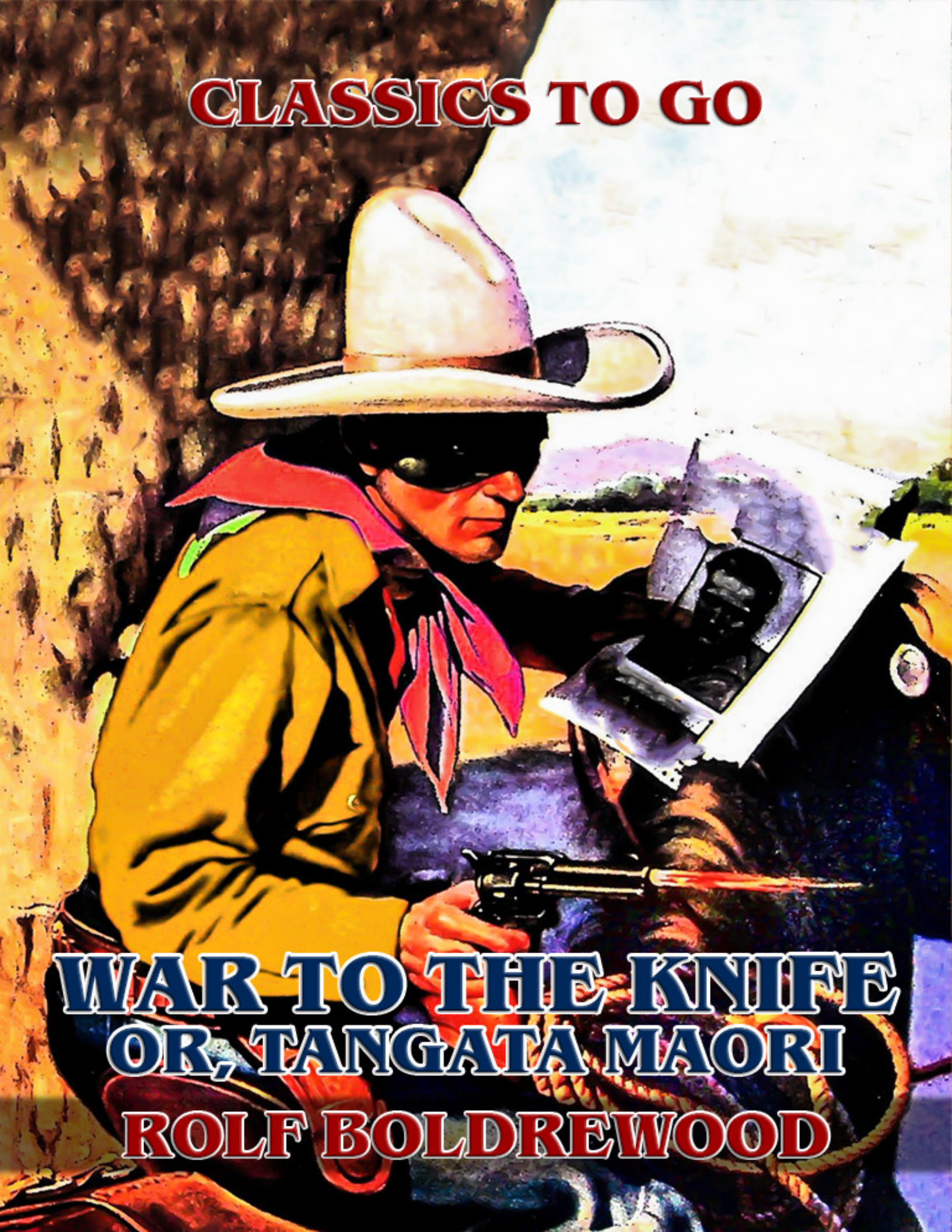
CLASSICS TO GO



WAR TO THE KNIFE
OR, TANGATA MAORI

ROLF BOLDREWOOD

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CHAPTER I

MASSINGER COURT in Herefordshire was a grand old Tudor mansion, the brown sandstone walls and tiled roofs of which had been a source of pride to the inhabitants of the county for untold generations. Standing in a fair estate of ten thousand acres, three roods, and twenty-eight perches (to be accurate), with a nominal rental of somewhat over fifteen thousand a year, it might be thought that for the needs of an unmarried man of eight and twenty there was "ample room and verge enough."

Beside the honour and glory of being Massinger of Massinger, and inhabiting "The Court," the erstwhile residence of a royal princess, with its priceless heirlooms and memories!

Many a newly enriched proprietor would have given his eyes to have possessed them by hereditary right.

For, consider, what a place, what a possession, it was!

Thus, many a maid, many a matron of the town and county, had often reflected in appraising the matrimonial value of the eligible suitors of the neighbourhood.

Think of the grand hall, sixty feet in length, twenty-six in width, extending to the roof with its fine old oaken rafters and queer post trusses! Think of the floor of polished oak, the walls with their priceless oak panelling, with carved frieze and moulded cornice; the mullioned windows, with arched openings giving light to King Edward's corridor on the first floor, carried across one corner of the hall by the angle gallery!

Then—glory of glories!—the bay, ten feet wide and nine deep, with windows glazed in lead squares, and extending to the springing of the roof.

Here was a place to sit and dream, while gazing over the park, in the glowing yet tender light of an early summer morn, the while the châtelaine tripped down the broad oaken staircase at the opposite end of the hall, with its carved grotesque-headed newels.

Boudoir and billiard-room, dining and drawing-room, library and morning-room, were they not all there, admirably proportioned, in addition to a score of other needful, not to say luxurious, apartments?

Thus much for the domestic demesne, the suzerainty of which is dear to every woman's heart.

From a man's point of view—at Massinger Moor were the head keeper's lodge and kennels; these last slated, with iron caged runs, stone-paved, iron-doored, complete.

The river Teme is famed for excellent trout-fishing. Salmon also are not unknown in the water. But, in this connection be it known, that for centuries past the lords of the manor have permitted the townspeople to fly-fish (for trout only) in that length of the river below the bridge.

"And then, her heritage, it goes
  Along the banks of Tame;
In meadows deep the heifer lows,
  The falconer and woodsman knows
Her thickets for the game."

As much as this might be said for the woods and coverts of "The Court," since that old time when "the forest laws were sharp and stern," and the Conqueror stood no nonsense

where "the tall deer that he loved as his own children" were concerned.

The descendants of these well-beloved and interesting animals were by no means scarce in "The Chase," which was still jealously preserved for them as of old.

The North Herefordshire hounds met three days a week, the Milverton hounds two days, the Ledbury were only just across the boundary, while, for fear the squire and his visitors might feel a *soupçon* of ennui in the season, the South Boulton harriers are available, and, to fill up any conceivable chink, the Dunster otter-hounds were within easy reach.

Thus, man's every earthly need being provided for, his spiritual welfare was by no means forgotten.

In the parish church, as was befitting in days of old, before the doctrine of equality and the "flat burglary" of democracy were so much as named, was reserved for the lords of Massinger and their assigns, by sale or lease, the whole of the south aisle and chapel. And as the church was within five minutes' walk of the Court, all pedestrian fatigue, as well as the indecency of taking out carriages and horses on the Sabbath, was avoided.

Now, from an earthly paradise like this, why should the lawful owner, young, good-looking, cultured, athletic, think for one moment of fleeing to the desert, socially, and no doubt literally, of a distant, almost unknown British colony?

Was there an angel with a flaming sword? If so, she was typified in the guise of Hypatia Tollemache. Was she mad?

Must be. He, of course, utterly moonstruck, inasmuch as there is well known to be throughout all England a sufficiency of marriageable damsels—even, as some have averred, a redundancy of that desirable national product. If

the county had been polled, they would have voted for a *de lunatico inquirendo*.

Was there a hidden reason? There could not be.

He was not rich, but Massinger had stood many an extravagant squire in the old days without losing the estate which had come down from father to son since the Conquest, and would again so continue to descend, with a prudent marriage in aid of rent and relief of mortgages.

But there was a reason besides what lay on the surface, and the old family lawyer, Mr. Nourse, of Nourse and Lympett, knew it well. More than a hundred years ago there had been a sudden-appearing re-incarnation of one of the most reckless spendthrifts—and there had been more than one in the annals of the family—that had ever scandalized the county, frightened the villagers, and wasted like water the revenues which should have kept up the ancient traditions of the house.

Rainauld de Massinger had the misfortune to be a living anachronism. Born out of due time, he was at odds with the age and the circumstances amidst which his lot had been cast. Despising the unlettered squirearchy of his day, and the nearly as uncongenial nobility of the county, he threw himself with ardour into the semi-scientific, wholly visionary studies which, under the name of astrology, amused the leisure of those personages who could not content themselves with the dull round of duties and coarse dissipations which the manners of the age prescribed. He constructed a laboratory in one of the turret-rooms, which only he and his confidential servant, a grave, silent Italian, were suffered to enter. From time to time mysterious strangers of foreign habit and alien language arrived at Massinger, and were entertained with every mark of high respect. The villagers spoke with awe of midnight fires in the turret-room, of the strange sounds, the evil-smelling fumes

thence proceeding, with other innovations proper in their untutored fancies to the occupation of a sorcerer. Seldom did he visit the Court, and when at rare intervals his tall figure and dark saturnine face were remarked in the throng of nobles, they inspired dislike or distrust more than kindly sentiment. Not that such feelings were openly displayed. For he had brought back from his travels in the East, and the far countries in which he had spent his early manhood, a reputation for swordsmanship which caused even the reckless gallants of the day to pause ere they lightly aroused the ire of one who was known to hold so cheaply his own life and that of others.

It was known that he had fought as a volunteer in the long Roumanian war with the Turks, in which it was popularly reported that he bore a charmed life; such had been his almost incredible daring, such had been the miraculous escapes from captivity and torture. And yet, all suddenly relinquishing a career which promised unusual brilliancy in court and camp, he had for years shut himself up in the old hall at Massinger, devoting himself to those unblessed studies which had excited the distrust of his neighbours, the displeasure of the Church, the cynical wonder of his peers.

Departing with his usual eccentricity from the course which he had apparently laid down for himself, he for a season quitted his lonely studies, once more mingled in the gaieties of the county, even consented to grace the revels of royalty with his presence. His manner at such times was gracious, courtly, and strongly interesting. Like many men of his character and reputation, he exercised an almost resistless fascination over the fairer sex when he chose to enter the lists. It was so in this instance. He succeeded, in despite of a host of rivals and the opposition of her parents, in winning the hand of the beautiful Elinor de Warrenne, the daughter of a neighbouring baronet of lands and honours hardly inferior to his own. For a year or more the gloom which

rested on his spirit seemed to have passed away. Happy in the possession of an heir, his conduct after marriage put to shame the ominous predictions of friends and foes. His wife was fondly attached to him. His stately manners had won sympathy for her, and the approval of the *grandes dames* of the county. He conciliated the tenantry; the ordinary duties of his station were not neglected. The happiest results were expected. He was even spoken of for the representation of the county; when, abruptly as he had emerged, he once more retreated into the seclusion of his laboratory, resisting all the efforts of his heart-broken wife and friendly wellwishers to cause his return to the duties of his rank and station.

For more than a year he pursued in gloom and silence his self-appointed task, only taking exercise at night, and from time to time, as before, joining with sorcerers and necromancers (as the neighbourhood fully believed) in unblessed study, if not unholy rites. On one eventful morn, suspicion being aroused, search was made for him, when the turret was found to be vacant, save of broken crucibles, strange scrolls, and other remnants of the so-called "black art." The seasons came and went, Massinger Chase grew fair in early spring and summer prime, the leaves of many autumns faded and fell, the heir grew from a rosy infant to a sturdy schoolboy—a tall stripling. Then the lady pined and withered, after lingering sadly in hope of the return of him who never again crossed the threshold of his ancient hall.

She was laid to rest with the dames of her race. An authentic statement of the death of Sir Rainauld reached England from abroad, and his son, Sir Alured, reigned in his stead.

Meanwhile, it had been discovered after his departure that large sums had been disbursed, and payments made to foreign personages. Warrants and vouchers, legally

witnessed, were in the hands of financiers whose demands could not be legally resisted. Sale had to be made, with the concurrence of Sir Alured when he came of age, of portions of the estate, which seriously curtailed its area and importance. Sir Alured, however, an easy-going, unambitious youth, had promised his mother, of whom he was passionately fond, to break the entail. Contented with the field-sports and homely pleasures which there was no present danger of his being forced to relinquish, he cared little for the future. Notwithstanding the sacrifice of the goodly acres which (in addition to his portrait in the costume of a Roumanian heiduck, hanging in King Edward's corridor) gave Sir Rainauld's descendants something to remember him by, it had been found necessary to negotiate another loan upon the security of the estate. This was looked upon as an unimportant, easily released encumbrance at the time; but, like all the tentacles of the dire octopus, Debt, it had a tendency to draw the debtor closer to that gaping maw, down which in all ages have gone the old and worn, the young and fair, the strong and brave, all sorts and conditions of men.

Sir Alured had no desire to pry into the arcana of science, nor did he show curiosity about the transmutation of metals. Indolent, if not self-indulgent, he was wholly averse to the examination of accounts. The interest on the mortgage, with occasional loans, increased the liability notably before his death; so that when our hero, Sir Roland (an ancestor had fought at Roncesvalles), came into the estate on attaining his majority, he was startled at the portentous amount for which he stood liable to the mortgagee.

Being, however, for his age, a sensible young person, he set himself to live quietly, to reduce expenses, and in a general way to pay off his liabilities by degrees. Just as he had formed these meritorious resolves, rents commenced to fall. Old tenants, who had been punctual and regular of

payment, began to decline from their proud position, asking for time, and, what was still worse, for abatement of rent. And with a show of reason. What with the importation of cheap meat, butter, wheat, and oats—all manner of farm produce, indeed, produced in colonies and other countries—the English farmer found himself unable to continue to pay rents calculated on prices which seemed to have fled for ever. It was hoped that farm commodities would regain their value, but they receded for the two years which were to see a recovery. Finally, after consultations with Messrs. Nourse and Lympett, it was decided that, at Sir Roland's present scale of expenditure, there needed to be no compulsory sale in his time. An heiress would set all right. Sir Roland must marry money. It was his duty to his family, his duty to the county, his duty to England.

Then Massinger Court could be restored to its former splendour, and the estate to its legitimate position in the county.

Sir Roland did not assent or otherwise to these propositions. He did not particularly want to marry—just yet, at all events. He was too happy and comfortable as he was. Even with his curtailed revenues, he found the position of a country gentleman pleasant and satisfactory. He was not expected to do much, whereas everybody, old and young, were most anxious to make themselves useful and agreeable to him. Of course a man must marry some day.

So much was clearly the duty of the heir of Massinger. The ancient house must not be suffered to become extinct.

Strangely enough, the succession had always gone in the direct line. But there was no hurry. He had not seen any one so far on whom he was passionately anxious to confer the title of Lady Massinger. So, matters might be worse. In this philosophical frame of mind, he told himself that he was content to remain a bachelor for the next half-dozen years

or so, during which period his pecuniary affairs might be expected to improve rather than otherwise.

At eight and twenty a man is young—very young indeed, as occasionally reflects the middle-aged *viveur*, looking regretfully back on the feats and feelings of his lost youth. Sir Roland was fairly well equipped, according to the society needs of the day. An Oxford degree taken creditably guaranteed all reasonable literary attainment; at any rate, the means and method of further development. Fond of field-sports, he shot brilliantly and rode well. Vigorous and active, neither plain nor handsome, but having an air of distinction—that subtle but unmistakeable accompaniment of race—he yet presented few points of divergence from the tens of thousands of youthful Britons capable, in time of need, of calm heroism and Spartan endurance, but unaware of any pressing necessity for stepping out of the beaten track.

Though unostentatious by nature and habit, it was not to be supposed that the name of Sir Roland Massinger, of Massinger Court, was unfamiliar to matrons with marriageable daughters, as well in his own county, as in the Mayfair gatherings which he did not disdain during the season.

More than one of his fair partners would not have objected to bear his name and title embellished, as his position could not fail to be, by the handsome settlements which her father's steadfast attention to trade would enable him to make.

But, so far, all appreciative reception of his ordinary courtesies—the sudden glance, the winning smile, the interested attention to his unstudied talk, conservatory lounges, country-house visits—all the harmless catalogue of the boy-god's snares and springes, were wasted on this

careless wayfarer, protected by a lofty ideal and an untouched heart.

Though he had listened politely to the prudent counsel of his man of business as to the necessity of repairing his attenuated fortune by marriage, such an arrangement had never been seriously contemplated by him. He felt himself capable of a passionate attachment to the princess of his dreams, could Fate but lead him into her presence. Not as yet had he encountered her. That was beyond doubt. He would await the voice of the oracle. In the meanwhile he was far from being *ennuyé*. There was a mildly pleasurable sensation in merely contemplating "the supreme psychological moment" from afar, and speculating as to situations not yet arisen. He awaited in resigned contentment the goddess-moulded maiden. In the meanwhile he was not minded to worship at the shrines of the lesser divinities.

Was Fate, unsmiling, ironic, even now listening to the too-presumptuous mortal?

It would appear so. For, shortly after making these prudential resolutions, he met at a military ball the beautiful Hypatia Tollemache, who decided the question of elective affinity once and for ever. One look, a brief study of her unrivalled graces, an introduction, an entrancing interchange of ideas after a deliriously thrilling dance—even a second waltz, perilously near the end of the evening—and the solemn chime from the ancient tower, found an echo in his heart, which seemed to ring "forever, ever, ever, forever."

That there are moments like this in men's lives, fateful, irrevocable, who may doubt? Sir Roland did not, at any rate. All the forces of his nature were aroused, electrically stimulated, magnified in power and volume. As they separated conventionally, and he delivered her into the care

of her chaperon, the parting smile with which she favoured him seemed the invitation of an angelic visitant. He could have cast himself at her feet, had not the formalism of this too-artificial age forbidden such abasement.

When he returned to the country house where he was staying, he examined himself closely as to his sensations.

How had he, the cool and indifferent Roland Massinger, come to be so affected by this—by *any* girl? He could almost believe in the philtre of the ancients. It wasn't the champagne; he had forgotten all about it, besides being by habit abstemious. Supper he had hardly touched. It could not even be a form of indigestion—here he laughed aloud. Surely his reason wasn't giving way? He had heard of abnormal brain-seizures. But he was not the sort of man. He had never worked hard, though steadily at college. And, when a man's appetite, sleep, and general health were faultless, what could have caused this dire mental disturbance? He went to bed, but sleep was out of the question. Throwing open the window, he gazed over the hushed landscape. The moon, immemorial friend of lovers, came to his aid. Slowly and majestically she rose, silvering over the ruined abbey, the ghostly avenue, the far-seen riverpools, as with calm, luminous, resistless ascent, she floated higher and yet higher through the cloud-world. Gradually his troubled spirit recognized the peaceful influence. His mind became composed, and betaking himself to bed, he sank into a slumber from which he was only aroused by the dressing-bell.

The cheerful converse of a country-house breakfast succeeding a prolonged shower-bath and a satisfactory toilette, restored him to a condition more nearly resembling his usual frame of mind. He was, however, rallied as to his sudden subjugation, which had not escaped the keen critics of a ball-room. In defence, he went so far as to admit that

Miss Tollemache was rather a nice girl, and so on, adding to the customary insincerities a doubt whether "she wasn't one of the too-clever division. Scientific, or something in that line, struck me?"

"That's all very well, Sir Roland," said a lively girl opposite to him. "You needn't try to back out of your too-evident admiration of the fair Hypatia—we all saw it. Why, you never took your eyes off her from the moment she came into the room, till you put her into the carriage. You forgot your dance with me. You never *once* asked Jennie Castanette; she used to be your favourite partner. A sudden attack of whatsyname at first sight, don't they call it?"

"You ought to know best," he replied; "but Miss Tollemache is certainly handsome, or, rather, distinguished-looking; seems clever too, above the average, though she avoided literary topics."

"Clever!" retorted his fair opponent. "I should think she is, though I defy you to do more than guess at it from her talk; she is so unpretending in her manner, and has a horror of showing off. Do you know what she did last year? There wasn't a girl that came near her in the University examinations."

"So much the worse for her chances of happiness or that of the man that marries her—if she is not too 'cultured' to marry at all."

"How do you make that out?"

"There are three things that tend to spoil a woman's character in the estimation of all sensible men," he answered: "beauty, money, or pre-eminent intellect. The beauty is flattered into outrageous vanity and frivolity. The heiress is besieged by suitors and toadies whose adulation fosters selfishness and arrogance. The third is perhaps the least evil, as after it is demonstrated that its possessor

cannot lay down the law in private life, as she is prone to do, she retains a reserve of resources within herself, and mostly makes a rational use of them. Depend upon it, the post of honour is a 'middle station.'"

"Indeed! I am delighted to hear it," replied Miss Branksome. "So we poor mediocrities who have neither poverty nor riches—certainly not the last—and who don't profess beauty, have a fair chance of happiness? I was not quite sure of it before. And now, having unburdened yourself of all this 'philosophy in a country house,' you will dash off in pursuit of Hypatia directly you find out what she is going to do today. What will you give me if I tell you? 'Have you seen my Sylvia pass this way?' and so on."

"Hasn't she gone back to Chesterfield?" he asked.

"So it was erroneously supposed. But Lady Roxburgh will tell you when she comes down that she brought off a picnic to the ruins of St. Wereburgh's Abbey; that she has been invited from the Wensleydales, and all the house-party here are going. Unless, of course, you would prefer to stay behind and have a peaceful day in the library?"

Sir Roland's face betrayed him. No human countenance, after such contending emotions as had almost "rent his heart in twain," could have retained its immobility.

"There now!" said Miss Branksome, scornfully. "'What a piece of work is man!' etc. I have been reading Shakespeare lately—on wet mornings."

"But are you certain as to the programme?"

"Clara Roxburgh is my authority. The arrangement was made at an early hour this morning. You are relied on to drive the drag conveying the ladies of this household, including my insignificant self—not without value, I trust, to *some* people, however we poor ordinary mortals may be overshadowed by 'sweet girl graduates.'"

"Then may I venture to ask you, with Lady Roxburgh's permission, to occupy the box seat?"

"That's very sweet of you; *faute d'autre*, of course. Her ladyship's nerves won't permit of her taking it herself. And now let me give you a little advice—'honest Injun,' I mean—in all good faith and friendship, though I know you men don't believe in our capacity for that. Don't be too devoted. It's a mistake if you want to be successful; any girl could tell you. We are mostly annoyed if we're run after. There's nothing like indifference; it piques us. Then, if we like a man, we run after *him*—in a quiet ladylike way, of course. Do you follow?"

"Oh yes; a thousand thanks. Pray go on."

"I have only one other bit of warning. You're a lot older than me, and I dare say you think you know best, as I'm not long out. But you don't. Some day you'll see it. In the meantime don't give away *all* your heart before you make sure of a fair return. She may lead you on—unconsciously, of course—which means she wouldn't be rude to you and all the rest of it. But my idea is, she doesn't know what she wants just now. She's the sort of girl that thinks she's got a career before her. She won't be satisfied with the regulation returned affection, matrimony business."

"But surely such a woman has no commonplace thoughts, no vulgar ideals. She is incapable of such paltry bargaining for wealth or position."

"You think so? I don't say she's worse than any other girl who's got such a pull in the way of looks, brains, family, and all the rest of it. But none of us like to go cheap, and the love in a cottage business, or even a man like yourself of good county family, but *not* rich, *not* distinguished—h'm—as yet, *not* a power socially or politically in the land, is scarcely

a high bid for a first-class property in the marriage market like Hypatia Tollemache."

"My dear Miss Branksome, don't talk like that. It pains me, I assure you."

"Perhaps it does, but it will do you good in the long run. It's pretty true, as you'll find out in time. And now, as I hear Lady Roxburgh coming downstairs, and I've talked enough nonsense for one morning, I'll go and get ready for the drag party. You'll know soon that I have no personal interest in the matter, though I've liked you always, and don't wish to see your life spoiled by a sentimental mistake."

And so this very frank young woman departed, just in time to meet the hostess, who, coming forward, explained her late arrival at the breakfast table by saying that she had to send off messages about the picnic party and an impromptu dance for the evening. She verified Miss Branksome's information respecting the drag, and the responsible office of coachman which Sir Roland expressed himself most willing to accept. But all the time he was suitably attiring himself; and even during a visit of inspection to the stables for the purpose of interviewing the well-matched team, and having a word or two with the head groom, a feeling of doubt would obtrude itself as he recalled the well-meant, unconventional warning of Miss Bessie Branksome.

"I suppose women know a good deal more about each other's ways than we do," he reflected. "But an average girl like Miss Branksome, good-hearted and well-intentioned, as she no doubt is, can no more enter into the motives of a woman like Miss Tollemache than a milkmaid could gauge the soul of a duchess. In any case, I must take my chance, and I shall have the satisfaction of taking my dismissal from *her* lips alone, for no other earthly authority will detach me from the pursuit. So that's settled."

And when Roland Massinger made use of that expression in soliloquy or otherwise, a certain line of action was definitely followed. Neither obstacles nor dissuasions had the smallest weight with him. In general, he took pains to work out his plans and to form his opinion before committing himself to them. This, however, he admitted, was an exception to his rule of life. Rule of life? It *was* his life—his soul, mind, body—everything. "Whatever stirs this mortal frame"—of course. What did Byron say about love? "'Tis woman's whole existence." Byron didn't know: he had long since squandered the riches of the heart, the boundless wealth of the affections. He could *write* about love. But the real enthralling, all-absorbing, reverential passion of a true man's honest love, he did not know, never could have known, and was incapable of feeling.

After this burst of blasphemy against the acknowledged high priest of "Venus Victrix," the great singer of "love, and love's sharp woe," Sir Roland felt relieved, if not comforted.

Then came the more mundane business of the day. The girls' chatter, always more or less sweet in his ears, like the half-notes of thrushes in spring; the arranging of pairs, and the small difficulties in mounting to the high seats of the drag; the monosyllabic utterances of the swells, civil and military, who helped to compose the party, at length came to an end.

Finally, when, with pretty, lively, amusing Miss Branksome on the box seat beside him, he started the well-matched team, and, rattling down the avenue, swept through the park gates, and turned into the road which led to St. Wereburgh's, he felt once more in comparative harmony with his surroundings.

"Now, Sir Roland, you look more like your old self—like the man we used to know. You take my tip, and back your opinion for all you're worth. If it comes off, well and good; if

it's a boil-over, pay and look pleasant. If you knew as much about girls as I do, you'd know there *are* as good fish in the sea, etc., though you men won't believe it. Now, promise me not to do the Knight of the Woeful Countenance any more, won't you?"

"As the day is so fine, for a wonder, and the horses are going well together, not to mention the charming company of Miss Branksome on the box seat, who would be perfect if she would drop the didactic business, I think I may promise."

So, shaking himself together by a strong effort of will, such as he remembered when acting in private theatricals, he defied care and anxiety, enacting the gay worldling with pronounced success. So much so, that between his prowess as a whip and his cheery returns to the airy badinage usual on such occasions, he ran a close second to a cavalry officer on leave from India for the honourable distinction of "the life of the party."

Pleasant enough indeed was their progress through one of the most picturesque counties in England, but when they stopped within full view of the venerable ivy-clad ruin, of which a marvellous gateway and a noble arch still remained perfect, Sir Roland's gaze did not rest on those time-worn relics of ancient grandeur.

"She's not here yet," said Miss Branksome, with a smile, after the descent from the drag and the regulation amount of handshaking, greeting, and "How are you?" and "How is your dear mother?" had been got through. "The Wensleydales have farther to come, and I doubt if their horses are as fast as ours. Oh yes! now I see them—just behind that waggon in the lane, near the bridge. Hypatia is on the box beside young Buckhurst. *He* can't drive a bit; that's a point in your favour, if you can get her to exchange with me going back. I'll suggest it, anyhow."

Sir Roland gave his guide, philosopher, and friend a look of such gratitude that she began to laugh; but, composing her countenance to an expression of the requisite propriety, she advanced to the rival coach, and so timed her movements that he was enabled to help the fair Hypatia to the ground—a slight, but smile-compelling service, which repaid the giver a hundredfold.

Taking a mean advantage of Buckhurst, who was compelled for some reason to overlook the unharnessing of his horses, he thereupon walked away with the entrancing personage towards the assembled party, abandoning Miss Branksome, who discreetly preferred to busy herself in animated conversation with the newcomers.

After this fortunate commencement all went well. Smiling as the morn, pleased (and what woman is not?) with the marked attention of a "personage," Miss Tollemache confessed the exhilaration proper to that pleasantest of informal gatherings—a picnic to a spot of historic interest in an English county, with congenial intimates, and perhaps still more interesting strangers.

Her companion was well up in the provincial records, and thereby in a position of superiority to the rest of the company conversationally.

They had pulled up for lunch in the meadow, deep-swarded and thick with the clovers white and purple, mingled with the tiny fodder plants which nestle around a ruin in green England. The party was full of exclamations.

"What a darling old church!—thousands of years old it must be," said one of the Miss Wensleydales. "Now, can any one tell me whether it is a Norman or a Saxon one?"

"Oh, Norman, surely!" was the verdict of several feminine voices, all at once.

"I am not quite certain," said Lady Roxburgh; "I always intended to look it up. What do you say, Miss Tollemache? You know more about these matters than we do."

"Oh, I don't pretend to any knowledge of architecture. A grand old ruin like this is such a thing of beauty that it seems a pity to pick it to pieces. That south door with its round arches looks rather Saxon. What does Sir Roland think? It's not far from Massinger, is it?"

"I used to know it well in my boyhood," replied that gentleman, who, truth to tell, had been waiting to be referred to. "Miss Tollemache is right; you will find its history in the Domesday Book. The manor was held by the secular canons of St. Wereburgh till the Conqueror gave it to Hugh Lupus, who granted it to the Benedictine monks."

"And was it an abbey church?" asked Miss Branksome, who may or may not have divined Sir Roland's special knowledge of church history.

"Certainly," he replied; "all the authorities are distinct on the point. The manor was held under the abbots by a family of the same name, so it must have belonged to the original Saxon stock."

"And why did they not keep it?" asked Lady Roxburgh. "Really, this is most interesting."

"A lady in the case," answered Sir Roland. "Alice de Sotowiche conveyed it away by her marriage with Robert de Maurepas. What the Normans did not get by the sword they seem to have acquired by matrimony. It did not go out of the family, though, till the time of Edward the First. These De Maurepases battled for their manorial rights, too, which included fishing in the Welland, always providing that sturgeon went to the overlord."

"I always knew it was a dear old place," said Lady Roxburgh, "but now it seems doubly interesting. I must get up this

history business for future use, and Miss Branksome shall give a little lecture about it next time we have a picnic."

"Thanks awfully, my dear Lady Roxburgh," said that young lady, "but I never could learn anything by heart in my life. I don't mind writing it down, though, from Sir Roland's notes, so that you can have it printed for private circulation at breakfast-time on picnic days."

"I think we might manage a county historical society," continued her ladyship. "It would be a grand idea for house-parties—only now it must be lunch-time. I see they have been unpacking. We must verify these quatrefoils, chevrons, and things afterwards."

They lunched under the mouldering walls, picturing a long-past day when, issuing forth from the courtyard of the neighbouring castle, had ridden knight and squire and lady fayre, attended by falconers and woodsmen, with hawk on wrist and hound in leash.

"What glorious times they must have had of it!" said Miss Tollemache. "I should like to have lived then. Life was more direct and sincere than in these artificial days."

"If we could only have seen the people as they really were," he replied, "'in their habit as they lived,' mental or otherwise, it would be such splendid opera business, would it not? But they must have been awfully dull between times. Hardly any books, no cigars till later on; war and the chase their only recreations."

"Noble occupations both," said Miss Tollemache, with an air of conviction; "they left little room for the frivolous indolence of these latter days."

"Perhaps so," assented her companion. "You had either to knock people on the head or undergo the operation yourself. Then, mark the opposite side of the shield. In that very castle—while the gay troop was riding out with pennons

flying—the feudal enemy or 'misproud' retainer was probably lying in the dungeon (*they had* one there, Orme says) after an imprisonment of years."

The gathering was a pronounced success. The ruin provided subjects for unlimited conversation as well as occasions for heroic daring in the matter of climbing. The lunch was perfect in its way; the ensuing walks and talks all that could be wished.

And when, after, as one of the young people declared, the "truly excellent—really delicious day" came so near to its close that the horses were brought up, Miss Branksome playfully suggested that she and Miss Tollemache should change seats, as she wished to take a lesson from the opposition charioteer in driving, and when, after a moment's playful contest, the fair enslaver was placed on the seat beside him, Sir Roland's cup of happiness was full.

"Let Fate do her worst;
  There are moments of joy,
Bright dreams of the past,
  Which she cannot destroy"—

must have been written by the poet, he felt assured, with that wondrous instinctive insight into the inmost soul of him, and all true lovers, which stamps the heaven-born singer.

Then the drive back to Roxburgh Hall, where they were to reassemble for the impromptu dance! The horses, home-returning, pulled just sufficiently to enable the box passenger to appreciate the strong arm and steady hand of her companion; and when, after an hour, the lamps were lit and the star-spangled night appeared odorous with the scents of early spring, the girl's low voice and musical laugh

seemed the appropriate song-speech for which the star-clustered night formed fitting hour and circumstance.

Roland Massinger in that eve of delicious companionship abandoned himself to hope and fantasy. His fair companion had been so far acted upon by her environment, that she had permitted speculative allusions to the recondite problems of the day; to the deeper aims of life—subjects in which she evinced an interest truly exceptional in a girl of such acknowledged social distinction; while he, drawn on by the thought of possible companionship with so rarely-gifted a being, abandoned his usual practical and chiefly negative outlook upon the world, acknowledging the attraction of self-sacrifice and philanthropic crusade. His mental vision appeared to have received an illuminating expansion, and as those low, earnest, but melodious tones made music in his ear, emanating from the fair lips so closely inclined towards his own, he felt almost moved to devote his future energies, means, lands, and life to the amelioration of the race—to the grand aims of that altruistic federation of which, it must be confessed, that he had been a formal, if not indifferent, professor. If only he might persuade this "one sweet spirit to be his minister"! Then, how cheerfully would he fare forth through whatever lands or seas she might appoint.

But that fatal *if*!

Why should *he* be privileged to appropriate this glorious creature, redolent of all the loveliness of earth's primal vigour, and yet informed with the lore of the ages, heightening her attractions a hundred—yes, a thousand-fold? Almost he despaired when thinking of his superlative presumption.

Fortunately for the safety of the passengers, who little knew what tremendous issues were oscillating in the brain of their pilot, he mechanically handled the reins in his usual skilled

and efficient fashion. Nor, indeed, did the fair comrade, or she would scarcely have emphasized the conventional remark, "Oh, Sir Roland, what a delightful drive we have had! I feel so grateful to you!" as he swung his horses round, and, with practised accuracy, almost grazed the steps at the portico of Roxburgh Hall.

CHAPTER II

EVENTS shaped themselves much after the manner customary since that earliest recorded compromise between soul and sense which mortals throughout all ages have agreed to call Love. Ofttimes such pursuits and contests have been protracted. After the first skirmish of temperaments, war has been declared by Fate, and through wearisome campaigns the rival armies have ravaged cities, so to speak, and assaulted neutral powers before the beleaguered citadel surrendered.

At other times, the maiden fortress has been taken by a *coup de main*, the assailant's resistless ardour carrying all before it. More frequently, perhaps, has the too venturous knight been repulsed with scorn, and, as in earlier days, been fain to betake himself to Palestine or other distant region blessed with continuous warfare, and exceptional facilities for acquiring fame or getting knocked on the head, as the case might be.

For the patient and scientific conduct of a siege, according to the rules of the Court of Love—and such there be, if the poets and minstrels of all ages deserve credence—Roland Massinger was unfitted by constitution and opinion. His fixed idea was, that every woman knew her mind perfectly well with regard to a declared admirer. If favourable, it was waste of time and emotion to await events. If otherwise, the sooner a man was made aware of his dismissal the better. He could then shape his course in life without distraction or hindrance. In any case he was freed from the hourly torments under which the victim writhes, uncertain of his fate. It was the *coup de grâce* which frees the wretch upon the rack; the knife-thrust which liberates the Indian at the

stake. And he trusted to his manhood to be equal to the occasion.

When he did "put his fortune to the touch, to win or lose it all"—as have done so many gallant lovers before this veracious history—he was too deeply grieved and shocked at the unexpected issue to place before the fateful maid any of the pleadings or protests deemed in such cases to be appropriate. He did not falter out statements inclusive of a "wrecked life," an "early grave," a career "for ever closed." Nor did he make the slightest reference to her having, so to speak, allured him to continue pursuit—"led him on," in more familiar terms.

Such commonplaces he disdained, although not without a passing thought that in the familiar play of converse, and her occasional touch upon the keynotes which evoke the deeper sympathies, an impartial judge might have discovered that perilous liking akin to love.

No! beyond one earnest appeal to her heart, into which he implored her to look, lest haply she had mistaken its promptings—a plea for time, for cooler consideration—he had no words with which to plead his cause, as he stood with sad reproachful gaze, assuring her that never would she know truer love, more loyal devotion.

What had she told him? Merely this: "That if she were to marry—a step which she had resolved not to take for some years, if at all—she confessed that there was no man whom she had yet known, with whom she felt more in sympathy, with whom, taking the ordinary phrase, she would have a greater prospect of happiness. But she held strong opinions upon the duties which the individual owed to the appealing hordes of fellow-creatures perishing for lack of care, of food, of instruction, by whom the overindulged so-called upper classes were surrounded. Such manifest duties were sacred in her eyes, though possibly incompatible with what was

called 'happiness.' For years—for ever, it might be—such considerations would be paramount with her. They could be neglected only at the awful price of self-condemnation in this world and perdition in the next. She was grieved to the soul to be compelled to refuse his love. She blamed herself that she should have permitted an intimacy which had resulted so unhappily for him—even for herself. But her resolve was fixed; nothing could alter it."

This, or the substance of it, fell upon the unwilling ears of Roland Massinger in unconnected sentences, in answer to his last despairing appeal. Meanwhile his idol stood and gazed at him, as might be imagined some Christian maiden of the days of Diocletian, when called upon to deny her faith or seal it with martyrdom. Her eyes were occasionally lifted upward, as if she felt the need of inspiration from above.

For one moment the heart of her lover stood still.

He placed his hand on his brow as if to quell the tumult of his thoughts. She moved towards him, deprecating the intensity of his emotion. An intolerable sense of her divine purity, her ethereal loveliness, seemed to pervade his whole being. He felt an almost irresistible desire to clasp her in his arms in one desperate caress, ere they parted for ever. Had he done this, the current of both lives might have been altered. The coldest maids are merely mortal.

But he refrained; in his present state of mind it would have been sacrilege to his ideal goddess, to the saintly idol of his worship.

Raising her hand reverently to his lips, he bowed low and departed.

When he thus passed out of her sight—out of her life—Hypatia herself was far from unmoved. Regrets, questionings, impulses to which she had so far been a

stranger, arose and contended with strange and unfamiliar power.

Never before had she met with any one in all respects so attractive to her physically, so sympathetic mentally; above all things manly, cultured, devoted, with the instincts of the best age of chivalry. She liked—yes, nearly, perhaps quite—loved him. Family, position, personal character, all the attributes indispensably necessary, he possessed.

Not rich, indeed; but for riches she cared little—despised them, indeed. Why, then, had she cast away the admittedly best things of life? For an abstraction! For toilsome, weary, perhaps ungrateful tasks among the poor, the disinherited of the earth.

Had not others of whom she had heard, died, after wasting, so to speak, their lives and opportunities, with scarcely veiled regrets for the sacrifice? How many secretly bewailed the deprivation of the fair earth's light, colour, beauty, consented to in youth's overstrained sense of obedience to a divine injunction! Was this wealth of joyous gladness—the free, untrammelled spirit in life's springtime, which bade the bird to carol, the lamb to frisk, the wildfowl to sport o'er the translucent lake—but a snare to lead the undoubting soul to perdition? As these questioning fancies crossed her mind, in the lowered tone resulting in reaction from the previous mood of exaltation, she found her tears flowing fast, and with an effort, raising her head as if in scorn of her weakness, hurried to her room.

A sudden stroke of sorrow, loss, disappointment, or disaster affects men differently, but the general consensus is that the blow, like wounds that prove mortal, is less painful than stunning. Roland Massinger never doubted but that his wound *was* mortal. For days he wondered, in the solitude of his retreat to which he had, like other stricken deer, betaken himself, whether or no he was alive. He returned to the

Court. He moved from room to room—he absorbed food. He even opened books in the library and essayed to read, finding himself wholly unable to extract the meaning of the lettered lines. He rode and drove at appointed hours, but always with a strange preoccupied expression. This change of habit and occupation was so evident to his old housekeeper and the other domestics, that the subject of their master's obvious state of mind began to be freely discussed. The groom was of opinion that he did not know the bay horse that carried him so well to hounds, from the black mare that was so fast and free a goer in the dog-cart.

He retired late, sitting in the old-fashioned study which served as a smoking-room, "till all hours," as the maids said.

He rose early, unconscionably so, as the gardener considered who had met him roaming through the shrubberies before sunrise. A most unusual proceeding, indefensible "in a young gentleman as could lie in bed till breakfast-bell rang."

The maids were instinctively of the opinion that "there was a lady in the case;" but, upon broaching their ingenuous theory, were so sternly silenced by Mrs. Lavender, the old housekeeper who had ruled in Massinger long before Sir Roland's parents had died, and remembered the last Lady Massinger as "a saint on earth if ever there was one," that they hastily deserted it, hoping "as he wouldn't have to be took to the county hospital." This theory proving no more acceptable than the other, they were fain to retire abashed, but clinging with feminine obstinacy to their first opinion.

Suddenly a change came over the moody squire who had thus exercised the intelligences of the household.

On a certain morning he ordered the dog-cart, in which he drove himself to the railway station, noticing the roadside incidents and mentioning the stud generally, in a manner so