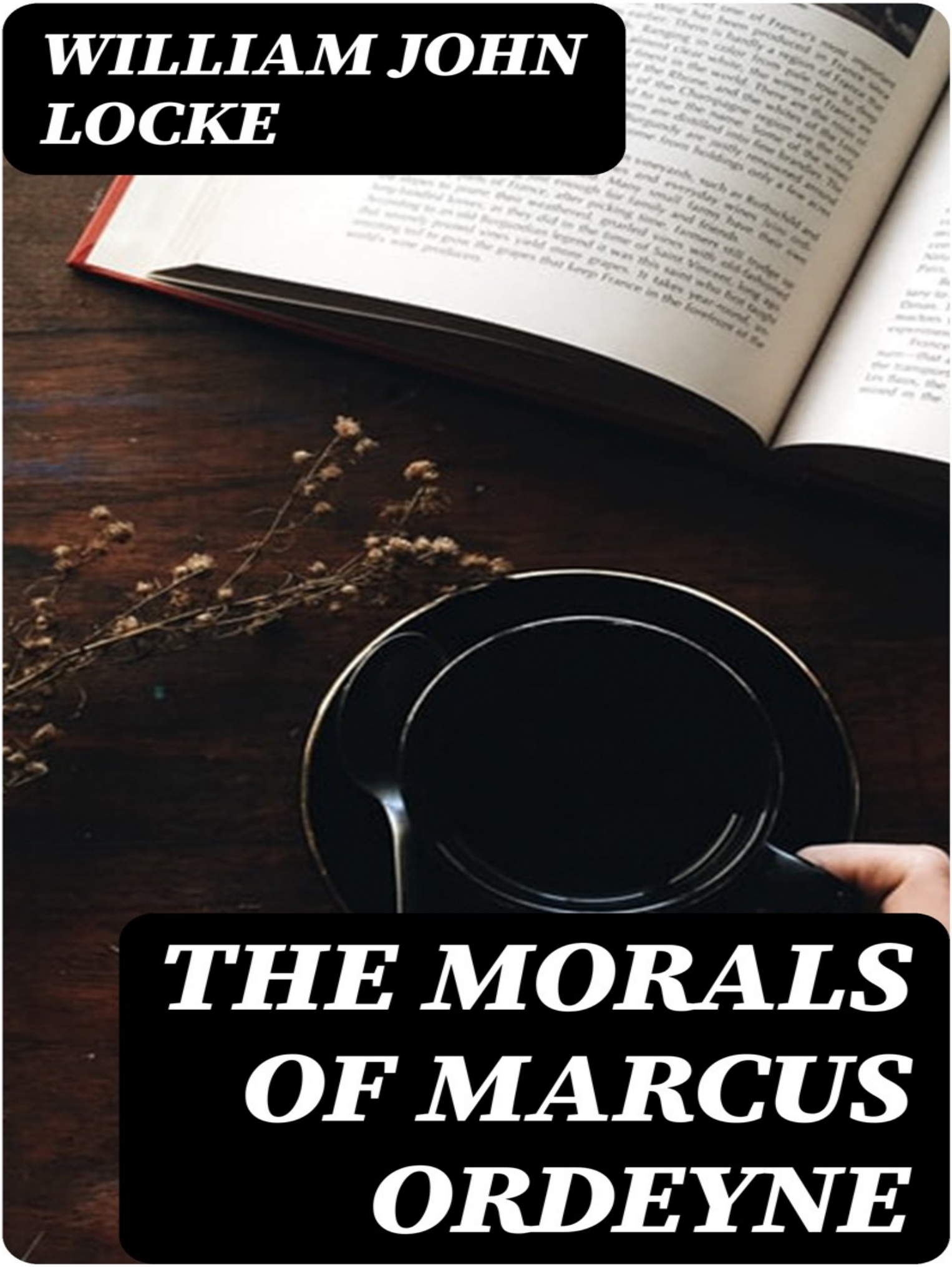
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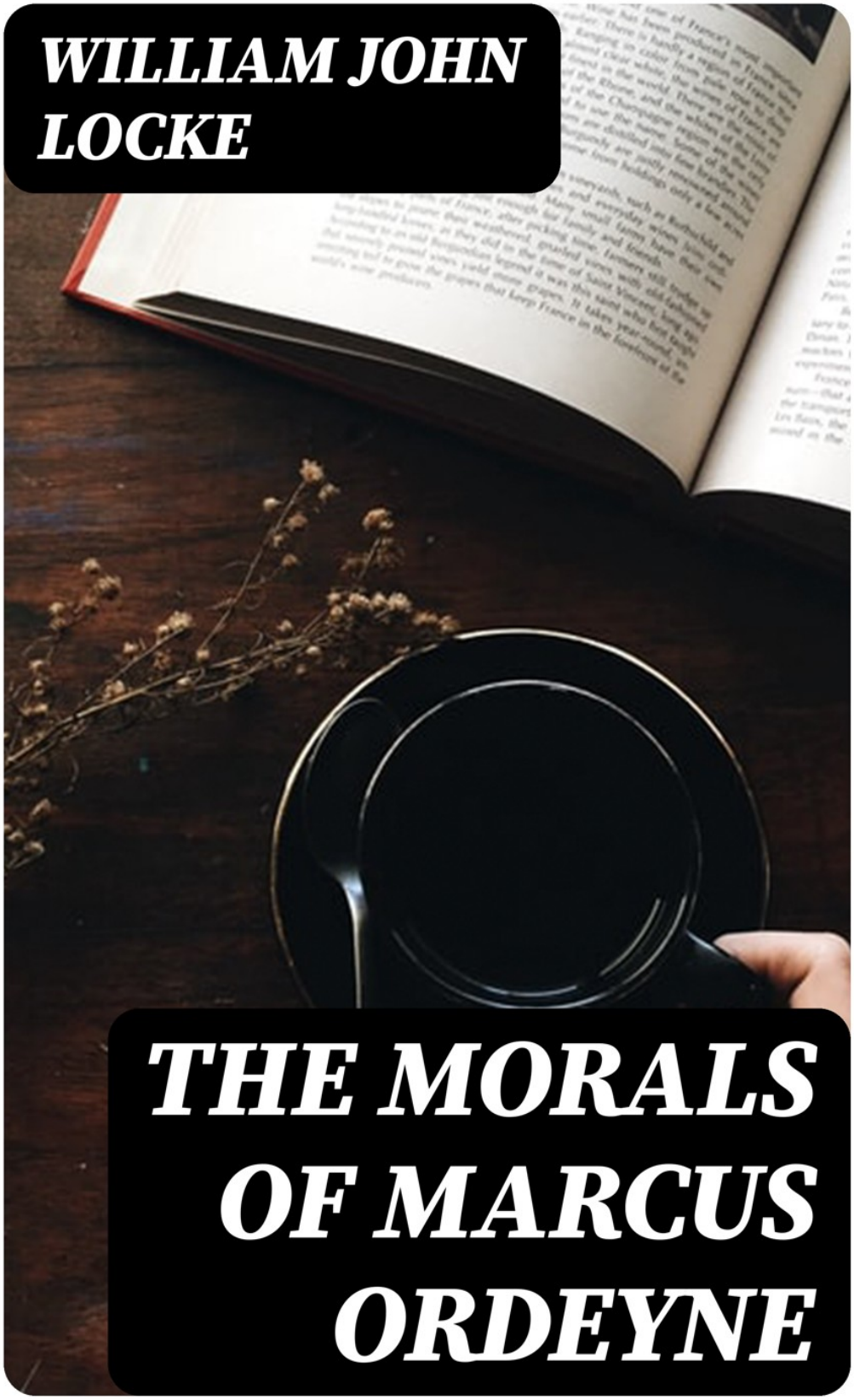
WILLIAM JOHN LOCKE
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William John Locke

The Morals of Marcus Ordeyne

A Novel

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CHAPTER XXV

PART I

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CHAPTER I

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For reasons which will be given later, I sit down here, in Verona, to write the history of my extravagant adventure. I shall formulate and expand the rough notes in my diary which lies open before me, and I shall begin with a happy afternoon in May, six months ago.

May 20th.

London:—To-day is the seventh anniversary of my release from captivity. I will note it every year in my diary with a sigh of unutterable thanksgiving. For seven long blessed years have I been free from the degrading influences of Jones Minor and the First Book of Euclid. Some men find the modern English boy stimulating, and the old Egyptian humorous. Such are the born schoolmasters, and schoolmasters, like poets, *nascuntur non fiunt*. What I was born passes my ingenuity to fathom. Certainly not a schoolmaster—and my many years of apprenticeship did not make me one. They only turned me into an automaton, feared by myself, bantered by my colleagues, and sometimes good-humouredly tolerated by the boys.

Seven years ago the lawyer’s letter came. The post used to arrive just before first school. I opened the letter in the class-room and sat down at my desk, sick with horror. The awful wholesale destruction of my relatives paralysed me. My form must have seen by my ghastly face that something had happened, for, contrary to their usual practice, they sat, thirty of them, in stony silence, waiting for me to begin the lesson. As far as I remember anything, they waited the

whole hour. The lesson over, I passed along the cloister on my way to my rooms. I overheard one of my urchins, clattering in front of me, shout to another:

“I’m sure he’s got the sack!”

Turning round he perceived me, and grew as red as a turkey-cock. I laughed aloud. The boy’s yell was a clarion announcement from the seventh heaven. I *had got the sack*! *I* should never teach him quadratic equations again. I should turn my back forever upon those hateful walls and still more abominated playing-fields. And I was not leaving my prison, as I had done once or twice before, in order to continue my servitude elsewhere. I was free. I could go out into the sunshine and look my fellow-man in the face, free from the haunting, demoralising sense of incapacity. I was free. Until that urchin’s shriek I had not realised it. My teeth chattered with the thrill.

I was fortunately out of school the second hour. I employed most of it in balancing myself. A perfectly reasonable creature, I visited the chief. He was a chubby, rotund man, with a circular body and a circular visage, and he wore great circular gold spectacles. He looked like a figure in the Third Book of Euclid. But his eyes sparkled like bits of glass in the sun.

“Well, Ordeyne?” he inquired, looking up from letters to parents.

“I have come to ask you to accept my resignation,” said I. “I would like you to release me at once.”

“Come, come, things are not as bad as all that,” said he, kindly.

I looked stupidly at him for a moment.

“Of course I know you’ve got one or two troublesome forms,” he continued.

Then I winced. His conjecture hurt me horribly.

“Oh, it’s nothing to do with my incompetence,” I interrupted.

“What is it, then?”

“My grandfather, two uncles, two nephews and a valet were drowned a day or two ago in the Mediterranean,” I answered, calmly.

I have since been struck by the crudity of this announcement. It took my chief’s breath away.

“I deeply sympathise with you,” he said at last.

“Thank you,” said I.

“A terrible catastrophe. No wonder it has upset you. Horrible! Six living human beings! Three generations of men!”

“That’s just it,” said I. “Three generations of my family swept away, leaving me now at the head of it.”

At this moment the chief’s wife came into the library with the morning paper in her hand. On seeing me she rushed forward.

“Have you had bad news?”

“Yes. Is it in the paper?”

“I was coming to show my husband. The name is an uncommon one. I wondered if they might be relatives of yours.”

I bowed acquiescence. The chief looked at the paragraph below his wife’s indicating thumb, then he looked at me as if I, too, had suffered a seachange.

“I had no idea—” he said. “Why, now—now you are Sir Marcus Ordeyne!”

“It sounds idiotic, doesn’t it?” said I, with a smile. “But I suppose I -am.”

And so came my release from captivity. I was profoundly affected by the awful disaster, but it would be sheer hypocrisy if I said that I felt personal grief. I knew none of the dead, of whom I verily believe the valet was the worthiest man. My grandfather and uncles had ignored my existence. Not a helping hand had they stretched out to my widowed mother in her poverty, when one kindly touch would have meant all.

They do not seem to have been a lovable race, the Ordeynes. What my father, the youngest son, was like, I have no idea, as he died when I was two years old, but my mother, who was somewhat stern and puritanical, spoke of him very much as she would have spoken of the prophet Joel, had he been a personal acquaintance.

Seven years to-day have I been a free man.

Feeling at peace with all the world I called this afternoon on my Aunt Jessica, Mrs. Ordeyne, who has borne me no malice for stepping into the place that should have been the inheritance of her husband and of her son. Rather has she devised to adopt me, to guide my ambitions and to point out my duties as the head of the house. If I refuse to be adopted, avoid ambitions and disclaim duties, the fault lies not with her good-will. She is a well-preserved worldly woman of fifty-five, and having begun to dye her hair in the peroxide of hydrogen era has not the curiosity to abandon the practice and see what colour will result. I wish I could

like her. I can’t. She purrs. Some day I feel she will scratch. She received me graciously.

“My dear Marcus. At last! Didn’t you know I have been in town ever since Easter?”

“No,” said I. “I am afraid I didn’t.” Which was true. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I would have asked you to dinner, but you will never come. As for At Home cards I never dream of sending them to you. It is a waste of precious half-penny stamps.”

“You might have written me a nice little letter about nothing at all,” I suggested.

“For you to say ‘What is that woman worrying me with her silly letters for?’ I know what you men are.” She looked arch.

This is precisely what I should have said. As I am not an inventive liar, I could only smile feebly. I am never at my ease with Aunt Jessica. I am not the kind of person to afford her entertainment. I do not belong to her world of opulence, and if even I desired it, which the gods forbid, my means would not enable me to make the necessary display. My uncle, thinking to retrieve the fallen fortunes of the title, amassed enormous wealth as a company promoter, while I, on whom the title has descended, am perfectly contented with its fallen fortunes. I have scarcely a thought or taste in common with my aunt. In fact, I must bore her exceedingly. Yet she hides her boredom beneath a radiant countenance and leads me to understand that my society gives her inexpressible joy. I wonder why.

She is always be-guide-philosopher-and-friending me. I resent it. A man of forty does not need the counsels of an

elderly woman destitute of intellect. I believe there are some women who are firmly convinced that their sheer sex has imbued them with all the qualities of genius. To-day my aunt tackled me on the subject of marriage. I ought to marry. I asked why. It appeared it was every man's duty.

"From what point of view?" I asked. "The mere propagation of the human race, or the providing of a superfluous young woman with a means of livelihood? If it is the former, then, in my opinion, there are too many people in the world already; and if the latter, I'm afraid I'm not sufficiently altruistic."

"You are so *funny!*" laughed my aunt.

I was not aware of being the least bit funny.

"But, seriously," she continued, "you *must* marry." She is a woman who has an irritating way of speaking in Italics. "Are you aware that if you have no son the title will become extinct?"

"And if it does," I cried, "who on this earth will care a half-penny-bun?"

I am growing tired of the title. At first it was rather amusing. Now it appears it is registered in Heaven's chancery and hedged about with divine ordinances. Only the other day an unknown parson requested me to open a church bazaar, and I gathered he had received his instructions direct from the Almighty.

"Why, every one would care," exclaimed my aunt, genuinely shocked. "It would be monstrous. You owe it to your descendants as well as to your ancestors. Besides," she added, with apparent irrelevance, "a man in your position ought to live up to it."

“I do,” said I, “just up to it.”

“Now you are pretending you don’t understand me. You ought to marry money!”

I smiled and shook my head. I don’t think my aunt likes me to smile and shake my head, for I saw a flicker in her eyes. “No, my dear aunt; emphatically no. It would be comfortless. If I kissed it, it would be cold. If I put my arms round it, it would be full of sharp edges which would hurt. If I tried to get any emotion out of it, it would only jingle.”

“What do you want then?”

“Nothing. But if I must—let it be plain flesh and blood.”

“Cannibal!” said my aunt.

We both laughed.

“But you can have plenty of flesh and blood, with money as well, for the asking,” she insisted; and thereupon my two cousins, Dora and Gwendolen, entered the drawingroom and interrupted the conversation. They are both bouncing, fresh-faced girls, in the early twenties. They ride and shoot and bicycle and golf and dance, and the elder writes little stories for the magazines. As I do none of these things, I am convinced they regard me as a poor sort of creature. When they hand me a cup of tea I almost expect them to pat me on the head and say, “Good dog!” I am long, lean, stooping, hatchet-faced, hawknosed, near-sighted. I have not the breezy air of the jolly young stockbrokers they are in the habit of meeting. They rather alarm me. Moreover, they have managed to rear a colossal pile of wholly incorrect information on every subject under the sun, and are addicted to letting chunks of it fall about one’s ears. This stuns me, rendering conversation difficult.

As I had not seen Dora since her return from Rome, where she had spent the early spring, I asked, in some trepidation, for her impressions. Before I could collect myself, I was listening to a lecture on St. Peter's. She told me it was built by Michael Angelo. I suggested that some credit might be given to Bramante, not to speak of Rosellino, Baldassare Peruzzi and the two San Gallo's.

"Oh!" said my young lady, with a superb air of omniscience. "It was all Michael Angelo's design. *The others only tinkered away at it afterwards*."

After receiving this brickbat I took my leave.

To console myself I looked up, during the evening, Michael Angelo's noble letter about Bramante.

"One cannot deny," says he, "that Bramante was as excellent in architecture as any one has been from the ancients to now. He placed the first stone of St. Peter's, not full of confusion, but clear, neat, and luminous, and isolated all round in such a way that it injured no part of the palace, and was held to be a beautiful thing, as is still apparent, in such a way that any one who has departed from the said order of Bramante, as San Gallo has done, has departed from the truth."

Michael Angelo did not like San Gallo; neither did he like Bramante-who was his senior by thirty years-but this makes his appreciation of the elder's work all the more generous.

Tinkered away at it, indeed!

May 21st.

I spent all the morning at work by the open window.

I have a small house in Lingfield Terrace, on the north side of the Regent's Park, so that my drawing-room, on the

first floor, has a southern aspect. It has been warm and sunny for the past few days, and the elms and plane-trees across the road are beginning to riot in their green bravery, as if intoxicated with the golden wine of spring. My French window is flung wide open, and on the balcony a triangular bit of sunlight creeps round as the morning advances. My work-table is drawn up to the window. I am busy over the first section of my “History of Renaissance Morals,” for which I think my notes are completed. I have a delicious sense of isolation from the world. Away over those tree-tops is a faint purpurine pall, and below it lies London, with its strife and its misery, its wickedness and its vanity. Twenty minutes would take me into the heart of it. And if I chose I could be as struggling, as wretched, as much imbued with wickedness and vanity as anybody. I could gamble on the stock exchange, or play the muddy game of politics, or hawk my precious title for sale among the young women of London society. My Aunt Jessica once told me that London was at my feet. I am quite content that it should stay there. I have much the same nervous dread of it as I have of an angry sea breaking in surf on the shingle. If I ventured out in it I should be tossed hither and thither and broken on the rocks, and I should perish. I prefer to stand aloof and watch. If I had a little more of daring in my nature I might achieve something. I am afraid I am but a waster in the world’s factory; but kind Fate, instead of pitching me on the rubbish-heap, has preserved me, perhaps has set me under a glass case, in her own museum, as a curiosity. Well, I am happy in my shelter.

I was interrupted in my writing by the entrance of my cook and housekeeper, Antoinette. She was sorry to disturb me, but did Monsieur like sorrel? She was preparing some *veau a l'oseille* for lunch, and Stenson (my man) had informed her that it was disgusting stuff and that Monsieur would not eat it.

"Antoinette," said I, "go and inform Stenson that as he looks after my outside so do you look after my inside, and that I have implicit confidence in both of you in your respective spheres of action."

"But does Monsieur like sorrel?" Antoinette inquired, anxiously.

"I adore it even," said I, and Antoinette made her exit in triumph.

What a reverential care French women have for the insides of their masters! At times it is pathetic. Before now, I have thrown dainty morsels which I could not eat into the fire, so as to avoid hurting Antoinette's feelings.

I came across her three years ago in a tiny hostelry in a tiny town in the Loire district. She cooked the dinner and conversed about it afterwards so touchingly that we soon became united in bonds of the closest affection. Suddenly some money was stolen; Antoinette, accused, was dismissed without notice. I had a shrewd suspicion of the thief—a suspicion which was afterwards completely justified—and indignantly championed Antoinette's cause.

But Antoinette, coming from a village some eighty miles away, was a stranger and an alien. I was her only friend. It ended in my inviting her to come to England, the land of the free and the refuge of the downtrodden and oppressed, and

become my housekeeper. She accepted, with smiles and tears. And they were great big smiles, that went into creases all over her fat red face, forming runnels for the great big tears which dropped off at unexpected angles. She was alone in the world. Her only son had died during his military service in Madagascar. Although her man was dead, the law would not regard her as a widow because she had never been married, and therefore refused to exempt her only son. "*On ne peut-etre Jeune qu'une fois, n'est-ce pas, Monsieur?*" she said, in extenuation of her early fault.

"And Jean-Marie," she added, "was as brave a fellow and as devoted a son as if I had been married by the Saint-Pere himself."

I waved my hand in deprecation and told her it did not matter in the least. The della Scalas, supreme lords of Verona for many generations, were every man jack of them so parented. Even William the Conqueror—

"*Tiens*," cried Antoinette, consoled, "and he became Emperor of Germany—he and Bismarck!"

Antoinette's historical sense is rudimentary. I have not tried since to develop it.

When I brought my victim of foreign tyranny to Lingfield Terrace, Stenson, I believe, nearly fainted. He is the correctest of English valets, and his only vice, I believe, is the accordion, on which he plays jaunty hymn-tunes when I am out of the house. When he had recovered he asked me, respectfully, how they were to understand each other. I explained that he would either have to learn French or teach Antoinette English. What they have done, I gather, is to invent a nightmare of a *lingua franca* in which they appear

to hold amicable converse. Now and again they have differences of opinion, as to-day, over my taste for *veau a l'oseille*; but, on the whole, their relations are harmonious, and she keeps him in a good-humour: Naturally, she feeds the brute.

The duty-impulse, stimulated by my call yesterday on one aunt by marriage, led my footsteps this afternoon to the house of the other, Mrs. Ralph Ordeyne. She is of a different type from her sister-in-law, being a devout Roman Catholic, and since the terrible affliction of two years ago has concerned herself more deeply than ever in the affairs of her religion. She lives in a gloomy little house in a sunless Kensington by-street. Only my Cousin Rosalie was at home. She gave me tea made with tepid water and talked about the Earl's Court Exhibition, which she had not visited, and a new novel, of which she had vaguely heard. I tried in vain to infuse some life into the conversation. I don't believe she is interested in anything. She even spoke lukewarmly of Farm Street.

I pity her intensely. She is thin, thirty, colourless, bosomless. I should say she was passionless—a predestined spinster. She has never drunk hot tea or lived in the sun or laughed a hearty laugh. I remember once, at my wit's end for talk, telling her the old story of Theodore Hook accosting a pompous stranger on the street with the polite request that he might know whether he was anybody in particular. She said, without a smile, "Yes, it was astonishing how rude some people could be."

And her godfathers and godmothers gave her the name of Rosalie. Mine might just as well have called me Hercules

or Puck.

She told me that her mother intended to ask me to dine with them one evening next week. When was I free? I chose Thursday. Oddly enough I enjoy dining there, although we are on the most formal terms, not having got beyond the "Sir Marcus" and "Mrs. Ordeyne." But both mother and daughter are finely bred gentlewomen, and one meets few, oh, very, very few among the ladies of to-day.

I reached home about six and found a telegram awaiting me.

"*Sorry can't give you dinner. Cook in an impossible condition. Come later.* Judith."

I must confess to a sigh of relief. I am fond of Judith and sorry for her domestic infelicities, though why she should maintain that alcoholized wretch in her kitchen passes my comprehension. If there is one thing women do not understand it is the selection, the ordering, and the treatment of domestic servants. The mere man manages much better. But, that aside, Antoinette has spoiled me for Judith's cook's cookery. I breathed a little sigh of content and summoned Stenson to inform him that I would dine at home.

A great package of books from a second-hand bookseller arrived during dinner. Among them were the nine volumes of Pietro Gianone's *Istoria Civile del Regno di Napoli*, a copy of which I ought to have possessed long ago. It is dedicated to the "Most Puissant and Felicitous Prince Charles VI, the Great, by God crowned Emperor of the Romans, King of Germany, Spain, Naples, Hungary, Bohemia, Sicily, *etcetera*." Is there a living soul in God's universe who has a

spark of admiration for this most puissant and most felicitous monarch crowned by God Emperor and King of the greater part of Europe (and docked of most of his pretensions by the Treaty of Utrecht)? We only remember the forcible-feeble person by his Pragmatic Sanction, and otherwise his personality has left in history not the remotest trace. And yet, on the 12th February, 1723, a profoundly erudite, subtle, and picturesque historian grovels before the man and subscribes himself “Of your Holy Caesarean and Catholic Majesty the most humble and most devoted and most obsequious vassal and slave Pietro Gianone.” What ruthless judgments posterity passes on once enormous reputations! In Gianone’s admirable introduction we hear of “*il celebre Arthur Duck, il quale oltro a’ con confini della sua Inghilterra volle in altri a piu lontani Paesi andav rintracciando l’uso a l’autorita delle romane leggi ne’ nuovi domini de’ Principi cristiani; e di quelle di ciascheduna Nazione volle ancora aver conto: le ricerco nella vicina Scozia, e nell’ Ibernia; trapasso nella Francia, e nella Spagna; in Germania, in Italia, a nel nostro Regno ancora: si stese in oltre in Polonia, Boemia, in Ungheria, Danimarca, nella Svezia, ed in piu remote parti*.” A devil of a fellow this celebrated English Arthur Duck, who besides writing a learned treatise *De Usu et Auth. Jur. Civ. Rom. in Dominiis Principum Christianorum*, was a knight, a member of Parliament, chancellor of the diocese of London, and a master in chancery. Gianone flattens himself out for a couple of pages before this prodigy whom he lovingly calls *Ariuro*, as who should say Raffaelo or Giordano; and now, where in the hearts of men lingers Sir Arthur Duck? For one

thing he had a bad name. Our English sense of humour revolts from making a popular hero of a man called Duck. Yet we made one of Drake. But there was something masculine about the latter: in fact, everything.

I am afraid it was rather late when I got to Judith.

CHAPTER II

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May 22d.

I wonder whether I should be happier now if I had lived in a garret “in the brave days when I was twenty-one,” if I had undergone the lessons of misery with the attendant compensations of “*une folle maitresse, de francs amis et l’amour des chansons*,” and had joyous-heartedly mounted my six flights of stairs. I lived modestly, it is true; but never for a moment was I doubtful as to my next meal, and I have always enjoyed the creature comforts of the respectable classes; never did Lisette pin her shawl curtain-wise across my window. Sometimes, nowadays, I almost wish she had. I never dreamed of glory, love, pleasure, madness, or spent my lifetime in a moment, like the singer of the immortal song. Often the weary moments seemed a lifetime.

And now that I am forty, “it is too late a week.” Boon companions, of whom I am thankful to say I have none, would drive me crazy with their intolerable heartiness. I once spent an evening at the Savage Club. As for the *folle maitresse*—as a concomitant of my existence she transcends imagination.

“What are you thinking of?” asked Judith.

“I was thinking how the *‘Dans un grenier qu’on est bien a vingt ans’’* principle would have worked in my own case,” I answered truthfully, for the above reflections had been Passing through my mind.

Judith laughed.

“You in a garret? Why, you haven’t got a temperament!”

I suppose I haven’t. It never occurred to me before. Beranger omitted that from his list of attendant compensations.

“That’s the difference between us,” she added, after a pause. “I have a temperament and you haven’t.”

“I hope you find it a great comfort.”

“It is ten times more uncomfortable than a conscience. It is the bane of one’s existence.”

“Why be so proud of having it?”

“You wouldn’t understand if I told you,” said Judith.

I rose and walked to the window and gazed meditatively at the rain which swept the uninspiring little street. Judith lives in Tottenham Mansions, in the purlieus of the Tottenham Court Road. The ground floor of the building is a public-house, and on summer evenings one can sit by the open windows, and breathe in the health-giving fumes of beer and whisky, and listen to the sweet, tuneless strains of itinerant musicians. When my new fortunes enabled me to give the dear woman just the little help that allowed her to move into a more commodious flat, she had the many mansions of London to choose from. Why she insisted on this abominable locality I could never understand. It isn’t as if the flat were particularly cheap; indeed the fact of its being situated over a public-house seems to enhance the rent. She said she liked the shape of the knocker and the pattern of the bathroom taps. I dimly perceive that it must have had something to do with the temperament.

“It always seems to rain when we propose an outing together. This is the fourth time since Easter,” I remarked.

We had planned a sedate country jaunt, but as the day was pouring wet we remained at home.

“Perhaps this is the way the *bon Dieu* has of expressing his disapproval of us,” said Judith.

“Why should he disapprove?” I asked.

A shrug of her shoulders ended in a shiver.

“I am chilled through.”

“My dear girl,” I cried, “why on earth haven’t you lit the fire?”

“The last time I lit it you said the room was stuffy.”

“But then it was beautiful blazing sunshine, you illogical woman,” I exclaimed, searching my pockets for a match-box.

I struck a match. To apply it to the fire I had to kneel by her chair. She stretched out her hand—she has delicate white hands with slender fingers—and lightly touched my head.

“How long have we known each other?” she asked.

“About eight years.”

“And how long shall we go on?”

“As long as you like,” said I, intent on the fire.

Judith withdrew her hand. I knelt on the hearthrug until the merry blaze and crackle of the wood assured me of successful effort.

“These are capital grates,” I said, cheerfully, drawing a comfortable arm-chair to the front of the fire.

“Excellent,” she replied, in a tone devoid of interest.

There was a long silence. To me this is one of the great charms of human intercourse. Is there not a legend that Tennyson and Carlyle spent the most enjoyable evenings of

their lives enveloped in impenetrable silence and tobacco-smoke, one on each side of the hob? A sort of Whistlerian nocturne of golden fog!

I offered Judith a cigarette. She declined it with a shake of the head. I lit one myself and leaning back contentedly in my chair watched her face in half-profile. Most people would call her plain. I can't make up my mind on the point. She is what is termed a negative blonde—that is to say, one with very fair hair (in marvellous abundance—it is one of her beauties), a sallow complexion and deep violet eyes. Her face is thin, a little worn, that of the woman who has suffered—temperament again! Her mouth, now, as she looks into the new noisy flames, is drawn down at the corners. Her figure is slight but graceful. She has pretty feet. One protruded from her skirt, and a slipper dangled from the tip. At last it fell off. I knew it would. She has a craze for the minimum of material in slippers—about an inch of leather (I suppose it's leather) from the toe. I picked the vain thing up and balanced it again on her stocking-foot.

"Will you do that eight years hence?" said Judith.

"My dear, as I've done it eight thousand times the last eight years, I suppose I shall," I replied, laughing. "I'm a creature of habit."

"You may marry, Marcus."

"God forbid!" I ejaculated.

"Some pretty fresh girl."

"I abominate pretty fresh girls. I would just as soon talk to a baby in a perambulator."

"The women men are crazy to marry are not always those they particularly delight to converse with, my friend,"

said Judith.

I lit another cigarette. “I think the sex feminine has marriage on the brain,” I exclaimed, somewhat heatedly. “My Aunt Jessica was worrying me about it the day before yesterday. As if it were any concern of hers!”

Judith laughed below her breath and called me a simpleton.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because you haven’t got a temperament.”

This was a foolish answer, having no bearing on the question. I told her so. She replied that she was years older than I, and had learned the eternal relevance of all things. I pointed out that she was years younger.

“How many heart-beats have you had in your life—real, wild, pulsating heart-beats—eternity in an hour?”

“That’s Blake,” I murmured.

“I’m aware of it. Answer my question.”

“It’s a silly question.”

“It isn’t. The next time you see a female baby in a perambulator, take off your hat respectfully.”

I am afraid I am clumsy at repartee.

“And the next time you engage a cook, my dear Judith,” said I, “send for a mere man.”

She coloured up. I dissolved myself in apologies. Her wounded susceptibilities required careful healing. The situation was somewhat odd. She had not scrupled to attack the innermost weaknesses of my character, and yet when I retaliated by a hit at externals, she was deeply hurt, and made me feel a ruffianly blackguard. I really think if Lisette had pinned up that curtain I should have learned something

more about female human nature. But Judith is the only woman I have known intimately all my life long, and sometimes I wonder whether I shall ever know her. I told her so once. She answered: “If you loved me you would know me.” Very likely she was right. Honestly speaking, I don’t love Judith. I am accustomed to her. She is a lady, born and bred. She is an educated woman and takes quite an intelligent interest in the Renaissance. Indeed she has a subtler appreciation of the Venetian School of Painting than I have. She first opened my eyes, in Italy, to the beauties, as a gorgeous colourist, of Palma Vecchio in his second or Giorgionesque manner. She is in every way a sympathetic and entertaining companion. Going deeper, to the roots of human instinct, I find she represents to me—so chance has willed it—the *ewige weibliche* which must complement masculinity in order to produce normal existence. But as for the “*zieht uns hinan*”—no. It would not attract me hence—out of my sphere. I could commit an immortal folly for no woman who ever made this planet more lustrous to its Bruderspharen.

I don’t understand Judith. It doesn’t very greatly matter. Many things I don’t understand, the spiritual attitude towards himself, for example, of the intelligent juggler who expends his life’s energies in balancing a cue and three billiard-balls on the tip of his nose. But I know that Judith understands me, and therein lies the advantage I gain from our intimacy. She gauges, to an absurdly subtle degree, the depth of my affection. She is really an incomparable woman. So many insist upon predilection masquerading as consuming passion. There is nothing theatrical about Judith.

Yet to-day she appeared a little touchy, moody, unsettled. She broke another pleasant spell of fireside silence, that followed expiation of my offence, by suddenly calling my name.

“Yes?” said I, inquiringly.

“I want to tell you something. Please promise me you won’t be vexed.”

“My dear Judith,” said I, “my great and imperial namesake, in whose meditations I have always found ineffable comfort, tells me this: ‘If anything external vexes you, take notice that it is not the thing which disturbs you, but your notion about it, which notion you may dismiss at once, if you please!’ So I promise to dismiss all my notions of your disturbing communication and not to be vexed.”

“If there is one platitudinist I dislike more than another, it is Marcus Aurelius,” said Judith.

I laughed. It was very comfortable to sit before the fire, which protested, in a fire’s cheery, human way, against the depression of the murky world outside, and to banter Judith.

“I can quite understand it,” I said. “A man sucks in the consolations of philosophy; a woman solaces herself with religion.”

“I can do neither,” she replied, changing her attitude with an exaggerated shaking down of skirts. “If I could, I shouldn’t want to go away.”

“Go away?” I echud.

“Yes. You mustn’t be vexed with me. I haven’t got a cook —”

“No one would have thought it, from the luncheon you gave me, my dear.”

The alcoholized domestic, by the way, was sent out, bag and baggage, last evening, when she was sober enough to walk.

“And so it is a convenient opportunity,” Judith continued, ignoring my compliment—and rightly so; for as soon as it had been uttered, I was struck by an uneasy conviction that she had herself disturbed the French caterers in the Tottenham Court Road from their Sabbath repose in order to provide me with food.

“I can shut up the flat without any fuss. I am never happy at the beginning of a London season. I know I’m silly,” she went on, hurriedly. “If I could stand your dreadful Marcus Aurelius I might be wiser—I don’t mind the rest of the year; but in the season everybody is in town—people I used to know and mix with—I meet them in the streets and they cut me and it—hurts—and so I want to get away somewhere by myself. When I get sick of solitude I’ll come back.”

One of her quick, graceful movements brought her to her knees by my side. She caught my hand.

“For pity’s sake, Marcus, say that you understand why it is.”

I said, “I have been a blatant egoist all the afternoon, Judith. I didn’t guess. Of course I understand.”

“If you didn’t, it would be impossible for us.”

“Have no doubt,” said I, softly, and I kissed her hand.

I came into her life when she counted it as over and done with—at eight and twenty—and was patiently undergoing premature interment in a small pension in Rome. How long her patience would have lasted I cannot say. If circumstances had been different, what would have

happened? is the most futile of speculations. What did happen was the drifting together of us two bits of flotsam and our keeping together for the simple reason that there were no forces urging us apart. She was past all care for social sanctions, her sacred cap of good repute having been flung over the windmills long before; and I, friendless unit in a world of shadows, why should I have rejected the one warm hand that was held out to me? As I said to her this afternoon, Why should the *bon Dieu* disapprove? I pay him the compliment of presuming that he is a broad-minded deity.

When my fortune came, she remarked, “I am glad I am not free. If I were, you would want to marry me, and that would be fatal.”

The divine, sound sense of the dear woman! Honour would compel the offer. Its acceptance would bring disaster.

Marriage has two aspects. The one, a social contract, a *quid* of protection, maintenance, position and what not, for a *quo* of the various services that may be conveniently epitomized in the phrase *de mensa et thoro*. The other, the only possible existence for two beings whose passionate, mutual attraction demands the perfect fusion of their two existences into a common life. Now to this passionate attraction I have never become, and, having no temperament (thank Heaven!), shall never become, a party. Before the turbulence therein involved I stand affrighted as I do before London or the deep sea. I once read an epitaph in a German churchyard: “I will awake, O Christ, when thou callest me; but let me sleep awhile, for I am very weary.” Has the human soul ever so poignantly expressed its