CHAPTER IV
THE LAST VIGIL
CHAPTER V
OTTER GIVES COUNSEL
CHAPTER VI
THE TALE OF SOA
CHAPTER VII
LEONARD SWEARS ON THE BLOOD OF ACA
CHAPTER VIII
THE START
CHAPTER IX
THE YELLOW DEVIL’S NEST
CHAPTER X
LEONARD MAKES A PLAN
CHAPTER XI
THAT HERO OTTER
CHAPTER XII
A CHOICE LOT
CHAPTER XIII
A MIDNIGHT MARRIAGE

CHAPTER XIV
VENGEANCE
CHAPTER XV
DISILLUSION
CHAPTER XVI
MISUNDERSTANDINGS
CHAPTER XVII
THE DEATH OF MAVOOM
CHAPTER XVIII
SOA SHOWS HER TEETH
CHAPTER XIX
THE END OF THE JOURNEY
CHAPTER XX
THE COMING OF ACA
CHAPTER XXI
THE FOLLY OF OTTER
CHAPTER XXII
THE TEMPLE OF JAL
CHAPTER XXIII
HOW JUANNA CONQUERED NAM
CHAPTER XXIV
OLFAN TELLS OF THE RUBIES
CHAPTER XXV
THE SACRIFICE AFTER THE NEW ORDER
CHAPTER XXVI
THE LAST OF THE SETTLEMENT MEN
CHAPTER XXVII
FATHER AND DAUGHTER
CHAPTER XXVIII

JUANNA PREVARICATES
CHAPTER XXIX
THE TRIAL OF THE GODS
CHAPTER XXX
FRANCISCO’S EXPIATION
CHAPTER XXXI
THE WHITE DAWN
CHAPTER XXXII
HOW OTTER FOUGHT THE WATER DWELLER
CHAPTER XXXIII
TRAPPED
CHAPTER XXXIV
NAM’S LAST ARGUMENT
CHAPTER XXXV
BE NOBLE OR BE BASE
CHAPTER XXXVI
HOW OTTER CAME BACK
CHAPTER XXXVII
“I AM REPAID, QUEEN”
CHAPTER XXXVIII
THE TRIUMPH OF NAM
CHAPTER XXXIX
THE PASSING OF THE BRIDGE
CHAPTER XL
OTTER’S FAREWELL

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

THE SINS OF THE FATHER ARE VISITED ON THE CHILDREN

Table of Contents

The January afternoon was passing into night, the air was cold and still, so still that not a single twig of the naked beech-trees stirred; on the grass of the meadows lay a thin white rime, half frost, half snow; the firs stood out blackly against a steel-hued sky, and over the tallest of them hung a single star. Past these bordering firs there ran a road, on which, in this evening of the opening of our story, a young man stood irresolute, glancing now to the right and now to the left.

To his right were two stately gates of iron fantastically wrought, supported by stone pillars on whose summits stood griffins of black marble embracing coats of arms, and banners inscribed with the device *Per ardua ad astra*. Beyond these gates ran a broad carriage drive, lined on either side by a double row of such oaks as England alone can produce under the most favourable circumstances of soil, aided by the nurturing hand of man and three or four centuries of time.

At the head of this avenue, perhaps half a mile from the roadway, although it looked nearer because of the eminence upon which it was placed, stood a mansion of the class that in auctioneers' advertisements is usually described as "noble." Its general appearance was Elizabethan, for in

those days some forgotten Outram had practically rebuilt it; but a large part of its fabric was far more ancient than the Tudors, dating back, so said tradition, to the time of King John. As we are not auctioneers, however, it will be unnecessary to specify its many beauties; indeed, at this date, some of the tribe had recently employed their gift of language on these attractions with copious fulness and accuracy of detail, since Outram Hall, for the first time during six centuries, was, or had been, for sale.

Suffice it to say that, like the oaks of its avenue, Outram was such a house as can only be found in England; no mere mass of bricks and mortar, but a thing that seemed to have acquired a life and individuality of its own. Or, if this saying be too far-fetched and poetical, at the least this venerable home bore some stamp and trace of the lives and individualities of many generations of mankind, linked together in thought and feeling by the common bond of blood.

The young man who stood in the roadway looked long and earnestly towards the mass of buildings that frowned upon him from the crest of the hill, and as he looked an expression came into his face which fell little, if at all, short of that of agony, the agony which the young can feel at the shock of an utter and irredeemable loss. The face that wore such evidence of trouble was a handsome one enough, though just now all the charm of youth seemed to have faded from it. It was dark and strong, nor was it difficult to guess that in after-life it might become stern. The form also was shapely and athletic, though not very tall, giving promise of more than common strength, and the bearing

that of a gentleman who had not brought himself up to the belief that ancient blood can cover modern deficiencies of mind and manner. Such was the outward appearance of Leonard Outram as he was then, in his twenty-third year.

While Leonard watched and hesitated on the roadway, unable, apparently, to make up his mind to pass those iron gates, and yet desirous of doing so, carts and carriages began to appear hurrying down the avenue towards him.

“I suppose that the sale is over,” he muttered to himself. “Well, like death, it is a good thing to have done with.”

Then he turned to go; but hearing the crunch of wheels close at hand, stepped back into the shadow of the gateway pillar, fearing lest he should be recognised on the open road. A carriage came up, and, just as it reached the gates, something being amiss with the harness, a footman descended from the box to set it right. From where he stood Leonard could see its occupants, the wife and daughter of a neighbouring squire, and overhear their conversation. He knew them well; indeed, the younger lady had been one of his favourite partners at the county balls.

“How cheap the things went, Ida! Fancy buying that old oak sideboard for ten pounds, and with all those Outram quarterings on it too! It is as good as an historical document, and I am sure that it must be worth at least fifty. I shall sell ours and put it into the dining-room. I have coveted that sideboard for years.”

The daughter sighed and answered with some asperity.

“I am so sorry for the Outrams that I should not care about the sideboard if you had got it for twopence. What an awful smash! Just think of the old place being bought by a

Jew! Tom and Leonard are utterly ruined, they say, not a sixpence left. I declare I nearly cried when I saw that man selling Leonard's guns."

"Very sad indeed," answered the mother absently; "but if he is a Jew, what does it matter? He has a title, and they say that he is enormously rich. I expect there will be plenty going on at Outram soon. By the way, my dear Ida, I do wish you would cure yourself of the habit of calling young men by their Christian names—not that it matters about these two, for we shall never see any more of them."

"I am sure I hope that we shall," said Ida defiantly, "and when we do I shall call them by their Christian names as much as ever. You never objected to it before the smash, and I *love* both of them, so there! Why did you bring me to that horrid sale? You know I did not want to go. I shall be wretched for a week, I——" and the carriage swept on out of hearing.

Leonard emerged from the shadow of the gateway and crossed the road swiftly. On the further side of it he paused, and looking after the retreating carriage said aloud, "God bless you for your kind heart, Ida Hatherley. Good luck go with you! And now for the other business."

A hundred yards or so down the road, was a second gate of much less imposing appearance than those which led to the Outram Hall. Leonard passed through it and presently found himself at the door of a square red brick house, built with no other pretensions than to those of comfort. This was the Rectory, now tenanted by the Reverend and Honourable James Beach, to whom the living had been presented many

years before by Leonard’s father, Mr. Beach’s old college friend.

Leonard rang the bell, and as its distant clamour fell upon his ears a new fear struck him. What sort of reception would he meet with in this house? he wondered. Hitherto his welcome had always been so cordial that until this moment he had never doubted of it, but now circumstances were changed. He was no longer in the position of second son to Sir Thomas Outram of Outram Hall. He was a beggar, an outcast, a wanderer, the son of a fraudulent bankrupt and suicide. The careless words of the woman in the carriage had let a flood of light into his mind, and by it he saw many things which he had never seen before. Now he remembered a little motto that he had often heard, but the full force of which he did not appreciate until to-day. “Friends follow fortune,” was the wording of this motto. He remembered also another saying that had frequently been read to him in church and elsewhere, and the origin of which precluded all doubt as to its truth:—

“Unto every one that hath shall be given, but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.”

Now, as it chanced, Leonard, beggared as he was, had still something left which could be taken away from him, and that something the richest fortune which Providence can give to any man in his youth, the love of a woman whom he also loved. The Reverend and Honourable James Beach was blessed with a daughter, Jane by name, who had the reputation, not undeserved, of being the most beautiful and sweetest-natured girl that the country-side could show. Now, being dark and fair respectively and having lived in

close association since childhood, Leonard and Jane, as might be expected from the working of the laws of natural economy, had gravitated towards each other with increasing speed ever since they had come to understand the possibilities of the institution of marriage. In the end thus mutual gravitation led to a shock and confusion of individualities which was not without its charm; or, to put the matter more plainly, Leonard proposed to Jane and had been accepted with many blushes and some tears and kisses.

It was a common little romance enough, but, like everything else with which youth and love are concerned, it had its elements of beauty. Such affairs gain much from being the first in the series. Who is there among us that does not adore his first love and his first poem? And yet when we see them twenty years after!

Presently the Rectory door was opened and Leonard entered. At this moment it occurred to him that he did not quite know why he had come. To be altogether accurate, he knew why he had come well enough. It was to see Jane, and arrive at an understanding with her father. Perhaps it may be well to explain that his engagement to that young lady was of the suppressed order. Her parents had no wish to suppress it, indeed; for though Leonard was a younger son, it was well known that he was destined to inherit his mother’s fortune of fifty thousand pounds more or less. Besides, Providence had decreed a delicate constitution to his elder and only brother Thomas. But Sir Thomas Outram, their father, was reputed to be an ambitious man who looked to see his sons marry well, and this marriage would

scarcely have been to Leonard’s advantage from the family lawyer point of view.

Therefore, when the matter came to the ears of Jane’s parents, they determined to forego the outward expression of their pride and delight in the captive whom they owed to the bow and spear of their daughter’s loveliness, at any rate for a while, say until Leonard had taken his degree. Often and often in the after-years did they have occasion to bless themselves for their caution. But not the less on this account was Leonard’s position as the affianced lover of their daughter recognised among them; indeed, the matter was no secret from anybody, except perhaps from Sir Thomas himself. For his part, Leonard took no pains to conceal it even from him; but the father and son met rarely, and the estrangement between them was so complete, that the younger man saw no advantage in speaking of a matter thus near to his heart until there appeared to be a practical object in so doing.

The Rev. James Beach was a stout person of bland and prepossessing appearance. Never had he looked stouter, more prepossessing, or blander than on this particular evening when Leonard was ushered into his presence. He was standing before the fire in his drawing-room holding a huge and ancient silver loving-cup in both hands, and in such a position as to give the observer the idea that he had just drained its entire contents. In reality, it may be explained, he was employed in searching for a hall-mark on the bottom of the goblet, discoursing the while to his wife and children—for Jane had a brother—upon its value and beauty. The gleam of the silver caught Leonard’s eye as he

entered the room, and he recognised the cup as one of the heirlooms of his own family.

Leonard's sudden and unlooked-for advent brought various emotions into active play. There were four people gathered round that comfortable fire—the rector, his wife, his son, and last, but not least, Jane herself. Mr. Beach dropped the cup sufficiently to allow himself to stare at his visitor along its length, for all the world as though he were covering him with a silver blunderbuss. His wife, an active little woman, turned round as if she moved upon wires, exclaiming, "Good gracious, who'd have thought it?" while the son, a robust young man of about Leonard's own age and his college companion, said "Hullo! old fellow, well, I never expected to see *you* here to-day!"—a remark which, however natural it may have been, scarcely tended to set his friend at ease.

Jane herself, a tall and beautiful girl with bright auburn hair, who was seated on a footstool nursing her knees before the fire, and paying very little heed to her father's lecture upon ancient plate, did none of these things. On the contrary, she sprang up with the utmost animation, her lips apart and her lovely face red with blushes, or the heat of the fire, and came towards him exclaiming, "Oh, Leonard, dear Leonard!"

Mr. Beach turned the silver blunderbuss upon his daughter and fired a single, but most effective shot.

"Jane!" he said in a voice in which fatherly admonition and friendly warning were happily blended.

Jane stopped in full career was though in obedience to some lesson which momentarily she had forgotten. Then Mr.

Beach, setting down the flagon, advanced upon Leonard with an ample pitying smile and outstretched hand.

“How are you, my dear boy, how are you?” he said. “We did not expect—”

“To see me here under the circumstances,” put in Leonard bitterly. “Nor would you have done so, but Tom and I understood that it was only to be a three days’ sale.”

“Quite right, Leonard. As first advertised the sale was for three days, but the auctioneer found that he could not get through in the time. The accumulations of such an ancient house as Outram Hall are necessarily *vast*,” and he waved his hand with a large gesture.

“Yes,” said Leonard.

“Hum!” went on Mr. Beach, after a pause which was beginning to grow awkward. “Doubtless you will find it a matter for congratulation that on the whole things sold well. It is not always the case, not by any means, for such collections as those of Outram, however interesting and valuable they may have been to the family itself, do not often fetch their worth at a country auction. Yes, they sold decidedly well, thanks chiefly to the large purchases of the new owner of the estate. This tankard, for instance, which I have bought—hem—as a slight memento of your family, cost me ten shillings an ounce.”

“Indeed!” answered Leonard coldly; “I always understood that it was worth fifty.”

Then came another pause, during which all who were present, except Mr. Beach and himself, rose one by one and quitted the room. Jane was the last to go, and Leonard

noticed, as she passed him, that there were tears in her eyes.

“Jane,” said her father in a meaning voice when her hand was already on the door, “you will be careful to be dressed in time for dinner, will you not, love? You remember that young Mr. Cohen is coming, and I should like somebody to be down to receive him.”

Jane’s only answer to this remark was to pass through the door and slam it behind her. Clearly the prospect of the advent of this guest was not agreeable to her.

“Well, Leonard,” went on Mr. Beach when they were alone, in a tone that was meant to be sympathetic but which jarred horribly on his listener’s ears, “this is a sad business, very sad. But why are you not sitting down?”

“Because no one asked me to,” said Leonard as he took a chair.

“Hem!” continued Mr. Beach; “by the way I believe that Mr. Cohen is a friend of yours, is he not?”

“An acquaintance, not a friend,” said Leonard.

“Indeed, I thought that you were at the same college.”

“Yes, but I do not like him.”

“Prejudice, my dear boy, prejudice. A minor sin indeed, but one against which you must struggle. But there, there, it is natural that you should not feel warmly about the man who will one day own Outram. Ah! as I said, this is all very sad, but it must be a great consolation to you to remember that when everything is settled there will be enough, so I am told, to pay your unhappy father’s debts. And now, is there anything that I can do for you or your brother?”

Leonard reflected that whatever may have been his father's misdeeds, and they were many and black, it should scarcely have lain in the mouth of the Rev. James Beach, who owed nearly everything he had in the world to his kindness, to allude to them. But he could not defend his father's memory, it was beyond defence, and just now he must fight for his own hand.

"Yes, Mr. Beach," he said earnestly, "you can help me very much. You know the cruel position in which my brother and I are placed through no fault of our own: our old home is sold, our fortunes have gone utterly, and our honourable name is tarnished. At the present moment I have nothing left in the world except the sum of two hundred pounds which I had saved for a purpose of my own out of my allowance. I have no profession and cannot even take my degree, because I am unable to afford the expense of remaining at college."

"Black, I must say, very black," murmured Mr. Beach, rubbing his chin. "But under these circumstances what can I do to help you? You must trust in Providence, my boy; it never fails the deserving."

"This," answered Leonard, nervously; "you can show your confidence in me by allowing my engagement to Jane to be proclaimed." Here Mr. Beach waved his hand once more as though to repel some invisible force.

"One moment," continued Leonard. "I know that it seems a great deal to ask, but listen. Although everything looks so dark, I have reliance on myself. With the stimulus which my affection for your daughter will give me, and knowing that in order to win her I must first put myself in a position to

support her as she should be supported, I am quite convinced that I shall be able to surmount all difficulties by my own efforts."

"Really, I cannot listen to such nonsense any longer," broke in Mr. Beach angrily. "Leonard, this is nothing less than an impertinence. Of course any understanding that may have existed between you and Jane is quite at an end. Engagement! I heard of no engagement. I knew that there was some boy and girl folly between you indeed, but for my part I never gave the matter another thought."

"You seem to forget, sir," said Leonard, keeping his temper with difficulty, "that not six months ago you and I had a long conversation on this very subject, and decided that nothing should be said to my father of the matter until I had taken my degree."

"I repeat that it is an impertinence," answered Mr. Beach, but with a careful avoidance of the direct issue. "What! You, who have nothing in the world except a name which you father has—well—tarnished—to use your own word, you ask me for my dear daughter's hand? You are so selfish that you wish not only to ruin her chances in life, but also to drag her into the depths of your poverty. Leonard, I should never have thought it of you!"

Then at last Leonard broke out.

"You do not speak the truth. I did not ask you for your daughter's hand. I asked you for the promise of it when I should have shown myself worthy of her. But now there is an end of that. I will go as you bid me but before I go I will tell you the truth. You wish to use Jane's beauty to catch this Jew with. Of her happiness you think nothing, provided only

you can secure his money. She is not a strong character, and it is quite possible that you will succeed in your plot, but I tell you it will not prosper. You, who owe everything to our family, now when trouble has overtaken us, turn upon me and rob me of the only good that was left to me. By putting an end to a connection of which everybody knew, you stamp me still deeper into the mire. So be it, but of this I am sure, that such conduct will meet with a due reward, and that a time will come when you will bitterly regret the way in which you have dealt with your daughter and treated me in my misfortunes. Good-bye."

And Leonard turned and left the room and the Rectory.

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

THE SWEARING OF THE OATH

Table of Contents

Arthur Beach, Jane's brother, was standing in the hall waiting to speak to Leonard, but he passed without a word, closing the hall door behind him. Outside snow was falling, though not fast enough to obscure the light of the moon which shone through the belt of firs.

Leonard walked on down the drive till he neared the gate, when suddenly he heard the muffled sound of feet pursuing him through the snow. He turned with an exclamation, believing that the footsteps were those of Arthur Beach, for at the moment he was in no mood for further conversation with any male member of that family. As it chanced, however, he found himself face to face not with Arthur, but with Jane herself, who perhaps had never looked more beautiful than she did at this moment in the snow and the moonlight. Indeed, whenever Leonard thought of her in after-years, and that was often, there arose in his mind a vision of a tall and lovely girl, her auburn hair slightly powdered over with the falling flakes, her breast heaving with emotion, and her wide grey eyes gazing piteously upon him.

"Oh! Leonard," she said nervously, "why do you go without saying good-bye to me?"

He looked at her awhile before he answered, for something in his heart told him that this was the last sight

which he should win of his love for many a year, and therefore his eyes dwelt upon her as we gaze upon one whom the grave is about to hide from us for ever.

At last he spoke, and his words were practical enough.

“You should not have come out in those thin shoes through the snow, Jane. You will catch cold.”

“I wish I could,” she answered defiantly, “I wish that I could catch such a cold as would kill me; then I should be out of my troubles. Let us go into the summer-house; they will never think of looking for me there.”

“How will you get there?” asked Leonard; “it is a hundred yards away, and the snow always drifts in that path.”

“Oh! never mind the snow,” she said.

But Leonard did mind it, and presently he hit upon a solution of the difficulty. Having first glanced up the drive to see that nobody was coming, he bent forward and without explanation or excuse put his arms around Jane, and lifting her as though she were a child, he bore her down the path which led to the summer-house. She was heavy, but, sooth to say, he could have wished the journey longer. Presently they were there, and very gently he laid her on her feet again, kissing her upon the lips as he did so. Then he took off his overcoat and wrapped it round her shoulders.

All this while Jane had not spoken. Indeed, the poor girl felt so happy and so safe in her lover’s arms that it seemed to her as though she never wished to speak, or to do anything for herself again. It was Leonard who broke the silence.

“You ask me why I left without saying good-bye to you, Jane. It was because your father has dismissed me from the

house and forbidden me to have any more to do with you."

"Oh, why?" asked the girl, lifting her hands despairingly.

"Can't you guess?" he answered with a bitter laugh.

"Yes, Leonard," she whispered, taking his hand in sympathy.

"Perhaps I had better put it plainly," said Leonard again; "it may prevent misunderstandings. Your father has dismissed me because *my* father embezzled all my money. The sins of the father are visited upon the children, you see. Also he has done this with more than usual distinctness and alacrity, because he wishes you to marry young Mr. Cohen, the bullion-broker and the future owner of Outram."

Jane shivered.

"I know, I know," she said, "and oh! Leonard, I hate him!"

"Then perhaps it will be as well not to marry him," he answered.

"I would rather die first," she said with conviction.

"Unfortunately one can't always die when it happens to be convenient, Jane."

"Oh! Leonard, don't be horrid," she said, beginning to cry. "Where are you going, and what shall I do?"

"To the bad probably," he answered. "At least it all depends upon you. Look here, Jane, if you will stick to me I will stick to you. The luck is against me now, but I have it in me to see that through. I love you and I would work myself to death for you; but at the best it must be a question of time, probably of years."

"Oh! Leonard, indeed I will if I can. I am sure that you do not love me more than I love you, but I can never make you

understand how odious they all are to me about you, especially Papa."

"Confound him!" said Leonard beneath his breath; and if Jane heard, at that moment her filial affections were not sufficiently strong to induce her to remonstrate.

"Well, Jane," he went on, "the matter lies thus: either you must put up with their treatment or you must give me the go-by. Listen: in six months you will be twenty-one, and in this country all her relations put together can't force a woman to marry a man if she does not wish to, or prevent her from marrying one whom she does wish to marry. Now you know my address at my club in town; letters sent there will always reach me, and it is scarcely possible for your father or anybody else to prevent you from writing and posting a letter. If you want my help or to communicate in any way, I shall expect to hear from you, and if need be, I will take you away and marry you the moment you come of age. If, on the other hand, I do not hear from you, I shall know that it is because you do not choose to write, or because that which you have to write would be too painful for me to read. Do you understand, Jane?"

"Oh! yes, Leonard, but you put things so hardly."

"Things have been put hardly enough to me, love, and I must be plain—this is my last chance of speaking to you."

At this moment an ominous sound echoed through the night; it was none other than the distant voice of Mr. Beach, calling from his front-door step, "Jane! Are you out there, Jane?"

"Oh! heavens!" she said, "there is my father calling me. I came out by the back door, but mother must have been up

to my room and found me gone. She watches me all day now. What *shall* I do?”

“Go back and tell them that you have been saying good-bye to me. It is not a crime; they cannot kill you for it.”

“Indeed they can, or just as bad,” replied Jane. Then suddenly she threw her arms about her lover’s neck and burying her beautiful face upon his breast, she began to sob bitterly, murmuring, “Oh my darling, my darling, what shall I do without you?”

Over the brief and distressing scene which followed it may be well to drop a veil. Leonard’s bitterness of mind forsook him now, and he kissed her and comforted her as he might best, even going so far as to mingle his tears with hers, tears of which he had no cause to be ashamed. At length she tore herself loose, for the shouts were growing louder and more insistent.

“I forgot,” she sobbed, “here is a farewell present for you; keep it in memory of me, Leonard,” and thrusting her hand into the bosom of her dress she drew from it a little packet which she gave to him.

Then once more they kissed and clung together, and in another moment she had vanished back into the snow and darkness, passing out of Leonard’s sight and out of his life, though from his mind she could never pass.

“A farewell present. Keep it in memory of me.” The words yet echoed in his ears, and to Leonard they seemed fateful—a prophecy of utter loss. Sighing heavily, he opened the packet and examined its contents by the feeble moonlight. They were not large: a prayer-book bound in morocco, her own, with her name on the fly-leaf and a short inscription

beneath, and in the pocket of its cover a lock of auburn hair tied round with silk.

“An unlucky gift,” said Leonard to himself; then putting on his coat, which was yet warm from Jane’s shoulders, he also turned and vanished into the snow and the night, shaping his path towards the village inn.

He reached it in due course, and passed into the little parlour that adjoined the bar. It was a comfortable room enough, notwithstanding its adornments of badly stuffed birds and fishes, and chiefly remarkable for its wide old-fashioned fireplace with wrought-iron dogs. There was no lamp in the room when Leonard entered, but the light of the burning wood was bright, and by it he could see his brother seated in a high-backed chair gazing into the fire, his hand resting on his knee.

Thomas Outram was Leonard’s elder by two years and cast in a more fragile mould. His face was the face of a dreamer, the brown eyes were large and reflective, and the mouth sensitive as a child’s. He was a scholar and a philosopher, a man of much desultory reading, with refined tastes and a really intimate knowledge of Greek gems.

“Is that you, Leonard?” he said, looking up absently; “where have you been?”

“To the Rectory,” answered his brother.

“What have you been doing there?”

“Do you want to know?”

“Yes, of course. Did you see Jane?”

Then Leonard told him all the story.

“What do you think she will do?” asked Tom when his brother had finished. “Given the situation and the woman, it

is rather a curious problem."

"It may be," answered Leonard; "but as I am not an equation in algebra yearning to be worked out, I don't quite see the fun of it. But if you ask me what I think she will do, I should say that she will follow the example of everybody else and desert me."

"You seem to have a poor idea of women, old fellow. I know little of them myself and don't want to know more. But I have always understood that it is the peculiar glory of their sex to come out strong on these exceptional occasions. 'Woman in our hours of ease,' etc."

"Well, we shall see. But it is my opinion that women think a great deal more of their own hours of ease than of those of anybody else. Thank heaven, here comes our dinner!"

Thus spoke Leonard, somewhat cynically and perhaps not in the best of taste. But, his rejoicing over its appearance notwithstanding, he did not do much justice to the dinner when it arrived. Indeed, it would be charitable to make allowances for this young man at that period of his life. He had sustained a most terrible reverse, and do what he might he could never quite escape from the shadow of his father's disgrace, or put out of his mind the stain with which his father had dimmed the honour of his family. And now a new misfortune hung over him. He had just been driven with contumely from a house where hitherto he was the most welcome of guests; he had parted, moreover, from the woman whom he loved dearly, and under circumstances which made it doubtful if their separation would not be final.

Leonard possessed the gift of insight into character, and more common sense than can often be expected from a

young man in love. He knew well that the chief characteristic of Jane's nature was a tendency to yield to the circumstances of the hour, and though he hoped against hope, he could find no reason to suppose that she would exhibit greater determination in the matter of their engagement than her general lack of strength might lead him to anticipate. Besides, and here his common sense came in, would it be wise that she should do so? After all, what had he to offer her, and were not his hopes of future advancement nothing better than a dream? Roughly as he had put it, perhaps Mr. Beach was right when he told him that he, Leonard, was both selfish and impertinent, since was it not a selfish impertinence in him to ask any woman to link her fortune with his in the present state of his affairs?

Let us therefore make excuses for his words and outward behaviour, for at heart Leonard had much to trouble him.

When the cloth had been cleared away and they were alone again, Tom spoke to his brother, who was moodily filling his pipe.

"What shall we do to-night, Leonard?" he said.

"Go to bed, I suppose," he answered.

"See here, Leonard," said his brother again, "what do you say to having a last look at the old place?"

"If you wish, Tom, but it will be painful."

"A little pain more or less can scarcely hurt us, old fellow," said Tom, laying his thin hand on his brother's shoulder.

Then they started. A quarter of an hour's walking brought them to the Hall. The snow had ceased falling now and the night was beautifully clear, but before it ceased it had done

a welcome office in hiding from view all the litter and wreckage of the auction, which make the scene of a recent sale one of the most desolate sights in the world. Never had the old house looked grander or more eloquent of the past than it did on that night to the two brothers who were dispossessed of their heritage. They wandered round it in silence, gazing affectionately at each well-known tree and window, till at length they came to the gun-room entrance. More from habit than for any other reason Leonard turned the handle of the door. To his surprise it was open; after the confusion of the sale no one had remembered to lock it.

“Let us go in,” he said.

They entered and wandered from room to room till they reached the greater hall, a vast and oak-roofed chamber built after the fashion of the nave of a church, and lighted by a large window of ecclesiastical design. This window was filled with the armorial bearings of many generations of the Outram family, wrought in stained glass and placed in couples, for next to each coat of arms were the arms of its bearer’s dame. It was not quite full, however, for in it remained two blank shields, which had been destined to receive the escutcheons of Thomas Outram and his wife.

“They will never be filled now, Leonard,” said Tom, pointing to these; “curious, isn’t it, not to say sad?”

“Oh! I don’t know,” answered his brother; “I suppose that the Cohens boast some sort of arms, or if not they can buy them.”

“I should think that they would have the good taste to begin a new window for themselves,” said Tom.

Then he was silent for a while, and they watched the moonlight streaming through the painted window, the memorial of so much forgotten grandeur, and illumining the portraits of many a dead Outram that gazed upon them from the panelled walls.

"*Per ardua ad astra*," said Tom, absently reading the family motto which alternated pretty regularly with a second device that some members of it had adopted—"For Heart, Home, and Honour."

"'*Per ardua ad astra*'—through struggle to the stars—and 'For Heart, Home, and Honour,'" repeated Tom; "well, I think that our family never needed such consolations more, if indeed there are any to be found in mottoes. Our Heart is broken, our hearth is desolate, and our honour is a byword, but there remain the 'struggle and the stars.'"

As he spoke his face took the fire of a new enthusiasm: "Leonard," he went on, "why should not we retrieve the past? Let us take that motto—the more ancient one—for an omen, and let us fulfil it. I believe it is a good omen, I believe that one of us will fulfil it."

"We can try," answered Leonard. "If we fail in the struggle, at least the stars remain for us as for all human kind."

"Leonard," said his brother almost in a whisper, "will you swear an oath with me? It seems childish, but I think that under some circumstances there is wisdom even in childishness."

"What oath?" asked Leonard.

"This; that we will leave England and seek fortune in some foreign land—sufficient fortune to enable us to

repurchase our lost home; that we will never return here until we have won this fortune; and that death alone shall put a stop to our quest."

Leonard hesitated a moment, then answered:

"If Jane fails me, I will swear it."

Tom glanced round as though in search of some familiar object, and presently his eye fell upon what he sought. A great proportion of the furniture of the old house, including the family portraits, had been purchased by the in-coming owner. Among the articles which remained was a very valuable and ancient bible, one of the first ever printed indeed, that stood upon an oaken stand in the centre of the hall, to which it was securely chained. Tom led the way to this bible, followed by his brother. Then they placed their hands upon it, and standing there in the shadow, the elder of them spoke aloud in a voice that left no doubt of the earnestness of his purpose, or of his belief in their mission.

"We swear," he said, "upon this book and before the God who made us that we will leave this home that was ours, and never look upon it again till we can call it ours once more. We swear that we will follow this, the purpose of our lives, till death destroys us and it; and may shame and utter ruin overtake us if, while we have strength and reason, we turn our backs upon this oath! So help us God!"

"So help us God!" repeated Leonard.

Thus in the home of their ancestors, in the presence of their Maker, and of the pictured dead who had gone before them, did Thomas and Leonard Outram devote their lives to this great purpose. Perhaps, as one of them had said, the thing was childish, but if so, at the least it was solemn and