WILLIAM JOHN LOCKE

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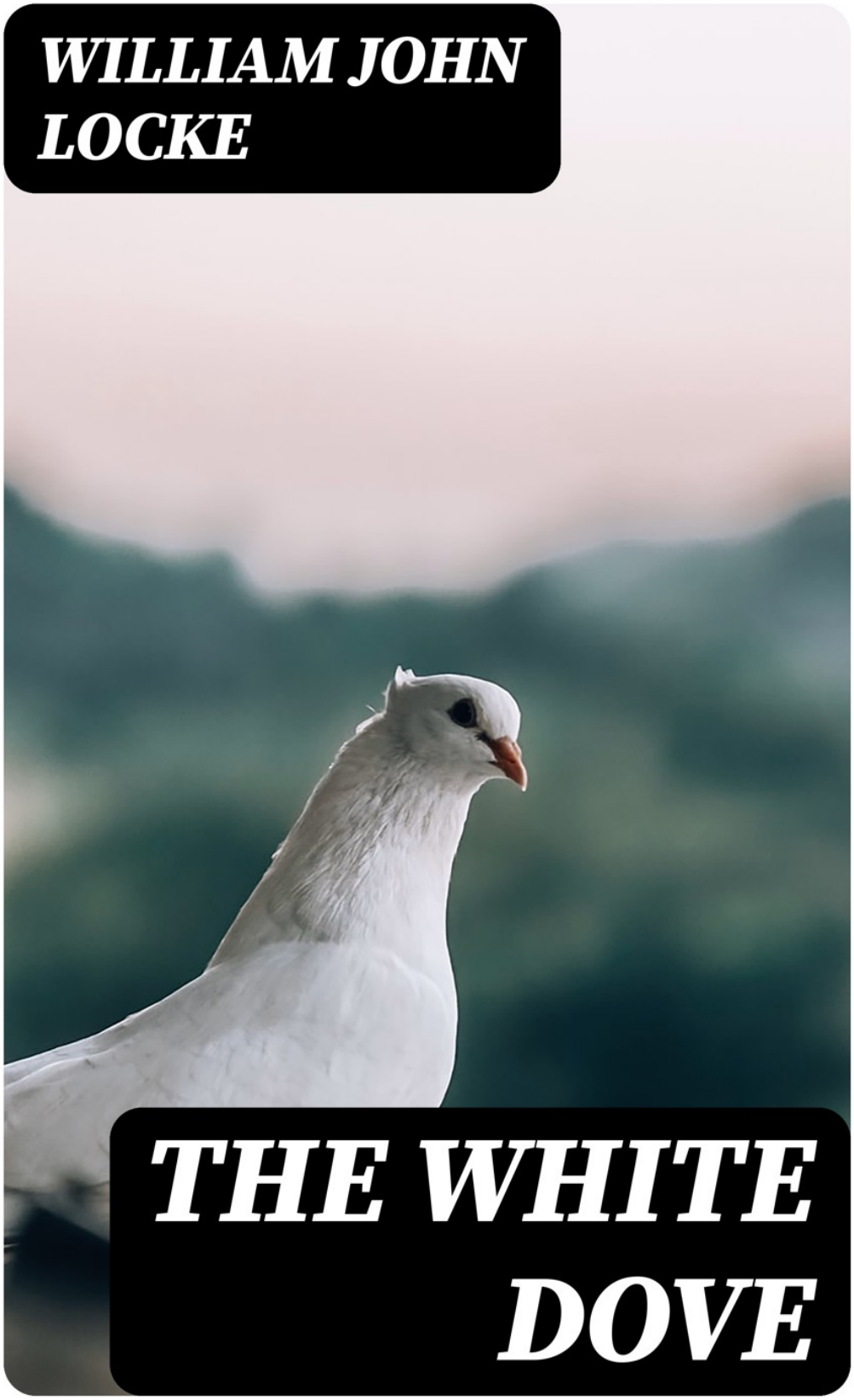

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THE WHITE DOVE

BY

WILLIAM J. LOCKE

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THE WHITE DOVE

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CHAPTER I—FATHER AND SON

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“LIFE is a glorious thing,” said the girl.

Sylvester Lanyon looked at her half in amusement, half in wistfulness. There was no doubt whatever of her sincerity. Therein lay the pathetic. To reply that the shadow of death and suffering clouded life's glory was too obvious a rejoinder. So he smiled and said,—

“Well?”

“We ought to conquer it, make it our own, and live it to the full.”

“If it is to be conquered by us weak wretches, it can't be such a glorious thing,” he remarked.

“But who said we were weak wretches?” she retorted. “You're not one, and I'm not one!” She laughed, flushing a little. “No, I'm not,” she repeated.

If Sylvester Lanyon had been endowed with the power of graceful words, here was a chance for a pretty compliment. It was challenged by the girl's self-conscious glance and by the splendid vitality of her youth; for Ella Defries usually carried the air of a conqueror with a certain sweet insolence. Some such idea passed vaguely through his mind, but, unable to express it, he said, shifting his ground lamely,—

“You see I'm getting elderly.”

“Nonsense!” she said. “You're only five and thirty. My own age to a day.”

“I don't quite follow,” said he.

“A woman is always ten years older than a man. You ought to know that.”

“And that proves?”

“That you ought to go into the world and win fame and mix with the brilliant men and women in London who can appreciate you.”

“I don't want to mix with more brilliant men and women than those who are under this *roof of Woodlands*,” said Sylvester.

Ella flushed again, but this time she drooped her eyes and bent her head over her sewing for some time abandoned. A smile played round her lips.

“Your Aunt Agatha, for instance.”

“No, dear soul. The other two.”

He rose and filled his pipe from a tobacco jar on the mantel-piece. The room, furnished with the solid mahogany and leather of a bygone generation, was his father's particular den, where, however, of all rooms in the house, he was least likely to find the privacy for which it was set apart. Ella, during her periodical visits to Ayresford, calmly monopolised it; Sylvester strolled in naturally from his widowed house over the way; Miss Agatha Lanyon, although she pretended to cough at the smoke, would leave her knitting promiscuously about on chairs and tables, while the little grandchild Dorothy spilled the ink with impunity over the Turkey carpet.

There was a silence while Sylvester lit his pipe and settled down again in the leathern armchair by the fire.

“I want no better company than the dear old man's, and yours,” said he.

“My conversation is not fit for an intellectual man,” said Ella, with a humility that contrasted with her conquering attitude of a few moments before.

“You are a very clever girl,” said Sylvester.

She shook her head with a little air of scorn and threw her sewing on the table.

“Oh, no. It pleases my vanity to think so. But what do I know in comparison with you? What can I do? You go to a bedside and hold the keys of life and death in your hand. To you, all the hidden forces and mysteries of nature are every-day commonplaces. Professor Steinthal of Vienna, whom I met the other day at Lady Milmo's, told me that, if you chose, you could become the greatest bacteriologist in Europe.”

“Did he say that?” asked Sylvester, eagerly.

“Yes, and that is why you ought to go away and live in London and fulfil your life gloriously.”

A look of amusement came into his grave eyes, and lit for a moment the sombreness of a face prematurely careworn.

“I *am* going to London,” he said. “I sold the practice this morning.”

Ella rose from her chair impetuously. “Why didn't you tell me at once, instead of letting me say all these silly things? It is just like a man.”

“You took my apathy so much for granted,” he said, laughing.

“I suppose I am a weak wretch, after all,” said Ella.

Sylvester put down his pipe and stood by her side.

“It is really all your doing, Ella. This is not the first time you have pointed out my way to me. And it won't be the

last, will it?”

There was a note of pathetic appeal in his tone that made her heart beat a little faster. Of all the phases of his manhood that her instinctive feminine alertness had caused him to present to her, this one moved her the most strongly. An unwonted shy tenderness came into her eyes.

“It is for you to settle that,” she said.

He looked at her for a moment as if about to speak, but some inward conflict seemed to check the words. A man's memories and dead loves rise up sometimes and stare at him in sad reproach.

“I wish I had the gift of speech,” he said.

“What do you want to say?” she asked gently.

He smiled whimsically. “If I could tell you that, I should have the gift.”

“You'll let me see something of you in London, won't you?”

“Why, of course! Whom else should I want to see? Frodsham's practice is a large one—I am buying a share, you know. A specialist generally has his hands full. I shall have neither the time nor the desire to go about butterflying. Besides, it is only a few people that like me. I'm generally looked upon as a 'stick.'”

His head had been turned aside; and while there had been no danger of his glance, Ella had scanned his face as a girl does that of a man who is already something more to her than friend or brother. It was thin and intellectual, somewhat careworn, with deep vertical lines between the brows. The hair was black and wavy, thinning a little over the temples; the features well cut and sensitive; the eyes,

deeply sunken, possessing keenness, but little brilliance; a moustache, standing well away at each end from the cheeks, accentuated their sharp contours. Yet in spite of the intellectual delicacy of the face, the tanned, rough skin, corresponding with the well-knit wiriness of his frame, gave assurance of strong physical health.

The last epithet in his remarks, so at variance with the character she was idealising from her scrutiny, moved her ready indignation.

“I should like to have, a quarter of an hour with the fool that said so!” she exclaimed.

“You are loyal to your friends,” said Sylvester.

They discussed the point. Ella let loose the fine scorn of five and twenty for the shallow society that could not appreciate a man of his calibre. Her championship was sweet for him to hear. For some time past he had been gradually growing conscious of the force that this sympathetic intelligence and this warm nature were bringing into his life. Unwittingly he had revealed the fact to Ella. As woman, and especially the fresh girl, is responsive, and gives bit by bit of herself, as it is craved, Ella, when she looked into her heart, found much that had been yielded. The situation therefore was sweet and delicate.

“My going will be a blow to my father,” he said after a while. “I hardly like to tell him.”

“He wouldn't stand in your way,” said Ella. “He's not like that. We have talked it over scores of times. He is as anxious as I am for you to take your proper place in the world.”

“Dear old fellow,” said Sylvester, his face brightening. “He would cut off both his feet for me, gladly. But he would feel the pain all the same.”

“Yes, who wouldn't love him?” said Ella.

“I wish I had a father.”

“We'll go shares in him,” said Sylvester.

“His heart is big enough.”

And again the girl coloured and felt very happy, as if the puzzle of her life were being explained to her.

“And Dorothy?”

“That's where the difficulty comes in. Would London be good for her?”

“Why not leave her here?”

Ella looked at him sharply and saw, as she had expected, the alarm on his face.

“You don't know what she is to me,” he said.

“It would cheer Uncle Matthew when you 're gone. He is devoted to her.”

He was silent awhile. The thought of parting from the child, the living memory of his dead wife; was a pang whose intensity he could not express even to Ella. She was seven. For four years he had brought her up alone in his own house, under the care of an old family servant who had taught her to read, and say her prayers, and use her knife and fork in a way befitting her station. The rest of her tiny education Sylvester himself had seen to. She was his constant companion, abroad and at home.

He could talk to her as it was in his power to—talk to no one else, almost persuading himself that her innocent clear

eyes saw into the depths of his heart. To leave her behind was a prospect filled with unspeakable dismay.

“It's a weary world,” he said, by way of generalisation.

“It isn't!” cried Ella. “It's a glorious world, full of love and heroism and beauty. I won't have my dear world abused! It is sweet to be alive in it, to use all one's faculties, to go about among men and women, to hear the rain, to smell the hay—”

“And get hay fever and then come to me—the misanthrope—to cure you. Paganism generally ends that way.”

“I should call your being able to cure me a very beautiful thing too,” she exclaimed conclusively. “Isn't your knowledge of healing a glorious thing?”

“Oh, don't tell me about the child gathering pebbles by the sea-shore.” It was modesty on Newton's part, but mock modesty on that of the people who quote him now. “Children can pick up a tremendous lot of pebbles in two hundred years!”

The door opened and Matthew Lanyon stood on the threshold, with an amused smile on his grave face. For the girl had been speaking with animation, and the fresh colour in her cheeks and the happiness in her eyes made her goodly to look upon.

“Syl annihilated as usual?” he asked, coming forward.

“I hope so. He won't be converted, Uncle Matthew. What do you think of the world? Isn't it a beautiful world?”

“Since it holds you, my dear, how could it be otherwise?”

She laughed and looked at Sylvester with some coquetry. Here was a lesson in compliment by which he might profit.

Sylvester thrust forward an armchair for his father.

“Tired?”

“Of course not. What has a healthy man got to do with being tired? No, my dear Ella, please don't. You know I disapprove of cushions. They are for the young and delicate.”

“Where shall we haye tea?” asked Ella. “Here, or in the drawing-room? Aunt Agatha is in her district.”

“Oh, here, then, by all means. We can have it comfortably.”

Ella rang the bell and cleared an occasional table of a litter of pipes, cigar-boxes, and papers. Matthew Lanyon lay back in his chair with the air of a man who had earned his home comforts, and stretched out his feet to the fire. Then he put his invariable question,—

“How's Dorothy?”

Sylvester replied, gave the usual bulletin as to her health, recounted the small incidents in the child's day. She had driven with him on his rounds that morning; during one of the waits had urgently requested Peck, the coachman, to die forthwith—straight and stiff—so that she might have the pleasure of seeing how her father brought him to life again. Her mind had been much exercised by a picture in the Family Bible of the raising of Jairus' daughter, and had identified her parent with the chief actor in the scene.

Tea arrived during the narration. Matthew listened with amused interest, for his son and his son's child were the dearest things earth held for him. His wife had died many years ago, when Sylvester was just emerging from boyhood and the great glory had gone out of his heaven. But his love

for Sylvester had deepened, and of late years the sad parallelism of their widowed lives had drawn the two men very near together. In many ways they were singularly alike, the mere facial resemblance stamping them at the first glance as father and son; both were grave, intellectual-looking men, of the same clean, wiry make, with an air of reserve and good breeding that commanded respect. But the older man possessed that peculiar grace of manner, called nowadays of the old school, which the brusquer habits of more modern times have forbidden to flourish. Both faces bore the marks of suffering; but the passage of the years had chastened that of the father, who looked more frankly at the world than the son and out of kindlier grey eyes. He was a little over sixty, his hair whitening fast; still he held himself erect, and scoffed satirically at old age.

“The prime of life, my dear sir,” he would say, “the heyday of existence! Up to sixty a man gathers his experience and tears his fingers dreadfully. After sixty he can sit down quietly and enjoy it and let his fingers heal.”

There was a pause in the talk, and the three sat, as they often did, content to be together, looking into the fire and thinking their own thoughts. Perhaps the girl's were the happiest. The room had darkened, and the firelight played on their faces gathered round the hearth. Suddenly Sylvester spoke.

“I was talking to Ella about my plans, father, before you came in.”

“A very sensible person to talk to,” said Matthew.

“I've burned my ships. I have sold the practice and am going to join Frodsham in London.”

“I'm very glad indeed to hear it,” said the old man; “you should have done it years ago.”

His voice was suave and even, but the keen eye of the physician detected a trembling of the fingers resting on the broad leathern arm of the chair.

“I don't at all like to leave you,” said Sylvester, feeling guilty. Matthew waved away the reluctance.

“Nonsense, my boy. I'm not a cripple that requires to be taken care of. Grown up men can't be for ever hanging on to —I was going to say, to each other's apron strings. London is your place. Perhaps after a time, when I am dead and gone, —a man must die some day, you know,—you'll like to come back to the old house and devote yourself entirely to research and be independent of two guinea fees and that kind of thing. That would be nice, wouldn't it, Ella?”

The girl's heart throbbed at the share implied, but a tenderer feeling quieted it at once.

“It would be impossible without you, Uncle Matthew,” she said.

He rose with a laugh. “None of us are indispensable, not even the most futile. I'm going to dress. You'll dine here, of course, Syl? And, Ella, tell them to get up some of the '84' Pommery to drink good luck to Syl.”

He walked out of the room with the brisk air of a man thoroughly pleased with life; but outside, in the passage, his face grew sad, and he mounted the stairs to his dressing-room very slowly, holding on to the balusters.

The younger folks remained for a while longer in the library. Sylvester bent forward and broke a great lump of coal with the poker.

“I'm not fit to black his boots, you know, My companionship means much more to him than Dorothy's does to me, and he gives it up without a murmur.”

“And that settles the Dorothy question?” asked Ella, in the direct manner that sometimes embarrassed him.

“Of course it settles it,” he cried warmly. “What a selfish beast you must have thought me!”

“If you didn't love others so warmly, I shouldn't—”

She came to a dead stop because his eyes were full upon her.

“Well?”

“I shouldn't care for you so much.”

“Do you care very much for me?” he asked rather wistfully, and came to where she was standing with one foot on the fender.

“You know I would do anything in the world you asked,” she answered in a low voice.

“Some day I may claim your promise.”

“You know I always keep my promises,” she said.

The dressing bell clanged loudly through the house. Sylvester hurriedly departed so as to dress in time for dinner. But Ella lingered by the fire, the girl in her wondering whether she had said too much, and the woman in her filled with a delicious pity for the strong-brained, deep-natured man who seemed dumbly to be holding out his hands for her love. She gave it generously and gratefully. Compared with him, all other men seemed of small account, and in her aunt Lady Milmo's house, where most of her life was spent, she had seen all the sorts and conditions of males that a well-to-do collector of minor celebrities can gather around

her in London. But to her direct mind the truest men of her acquaintance were Matthew Lanyon, her former guardian, whose title of uncle was purely one of courtesy, and Sylvester, with whom the old quasi-cousinly relations were being transmuted into sweeter ties.

CHAPTER II—THE SHADOW IN A LIFE

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Father and son sat together in the dining-room, smoking their after-dinner cigars, and speaking very little, as their custom was when together. With its snow-white table-cloth set off by the glass and cut flowers and the rich purple of the old port in the decanter; with its picture-hung walls, its massive mahogany sideboard gleaming with silver, amid which displayed itself opulently a huge salver presented to Matthew Lanyon, Esquire, by his fellow-townsmen on the completion of his third year of mayoralty; with its great red-shaded lamp suspended over the table, and its dark marble fireplace,—the room had an air of warmth and generous comfort that spoke of a long continuance of worldly ease. In his younger days Matthew Lanyon had roved about the world, picking up much knowledge of men in new lands where life was rude, and a little money wherewith to start a career when he returned to civilisation. His return was speedier than either himself or his friends had anticipated. The latter beheld him married to a sweet flower-like girl whom he had met not long before in Australia; but more than this they did not learn. He was not given to offering information as to his doings, and there was that suggestion of haughtiness behind his frank young smile which forbade questioning. He was there; his wife was there. The friends must accept both on their merits. He had served his articles as a solicitor before leaving England. He turned to his profession for maintenance and bought a share in a cousin's practice in Ayresford. He was to have made his

fortune, gone away again with his young wife into the wide world, and seen all the wonders that it held. But as in the case of many other young dreams, it seemed otherwise to the gods. Wealth had come quickly, and he had added gradually to his little home until it had become a great house, and his cousin had died, and his wife had died, and in Ayresford he had lived all the time, married and widowed, and now the longing for change had gone, and in Ayresford he hoped that he himself would die, in the home endeared to him by so many memories, in the bed consecrated by the pale sweet shadow of her who even now seemed to lie by his side.

Wealth had come, yet much of it had gone; how, no man knew but himself and one other; he had toiled hard to win it, was toiling hard at sixty to win it back. And how strenuously he toiled, again no man knew; least of all his son.

The desultory talk had drooped. Suddenly Matthew Lanyon plunged his hand in the breast pocket of his dress-coat and drew out an old-fashioned miniature, which, after regarding it for a few moments, he handed to Sylvester.

“I've been rummaging about to-day and found this. Perhaps you'd like to have it.”

“My mother!” said Sylvester.

It was a portrait, on ivory, of a singularly sweet face, possessing the tender, unearthly purity of one of Lorenzo di Credi's Madonnas, executed when the original was very young, a few months, in fact, before Sylvester was born.

“A very good likeness,” said Matthew.

“I shall be glad to keep it,” replied the son, putting it into his pocket.

“I thought you would,” assented the elder.

“It will be a companion to my miniature of Constance,” said Sylvester.

And then silence came again; for memories crowded into the minds of each that they knew not how to speak of. Yet each knew that the other was thinking of his dead wife and wished that he could burst the strange bonds of reserve that held him and speak out that which was in his heart.

“It's a devil of a muddle, isn't it?” said Matthew at last.

“What?”

“The cosmos. And the more one tries to establish order, the worse confounded becomes the confusion. The high gods seem to have given it up as a bad job.”

“That reminds me,” said Sylvester, with a laugh. “I found Billings to-day having a glorious drunk on champagne. For a man earning twenty-five shillings a week, with a large family to support and a wife half dying of pneumonia, I thought it rather strong.”

Matthew rose from his chair, his brows bent and his eyes kindling with sudden anger.

“The damned hound! What did you do with him?”

“I took him outside so as not to disturb his wife and then I kicked him until he was sober,” replied Sylvester, grimly. “I wonder who could have sent the champagne.”

“Some silly fool,” said Matthew, nursing his wrath.

“Yet nearer to heaven than most of us,” said Sylvester, knocking the ash off his cigar.

“Rubbish!” said Matthew. “Besides, silly fools don't go to heaven. There's no place for 'em.”

“I don't think Billings will rob his wife again,” remarked Sylvester.

“Well, you can send him up to me in the morning.”

“I think he'd sooner have another kicking,” laughed Sylvester.

A picture rose before him of the reprobate cringing before his father, wriggling at each sentence as at a whip lash, and going away with two more bottles of wine that would burn his dirty hands like hot bricks. He laughed, but Matthew thrust both hands in his pockets and stood with feet apart on the hearth-rug.

“Did you ever hear of such a mean skunk?”

“You will never fathom the depth of human meanness, father, if you live to be a hundred.”

“I thank you for the compliment, Syl,” replied the old man, drily, “but I happen to think otherwise. May you never live to know it as I do.”

“Mr. Usher, sir,” said the servant, suddenly throwing open the door.

Matthew started, and glanced instinctively at his son. Sylvester, who had been struck by an unusual note of emotion in his father's voice, was looking at him curiously. So their eyes met in a mutual sensitive glance, and Matthew flushed slightly beneath his tanned and care-lined skin.

“Confound Usher!” muttered Sylvester, irritably.

An elderly man of about Matthew's age appeared, white-bearded, gold-spectacled, wearing a tightly buttoned frock-coat. He was of heavy build and had loose lips and dull watery eyes, the lids faintly rimmed with blood-red. He came forward into the room with extended hand.

“My dear friend, how are you this evening?” he said with a curious deliberation, as if he had duly sucked each word before he spat it out. “And, Sylvester, my dear lad, how are you? I have been very unwell to-day, and the weather has increased my sufferings. You notice that there is a wheezing in my bronchial tubes. Yet I thought I must come to see you this evening in spite of the weather. I said to Olivia, 'It is a duty, and I must fulfil it.'”

“Pray sit down, Usher,” said Matthew, politely. “Let me pass you the port.”

“A little port wine would be very good for me. I cannot afford port wine, Matthew, like you, or I should drink it habitually. I should think this was very expensive.”

He smacked his loose lips and held the glass up to the light.

“It is a sound wine,” said Matthew.

“If you would not put too high a price on it,” said the other, in his monotonous voice, “perhaps I might buy some from you. What would you charge?”

“In the market it would fetch about a hundred and eighty shillings a dozen,” said Sylvester, savagely.

But his father raised a hand in courteous deprecation.

“I am not a wine-merchant, Usher, and am not in the habit of retailing my cellar. But if you'd accept a dozen, I should be very pleased to send it round to you.”

“I will accept it with great pleasure,” said Usher, blandly. “It would hurt your feelings if I refused your generosity. Have you ever remarked how generous your father is, Sylvester?”

The young man moved impatiently in his chair. He could never understand the almost lifelong intimacy that existed between his father and this old man, Usher, whom he held in cordial detestation. So he said nothing, while the guest took a fresh sip of wine, and rolled it appreciatively over his tongue.

“Your father and I were young men together in Australia, Sylvester,” he remarked. “Youth is a glorious time, and its friendships last. I never forget my old friends.”

“The sentiment does you credit, Usher,” said Matthew.

The servant entered with the London evening paper just sent from the railway bookstall. Usher held out a large soft hand for it, and the servant retired.

“I want to see what has happened in the Trevelyan divorce case,” he said, unfolding the paper. “I have followed it closely.”

A *cause celebre* was setting England whispering and sniggering, and there were many like Usher who scanned the columns of the newspapers that evening in pleased anticipation. But Sylvester expressed his distaste.

“How can you read it? The air is reeking sufficiently with the nastiness already.”

“I am interested,” replied Usher. “I think nothing human alien to me. *Nil humani*, as we used to say at school. I remember my classics. I have a very good memory. Here it is. The jury found Mrs. Trevelyan guilty of adultery with the co-respondent. Damages £5000 and costs. The judge pronounced a decree *nisi*; the husband to have custody of the children. I pity the poor woman.”

“I don't,” said Sylvester, shortly. “Such women are better dead.”

“No doubt you are right,” returned Usher. “The sacred principles of morality ought to be upheld at any cost. I have always upheld morality. What do you think, Matthew?” The old man looked steadily at his finger nails and replied in a dispassionate voice,—

“One never knows what lies behind.” Sylvester rose and shrugged his shoulders.

“Wantonness and baseness lie behind. I have no patience with misplaced sympathy in such cases. Here is this woman you are reading about,—she betrayed her husband, deserted her children. She deserves no pity.”

Usher waggled his head indulgently.

“I am a Christian man,” he said, “and I have a tender heart. I have always had a tender heart, Matthew.”

Sylvester laughed and threw the end of his cigar into the fire. He was half ashamed of having been betrayed into a display of deep feeling before one whom he considered a shallow egotist.

“Well, I haven't,” he said. “I'm going up to the drawing-room. Perhaps you'll join me.”

He nodded to his father and left the room. Matthew edged his chair further from the fire, and wiped his lips and brow with his handkerchief.

“You are getting too warm,” said Usher.

“The room is hot. When you have finished your wine, we may as well follow Sylvester.”

Usher poured out another glass.

“I am very comfortable,” he said. “I always am here. You must be proud to have a son with such sentiments as Sylvester.”

Matthew rose abruptly from his seat, clenched his hands by his side, and bit a quivering lip. Evidently he was mastering something.

“Drink your wine and come upstairs,” he said.

The other looked at him askance and hesitated. Then yielding, as it were, to compulsion, he gulped down the contents of his glass and rose with watery eyes.

“It was a sin to do that,” he said with a sigh. “You always were an unreasonable fellow, Matthew. I only said I was glad that Sylvester held such opinions. Most young men nowadays are shockingly lax in their principles.” Matthew did not reply, but with cold, imperturbable face opened the door for him to pass out. Usher hung back.

“I must speak to you about my son Roderick. Business before pleasure. It has been my constant rule in life.”

“What has Roderick been doing now?” asked Matthew, closing the door again.

“He is bringing my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave again,” replied Usher. “My son and your son—what a difference, Matthew! 'Tis sharper than—”

“Rubbish! What's the matter, man?”

“A serpents tooth, to have a thankless child. I dislike being interrupted. Matthew, Roderick has gone to the Jews. The bills have fallen due. They won't renew, and if they are not paid, they'll put him in prison. I cannot have my son in prison.”

“Get him out, then,” replied Matthew. “I can't do more for him than I do. I promised, years ago, that what Sylvester had, Roderick should have, and, by Heaven! I've kept my promise. I can't do more. You can't draw blood from a stone.”

“As if any one ever wanted to. Proverbs are foolish. I never make use of proverbs. I think you must take up those bills.”

“And if I don't?”

Usher shrugged his shoulders and, sitting down again, refilled his glass and held it up to the light. Matthew stood on the hearth-rug, his hands behind him, and regarded him impassively.

“I gave you Roderick's quarterly allowance only a short while ago. What has he done with it?”

“I do not know,” said Usher, impressively, turning his dull venerable face towards him. “He has nearly ruined me already.”

“Have you brought his letters with you?”

“I burned his letters. It is imprudent to keep compromising letters. But I have made out a statement of affairs.”

Usher took from his pocket a double sheet of foolscap, smoothed it out and examined it deliberately, then handed it to Matthew. The latter glanced through the statement. His lips quivered for a moment.

“This is practically fraud,” he said. “A magistrate might commit on it, a jury find a verdict of guilty, and then—”

“His dear mother's memory,” said Usher, wagging his head solemnly.

Matthew involuntarily clenched the paper tight in his hand.

“Damn you!” he said. Then he repeated it. “Damn you!”

But Usher stretched out a deprecating hand and spoke in tones of gentle reproach.

“You must be calm, my dear friend. I am always calm. I have never said a word in all my life that I have had cause to regret. Not even this morning, when Olivia with great carelessness destroyed a new book-plate. And it was a very valuable book-plate. It belonged to Hugh, the first Earl of Lawford, of Edward III.'s creation.”

“Are you aware that your own son is in danger of penal servitude?” asked Matthew, sharply.

“Why, of course. Is not that my reason for coming to you? I put the matter into your hands, as lawyer and friend and second father to my erring boy, and I am content. Yes, I am content, for I have trust in you. Shall we go up now and join the ladies?” Matthew bit the end off another cigar and lighted it. Then, as if his guest had made the most natural and relevant proposal in the world, he said with a courtesy not devoid of grimness,—“My sister is not feeling very well this evening, and the young folks might be happier alone together, so perhaps we'll not go upstairs. And as this affair of Roderick's will give me some thinking, you'll excuse me if I leave you shortly.”

“You are right,” replied Usher, rising ponderously. “The night air is not good for me. I suffer much from my bronchial tubes. I must have some one fitter than Olivia to nurse me. Servants are never grateful for the bounties one heaps on them. If only Miss Defries would look upon Roderick as

favourably as she does upon Sylvester, how happily things could be arranged.”

There was not a spark of cunning or rearward thought in his dim, unspeculative eyes. Yet Matthew felt a sudden pang of suspicion at his last words, and scanned his face intently. Was it the first hint of some scheme long maturing in his dull yet tenacious brain, or the mere surface fancy of the egotist? He could not tell, although he flattered himself that he knew the man's soul as a priest his breviary,—every line and phrase, every thumb-mark and dog's ear.

“I think the less said about Roderick for some time, the better,” he remarked, ringing the bell. Then before the servant came, he said suddenly,—

“But, by Heaven! this is the last time. Understand that. Once more, and I break down the whole structure though it kill me—carry the war into your quarters and tell Roderick all.”

Usher's face was shadowed by a faint smile.

“My dear friend, Roderick has known all his life. I could never leave my son in ignorance. I gave him the best training.”

The servant appeared. Usher extended his hand, which the other touched mechanically, and in another moment was gone, leaving Matthew staring incredulously, conscious of utter dismay.

“Is he lying?” he asked himself, a short while later, as he paced the library, whither he had betaken himself with the moneylending document. “Can the boy be such a blackguard? He must be lying.” But how base the lie was in reality, even he could not surmise.