WILLIAM JOHN LOCKE

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CHAPTER I

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THE early story of Baltazar is not the easiest one to tell. It is episodic. It obeys not the Unities of Time, Place and Action. The only unity to be found in it is the oneness of character in that absurd and accomplished man. The fact of his being lustily alive at the present moment does not matter. To get him in perspective, one must regard him as belonging to the past. Now the past is a relative conception. Save to the academic student of History, Charlemagne is as remote as Sesostris. To the world emerging from the stupor of the great war, Mons is as distant as Balaclava. Time is really reckoned by the heart-throbs of individuals or nations. Yester-year is infinitely far away....

To get back to Baltazar and his story. In the first place it may be said that he was a man of fits and starts; a description which does not imply irresponsible mobility of purpose and spasmodic achievement. The phrase must be taken in the literal significance of the two terms. A man of fits—of mental, moral and emotional paroxysms; of starts—of swift courses of action which these paroxysms irresistibly determined. Which same causes of action, in each case, he doggedly and ruthlessly pursued. One, an intimate teacher of Baltazar, one who, possessed of the knowledge of the scholar and the wisdom of the man of the world, might be qualified to judge, called him a Fool of Genius. Now the genius is steadfast; the fool erratic. In this apparent

irreconcilability of attributes lies the difficulty of presenting the story of Baltazar.

But for the war, the story would scarcely be worth the telling, however interesting might be his sheer personality and his calculated waywardness. It would have led no whither, save to a stage or two further on his journey to the grave. But there is scarcely a human being alive with whose apparently predestined lot the war has not played the very devil. It knocked Baltazar's world to bits—as soon as the realization of it burst on his astonished senses; yet it seemed to bring finality or continuity into his hitherto disconnected life.

It was during the war that his name was mentioned and his character discussed for the first time for many years, by two persons not without interest in his fate.

Marcelle Baring, a professional nurse of long standing, arrived late one night at Churton Towers, to take up the duties of sister in charge. The place was the country seat of a great family who, like many others, had given it over to the Government as a convalescent home for officers; a place of stately lawns and terraces and fountains; of picture-hung galleries guarded by grim emptinesses in armour; of noble halls heterogeneously furnished—for generosity seldom goes so far as to leave the edges of a priceless marquetry table at the mercy of a feather-headed subaltern's forgotten cigarette; of tapestried rooms, once filled with the treasures of centuries, now empty save for the rows of little standard War Office bedsteads and the little deal regulation tables at their heads.

Somewhat confused by the vastness of her new home, and by the contrast of its gracious splendour with the utilitarian ugliness and mathematical uniformity of the General Hospital which she had just left, Marcelle Baring went downstairs the next morning to begin her new duties. Once in the wards she felt at home; for a ward of sick men is the same all the world over. The Matron went round with her, performing introductions; but that first morning she only caught a third of the names. It would take a few days to learn them, to learn also the history of the cases. Besides, they were convalescents, dressings were few, and her work was more administrative than personal. Her first impression was that of a high spirited crowd of almost indistinguishable young men, some to all intents and purposes sound of wind and limb, who in a short time would be sent back to the tempest of shell whence they were driven; others maimed and crippled, armless, legless, with drooping wrists, with unserving ankles. In the daytime nearly all were out of the wards; most in the open air playing tennis or lounging about the terraces, or playing billiards in the open-sided pavilion that looked over the Japanese garden. It was no easy matter to keep track of them all.

It was only on the second day that the name of a young officer who had lost his foot caught her eye: “Mr. G. Baltazar.” He was very young, fair, blue-eyed, with a little blond moustache. His tunic, laid ready with the rest of his clothes, bore the white and purple ribbon of the Military Cross. The stump had practically healed, but it still needed attention.

“It’s rotten luck, isn’t it, Sister?” he said while she was tending him. “I thought I had got through all right—the show at Ypres early in June. I all but saw it out, but a bit of high explosive got me and here I am. Anyhow, they say they’re going to wangle me an artificial foot, so that I’ll never know the difference. One of those pukka things, you know, that’ll pick up pins with the toes. I hope it’ll come soon, for I’m fed up with crutches. I always feel as if I ought to hold out my hat for pennies.”

“Poor chap!” said Marcelle, absently.

“That’s kind of you, but it’s just what I’m hating. I don’t want to go through life as a ‘poor chap.’ ” He paused, then ran on: “I wonder how you dear people can look at the beastly thing. Whenever I cock my leg down and try to have a sight of it, it nearly makes me sick. I like to be neat and tidy and not repulsive to my fellow-creatures, but that crimpled-crumpled end of me is just slovenly and disgusting.”

Marcelle Baring scarcely heeded his debonair talk. His name had awakened far-off memories. She worked in silence, pinned the bandage and, smiling, with a “You’ll do all right, Mr. Baltazar,” left him.

The shock came the next afternoon. As she passed through the great entrance hall, fitted up as a lounge with the heterogeneous furniture, she came across him, the solitary occupant, sitting at a table, busy with pencil and writing pad and a thick volume propped up in front of him. Her eye caught arresting symbols on the paper, then the page-heading of the book: “Rigid Dynamics.”

She paused. He looked up with a laugh.

“Hello, Sister!”

She said, with a catch in her breath, “You’re a mathematician?”

He laughed. “More or less. If they kick me out of the Army, I must go back to Cambridge and begin again where I left off.”

“You must have left off rather high, if you’re reading Rigid.”

He started, for no one in this wide world but a mathematical student could have used the phrase.

“What the—what do you know about Rigid?”

“I was at Newnham, in my young days,” she replied, “and I read mathematics. And, oddly enough, my private tutor was”—she hesitated for a second—“someone of your name.”

He pushed his chair away from the table.

“That must have been my father.”

“John Baltazar.”

“Yes, John Baltazar. One of the greatest mathematical geniuses Cambridge has produced. Good Lord! did you know my father?”

“He and I were great friends.”

She looked him through and through with curiously burning eyes; of which the boy was unconscious, for he said:

“Fancy your reading with my father! It’s a funny old world.” Then suddenly he reflected and glanced at her critically. “But how could you? He disappeared nearly twenty years ago.”

“I’m thirty-eight,” she said.

“Lord! you don’t look it—nothing like it,” he cried boyishly.

Nor did she. She carried a graceful air of youth, from the wave of brown hair that escaped from beneath her Sister’s cap to the supple and delicately curved figure. And her face, if you peered not too closely, was young, very pure in feature, still with a bloom on the complexion in spite of confinement in hospital wards. Her voice, too, was soft and youthful. Perhaps her eyes were a little weary—they had seen many terrible things.

At the young man’s tribute she flushed slightly and smiled. But the smile died away when he added:

“What was he like? I’ve often wondered, and there has been no one to tell me—no one I could have listened to. The dons of his generation are too shy to refer to him and I’m too shy to ask ’em. Do you know, I’ve never seen a picture of him even.”

“He was not unlike you,” she replied, looking not at him, but wistfully down the years. “Of heavier build. He was a man of tremendous vitality—and swift brain. The most marvellous teacher I have ever met. He seemed to hold your intellect in his hands like a physical thing, sweep it clear of cobwebs and compel it to assimilate whatever he chose. A born teacher and a wonderful man.”

“But was he human? I know his work, though I haven’t read enough to tackle it yet—most of it’s away and beyond Part II of the Tripos even. I went up with an Open Mathematical Scholarship just before the war, and only did my first year’s reading. I’m beginning this”—he tapped his Treatise on Rigid Dynamics—“on my own. What I mean is,”

he went on, after a pause, “my father has been always an abstraction to me. I shouldn’t have worried about him if he had just been a nonentity—it wasn’t playing the game to vanish as he did into space and leave my mother to fend for herself.”

“But I heard,” said the Sister, “that your mother had her own private fortune.”

“I wasn’t alluding to that side of it,” he admitted. “But he did vanish, didn’t he? Well, as I say, if he had been just a nobody, I shouldn’t have been particularly interested; but he wasn’t. He was the most brilliant man of his generation at Cambridge. For instance, he took up Chinese as a sort of relaxation. They say his is the only really scientific handbook on the study of the language. You see, Sister”—he swerved impatiently on his chair and brought his hand down on the table, whereat she drew a swift inward breath, for the gesture of the son was that of the father—“I’ve always wanted to know whether I’m the son of an inhuman intellect or of a man of flesh and blood. Was he human? That’s what I want to know.”

“He was human all right,” she replied quietly. “Too human. Of course he was essentially the scholar—or savant—whatever you like to call it. His work was always to him an intellectual orgy. But he loved the world too. He was a fascinating companion. He seemed to want to get everything possible out of life.”

“Why didn’t he get it?”

“He was a man,” she said, “of sensitive honour.”

Captain Baltazar threw away the flaming match wherewith he was about to light a cigarette.

“That licks me,” said he.

“How?”

“His bolting. Did you know my father very well?”

“I’ve told you we were great friends.”

“Did you know my mother?”

Her eyelids flickered for a moment; but she replied steadily:

“No. I was only a student and your father was my private tutor. But I heard—from other people—a great deal about your mother. I believe she died many years ago, didn’t she?”

“Yes. When I was five. I barely remember her. I was brought up by my uncle and aunt—her people. They scarcely knew my father and haven’t a good word to say about him. It was only when I grew up and developed a sort of taste for mathematics, that I realized what a swell he was. And I can’t help being fascinated by the mystery of it. There he was, as far as I can gather, full of money, his own (which he walked off with) and of mother’s, beginning to enjoy at thirty a world-wide reputation—and suddenly he disappears off the face of the earth. It wasn’t a question of suicide. For the man who buys a ticket for the next world doesn’t go to peculiar trouble to take all his worldly estate with him. It isn’t reasonable, is it?”

“Your father was too much in love with life to go out of it voluntarily,” said Sister Baring.

“Then what the blazes did he do, and why did he do it?”

“I don’t know,” she said.

“Is he alive or dead?”

“How should I know, Mr. Baltazar?”

“He never wrote to you—after——?”

“Why should he have written to me?” she interrupted.

The rebuke in her voice and eyes sent the young man into confused apologies.

“Naturally not. You must forgive me, Sister; but, as I’ve told you, I’ve never met a pal of that mysterious father of mine before. I want to get all the information I can.”

She drew a chair and sat by him. The great hall was very still and, in contrast with the vivid sunshine perceived through the eastern windows, very dark. Through the open door came the scents of the summer gardens. The air was a little heavy. She felt her cap hot around her temples, and lassitude enfeebling her limbs. The strain of the war years began to tell. She had regarded this appointment as a rest from the intolerable toil of the General Hospital in a large town which she had just quitted. Before then she had served in France. And before that—for many years—she had followed the selfless career of the nurse. Now, suddenly, her splendid nerve showed signs of giving. If she had not sat down, her legs would have crumpled up beneath her. So she thought....

She looked at the young man, so eager, so proven, so like his father in gesture and glance, yet in speech and outlook—she was yet to get to that—but she knew the revolutionary influences of the war, the real war, on those who have faced its terrors and become saturated with its abiding philosophies—so different from the fervid creature, John Baltazar, of the late nineties, who had never dreamed of the possibility of this world convulsion. He had much the same frank charm of manner, the direct simplicity of

utterance; but the mouth was weaker; the eyes were blue, the eyes of a shrewish blonde—not the compelling, laughing, steel-grey eyes with a queer sparkle in the iris of John Baltazar. All in the young face that was not John Baltazar's was the mother's. She hated the mother dead, as she had loathed her living. Only once had she seen her, a blonde shrew-mouse of a woman. Just a passing by on the Newnham road, when a companion had pointed her out as Mrs. Baltazar. The little bitter mouth had bitten into her memory: the hard little blue eyes had haunted her for eighteen years. The mouth and eyes were there, before her, now. The rest, all that was noble in the boy, was John Baltazar.

"Who has told you the little you do know about him?" she asked.

"My uncle. My mother's brother. I don't think I have any relations living on my father's side. At any rate, I've not heard of them. We're of old Huguenot stock—Revocation of Edict of Nantes refugees—God knows what we were before. Long ago I happened upon a copy somewhere of the Annuaire Militaire de l'Armée Française—and I found a Baltazar in the list. I had an idea of writing him; but I didn't, of course. Now I suppose the poor devil's killed. Anyhow, that's nothing to do with your question. My uncle—Sir Richard Woodcott—they knighted him for manufacturing easily broken hardware round about Birmingham, or for going to chapel, or something—you know the type——"

Again she rebuked him: "I thought you said your uncle brought you up."

“On my mother’s fortune—he was my guardian and trustee. But he never let me forget that I was the son of John Baltazar. There was no question of affection from either of them—himself or his wife. Anything I did wrong—it was my scoundrel of a father coming out in me. After passing through a childish phase of looking on him as a kind of devil who had blasted my young life, I began to have a sneaking regard for him. You see, don’t you? If he was the antithesis of Uncle Richard, he must be somebody I could sympathize with, perhaps rather somebody who could sympathize with me. They drew me into the arms of his memory, so to speak. Odd, isn’t it?”

“What specifically did they accuse him of?”

“Oh, everything,” he replied, with a careless laugh. “Every depravity under the sun. Colossal egotism and heartlessness the mildest. And of course he drank——”

A sudden red spot flamed in the Sister’s cheek and her tired eyes flashed. “That’s a lie! And so is the other. How dare they?”

“Oh, a pacifist Knight who is making his fortune out of the war will dare anything. Then, of course, there’s what they say about any man who runs away from his wife——”

“To be explicit——?” She leaned an elbow on the table, a cheek on hand, and looked at him steadily.

“Well——” he paused, somewhat embarrassed. “Immorality—you know—other women.”

“That’s not true either. At least, not in that sense. There was another woman. Yes. But only one. And God knows that there could be nothing purer and cleaner and sweeter on this earth than that which was between them.”

“I’m more than ready to believe it,” said John Baltazar’s son. “But—how do you know?”

“It’s the story of a dear friend of mine,” she replied. “Nothing was hidden from me. The girl couldn’t help worshipping him. He was a man to be worshipped. I don’t want to speak evil of your mother—there may have been misunderstandings on both sides—but I knew—my friend and I knew—through acquaintances in Cambridge—never from himself—that his married life was very unhappy.”

“Look here, Sister,” said young Baltazar, putting up an arresting hand. “As we seem to be talking pretty intimately about my affairs, I’ll tell you something I’ve never breathed to a human being. I’ve no childish memories of being tucked up in bed and kissed to sleep by an angel in woman’s form, like children in picture books. Now I come to think of it, I used to envy them. The only vivid thing I remember is being nearly beaten to death with a belt—it was one of those patent leather things women used to wear round their waists—and then being stuffed away in the coal hole.”

“Oh, you poor mite!” Marcelle straightened herself in her chair, and the tears sprang. “Before you were five! Oh, how damnable! What a childhood you must have had! How did you manage to come through?”

He laughed. “I suppose I’m tough. As soon as I went to school—they sent me at eight years old—I was all right. But never mind about me. Go on with your friend’s story. It’s getting interesting. I quite see now that my father may have had a hell of a time.”

“If you quite see,” she said, “there’s little more to tell.”

She leaned forward again on her elbow and, staring across the great hall, through the wide-open doorway to the lawns and trees drenched in the afternoon sunshine, forgot him and lost herself in the sunshine, the most wonderful that ever was, of the years ago. Godfrey Baltazar looked at her keenly yet kindly, and his stern young lips softened into a smile; and after a bit he stretched out a hand and touched her wrist very gently.

"Tell me," he said in a low voice. "It's good for me, and may be good for you."

She came back to the present with a little sigh.

"It's such a very old story, you see. He was unhappy. His wife's ungovernable temper drove him from the house. He had to lead his intellectual as well as his physical life. He lived most of his time in college. Went home for week-ends —vainly seeking reconciliation. Then the girl threw herself into his life. She worshipped him. She seemed to give him something sweet and beautiful which he had been looking for. And he fell in love with her. And when she knew it, she was taken up into the Seventh Heaven and she didn't care for God or woman—only for him. It lasted just a month—the end of the summer term. Oh, it was very innocent, as far as that goes—they only met alone in the open air—stolen hours in the afternoon. Only one kiss ever passed between them. And then he said: 'I am a brute and a fool. This can't go on.' She had given herself to him in spirit and was ready to go on and on whithersoever he chose, so long as she was with him; but she was too shy and tongue-bound to say so. And he stamped along the road, and she by his side, all her heart and soul a-flutter, and he cried: 'My God, I never

thought it would have come to this! My child, forgive me. If ever I hurt a hair of your dear head, may God damn me to all eternity!' And they walked on in silence and she was frightened—till they came to the turn of the road—this way to Newnham, that to Cambridge. And he gripped her two hands and said: 'If I withered this flower that has blossomed in my path I should be a damnable villain.' He turned and walked to Cambridge. And the girl, not understanding anything save her love for him, wept bitterly all the way to Newnham. She neither saw him nor heard of him after that. And a week afterwards he disappeared, leaving no trace behind. And whether he's alive or dead she doesn't know till this day. And that is the real story of your father."

He had turned and put both elbows on the intervening table and, head in hand, listened to her words. When she ended, he said:

"Thank God. And thank you. So that is the word of the enigma."

"Yes. There is no other."

"And if he had been less—what shall we say—Quixotic—less scrupulous on the point of a woman's honour—you would have followed him to the end of the world——"

"I?" She started back from the table. "I? What do you mean?"

"Why the friend, Sister? Why the camouflage?" He reached out his hand and grasped hers. "Confess."

She returned his pressure, shrugged her shoulders, and said, without looking at him:

"I suppose it was rather thin. Yes. Of course I would have thrown everything to the winds for him. It was on my

account that he went away—but, as God hears me, I never sent him."

A long silence stole on them. There was so much that struggled to be said, so little that could be said. At last the young man gripped his crutches and wriggled from his chair. She rose swiftly to aid him.

"Let us have a turn in the sun. It will be good for us."

So they went out and she helped him, against his will—for he loved his triumph over difficulties—down the majestic marble stairs, and they passed the happy tennis courts and the chairs of the cheery invalids looking on at the game, and on through the Japanese garden with its pond of great water-lilies and fairy bridge across, and out of the gate into the little beech wood that screened the house from the home farm. On a rough seat amid the sun-flecked greenery they sat down.

He said: "I may be a sentimental ass, but you seem to be nearer to me than anyone I've ever met in my life."

She made a little helpless gesture. He laughed his pleasant laugh, which robbed his lips of their hardness.

"You supply a long-felt want, you know."

"That sounds rather nice, but I don't quite understand, Mr. Baltazar."

"Oh, Mr. Baltazar be blowed!" he cried. "My name's Godfrey. For God's sake let me hear somebody call me by it! You of all people. Why, you knew me before I was born."

He said it unthinking—a boyish epigram. Her sudden flush brought consciousness of blunder in elemental truth and taste. He sat stiff, horrified; gasped out:

"Forgive me. I didn't realize what I was saying."

She glanced covertly at his young and consternation-stricken face, and her heart went out to him who, after all, on so small a point of delicacy found himself so grievously to blame.

“Perhaps, my dear boy,” she said, “it is well that you have touched on this. You and I are grown up and can speak of things frankly—and certain things that people don’t usually discuss are often of supreme importance in their own and other people’s lives. I didn’t know you before you were born, nor did your father. It’s he that counts. If he had known, he would never have left your mother to…. No, no! He would have found some other way. He couldn’t have left her. It’s incredible. I know it. I know all the strength and the beauty and the wonder of him.”

“My God,” said the young man, “how you must have loved him!”

“Without loving him, any fool could have looked through his transparent honesty. He was that kind of man.”

“Tell me,” he said, “all the little silly things you can remember about him.”

He re-explained his eagerness. He had been such a lonely sort of fellow, with no kith or kin with whom he could be in sympathy: an intellectual Ishmaelite—if an inexplicable passion for mathematics and a general sort of craving for the solution of all sorts of problems, human and divine, could be called intellectual—banned by the material, dogmatic, money-obsessed Woodcotts; referred back, as he had mentioned, for all his darling idiosyncrasies to his unmentionable father. Small wonder that he had built up a sort of cult of the only being who might have taken for him a

sympathetic responsibility. And now—this was the greatest day of his life. All his dreams had come true. He was not a sentimental ass, he reasserted. If there was one idiot fallacy that the modern world was exploding, it was the fallacy of the debt due by children for the privilege they owed their parents for bringing them into this damned fool of a world. The only decent attitude of parents towards their children was one of profound apology. It was up to the children to accept it according to the measure of its fulfilment. But, after all, an uncared-for human atom, with intelligence and emotions, could not go through life without stretching out tentacles for some sort of sympathy and understanding. He must owe something of Himself—himself with a capital H—to those who begot and bore him. Mustn't he? So when they impressed on his young mind, by way almost of an hereditary curse, the identity of his spiritual (or, to their way of thinking, anti-spiritual) outlook with that of his father, he, naturally, stretched out to his unknown father the aforesaid tentacles: especially when he learned later what a great man his father was. Yes, really, he considered it the most miraculous day of his life. He would have given another foot to have it.

"There's another thing," he said. "Once I found in an old book some odds and ends of his manuscript. I fell to copying his writing, especially his signature. The idiotic thing a boy would do. I got into the trick of it, and I suppose I've never got out. Look."

He scrawled a few words with his signature on the pad. She started. It was like a message from the dead. He laughed and went on with the parable of his father.

“You see,” he concluded, “it is gorgeous to know, for a certainty at last, that the Family were vilely wrong, and my own instinct right, all the time.”

He had spoken with a touch of the vehemence she so well remembered. And she had let him speak on, for the sake of the memories; also in the hope that he might forget his demand for a revelation of them. But he returned to it.

“Another day,” she replied. “These things can’t all be dragged at once out of the past. We’ll have many opportunities of talking—till your new foot comes.”

“You will have another talk—many others, won’t you?” he asked eagerly.

“Why should you doubt it?”

“I don’t know. Forgive me for saying it—I don’t want to be rude, but women are funny sometimes.”

She smiled from the wisdom of her superior age—his frankness had the disarming quality of a child. “What do you know of women, Godfrey Baltazar?”

He wrinkled his brow whimsically and rubbed his hair.

“Not much. What man does? Do you know,” he asked with the air of a pioneer of thought, “you are all damnably perplexing?”

At this she laughed outright. “Isn’t she kind?”

“She—who—oh, yes. How did you guess?”

“The way of Nature varies very little. What about her?”

“She would be all right, if it weren’t for my brother——”

“Your brother? Oh, of course——” She had to reach back into unimportant memories. “Your mother was a widow when she married—with an only son.”

“That’s it. Seven or eight years older than I am. Name of Doon. Christened Leopold. We never hit it off. I’ve loathed the beggar all my life; but he’s a damn fine soldier. Major. D.S.O. Doing splendid work. But the brute has the whole of himself left and isn’t a dot and carry one, like me.”

“And the lady?”

“I’ll tell you another time—in one of our many talks. At present it doesn’t seem to amount to a row of pins compared with my meeting you. My hat!” he exclaimed after a pause. “It’s a funny little world.”

He thrust his hands into his pockets and stretched out his legs, the end of the maimed one supported on the crutch. The afternoon peace of the beech wood enfolded them in their contemplation of the funny little world. She looked at him, young, strong, full of the delight of physical and intellectual life, reckoning as of no account the sacrifice to his country of much that made that physical existence full of precious meaning; hiding deep in his English soul all the significance of his familiar contempt for death; a son whom any mother might be proud to have brought into the world. And tears were very near her eyes when she thought of what might have been. And all her heart went out to him suddenly in a great gush of emotion, as though she had found her own son, and the tears started. She laid rather a timid hand on his shoulder.

“My dear,” she said, “let us be great friends for the sake of the bond between us.”

He started at her touch, and plucking both hands from his pockets, imprisoned hers in them.

“Friends! You’re a dear. The dearest thing in the world. You’re going to be the only woman I’ve ever loved. Why, you’re crying!”

Her wet eyes glistened. “We’re all hopelessly perplexing, aren’t we?”

“You’re not. Not a little bit.” He kissed her hand and let it go. “You’re straight and adorable. But what can I call you?”

“Call me?” The question was a little shock. “You can call me by my name, if you like—when we are alone—Marcelle.”

“Splendid!” he cried. “The long-felt want. I’ve had as many Sisters as my young life can stand.”

She rose, helped him to rise.

“I hope,” she said, “you will remain the boy that you are for a very long time.”

CHAPTER II

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AFTER this they had the many talks which they had promised themselves, and she told him the little things about John Baltazar which he had craved to learn. And the young man told her of his ambitions and his hopes and his young despairs. The last mainly concerned one Dorothy Mackworth, a Warwickshire divinity in a silk tennis sweater and tam-o'-shanter, whose only imperfection, if the word could be applied to tragic misfortune, was her domination by some diabolic sorcery which made her look more kindly on the black Leopold, his brother, than on himself. Her age? Seventeen. "You poor babies," thought Marcelle. Once she said:

"Why worry? You can find a thousand little Dorothys in a week if you look for them—all a-growing and a-blowing, with never a wicked spell on them at all."

"You are wrong," he replied. "One can find thousands of Susans and Janes and Gertrudes—all very charming girls, I admit; but there's only one Dorothy. She's very remarkable. She has an intellect. She has a distracting quality, something uncanny, you know, in her perceptions and intuitions. I'm dead serious, Marcelle, believe me——"

She let him talk his heart out. Her soul, dry and athirst, drank in his boy's freshness—how greedily she scarcely realized. In her character of nurse she had acted as Mother Confessor to many a poor lonely wretch; but in every case she had felt it was to the nun-descended uniform she wore, to its subconsciously recognized sanctity, and not to the mere kindly woman beneath, that she owed the appeal or

the revelation. But now to young Godfrey Baltazar she was intensely, materially woman. Foolishly woman in her unconfessed craving to learn the details of his life and character and outlook on the world.

Once he checked an egotistic exposition.

“Look here,” he said, struck by a sudden qualm, “I’m always holding forth about myself—what about you?”

“There’s nothing about me. I’m just a nurse. A nurse is far too busy and remote from outside things to be anything else than a nurse.”

“But you started out as a mathematical swell at Newnham. Oh yes, you did! Men like my father don’t coach rotters—least of all women. What happened? You went in for the Tripos, of course?”

She shook her head. “No, my dear. The magic had gone out of my life. I tried Newnham for half the next term—facing the music—but it was too much for me. I broke down. I had to earn my livelihood. My original idea was teaching. I gave it up. Took to nursing instead. And now you know the whole story of my life.”

“I can’t understand anybody really bitten with mathematics giving it up.”

She smiled. “I don’t think I was really bitten. Not like you.”

Then she led him from herself to his own ambitions, on this as on other occasions. Gradually she established between them a relationship very precious. It was the aftermath of her own romance.

One day, business calling her to London, she changed into mufti, and hurried down the front steps to the car that

was to take her to the station. She found Godfrey waiting by the car door.

“My word! You look topping!” he cried in blatant admiration, and she blushed with pleasure like a girl.

He begged for a jaunt to the station and back. The air would do him good. She assented, and they drove off.

“You look younger than ever,” he went on. “It’s a sin to hide your beautiful hair under that wretched Sister’s concern. Now I see really the kind of woman you are——”

“What have clothes got to do with it?”

“Lots. The way you select them, the way you put them on, the way you express yourself in them. No one can express themselves in a beastly uniform. Now, all kinds of instincts, motives, feelings, went into that hat. There’s a bit of defiance in it. As who should say: ‘Now that I’m an ordinary woman again, demureness be damned!’ ”

She said: “I’m glad I meet with your lordship’s approval,” and she felt absurdly happy for the rest of the day. In her heart she thanked God that he regarded her not merely as a kind old thing to whom, as a link between himself and his father, he was benevolently disposed. Out of sight, she would then be out of his mind. But she held her own as a woman; unconsciously had held it all the time. Now the little accident of the meeting in mufti secured her triumph. When he left the home he would not drift away from her.

He had said on the platform, waiting for her train:

“As soon as we can fix it up, I’ll get hold of Dorothy, and you and I and she’ll have a little beano at the Carlton. I do so want her to meet you.”

The wish, she reflected afterwards, signified much: Dorothy to meet her, not she to meet Dorothy. The kind old thing, as a matter of boyish courtesy, would be asked to meet Dorothy. But Dorothy was to meet somebody in whom he took a certain pride.

She remembered a story told her by a friend who had gone to see her boy at a famous public school on the occasion of the Great Cricket Match. At the expansive moment of parting he said: “Mother, I suppose you know that the men feel it awfully awkward being seen with their people, but as you were out and away the most beautiful woman in the crowd, I went about not caring a hang.”

She would have to get herself up very smart for Dorothy. In the train coming back she fell a-dreaming. If John Baltazar and she had stuck it out in all honour for a few years, Death, which was in God’s hands and not theirs, would have solved all difficulties. They would have been married. The five-year-old child would have called her “mother.” She would be “mother” still to this gallant lad whose youth and charm had suddenly swept through the barren chambers of her heart. And in the night she asked again the question which in the agonized moments of past years she had cried to the darkness: “Why?”

Why had he left her? If he had been strong enough to keep love within the bounds of perfect friendship, she, the unawakened girl, living in passionate commune with intellectual and spiritual ideals, would have found for some years, at least, all her cravings satisfied in such a tender and innocent intercourse. And if he had claimed her body and her soul, God knows they were his for the taking.

So why? Why the breaking of so many lives? His own, so vivid, most of all.

In the quivering splendour of her one girlish month of love, a distracted Semele, she had scarcely seen her Jovian lover, as he was in human form. She pictured him, Heaven knows how romantically. But always, in her picturing, she took for granted the canon of chiaroscuro, of light and shade. In judging him afterwards, she had no conception of a being to whom compromise was damnation. A phrase—an instinctive cutter of Gordian knots—might have brought illumination; but there was none to utter it.

She was amazed, dumbfounded, conscience-stricken, all but soul-destroyed, when the astounding fact of John Baltazar's disappearance became known. The familiar houses and trees and hedges on the Newnham Road pointed to her as accusing witnesses. Yet she kept her own counsel, and, keeping it, suffered to breaking-point. Many months passed before she could look life again squarely in the face—and then it was the new life that had lasted for so many years. And still, with all her experience of human weakness and human fortitude, she lay awake asking herself the insoluble question.

So little occasion had been given for scandal, that her name was associated in no man or woman's mind with the extraordinary event. Clue to John Baltazar's disappearance, save the notorious shrewishness of his wife, there was none. Common Rooms, heavy with the secular atmosphere of

casuistic argument, speculated in vain. A man of genius, destined to bring the University once more into world-wide fame—watched, therefore, by the University with sedulous care and affection; a man with the prizes of the earth (from the academic point of view) dangling within his grasp, does not, they contended, forsake all and go out into the darkness because his wife happens to be a scold. Another woman? To Common Rooms the idea was preposterous. Besides, if there had been one, the married members would have picked up in their homes the gossip of one of the most nervous gossip centres in the United Kingdom. Mad, perhaps? But Mrs. Baltazar proclaimed loudly the sagacious method by which he realized his private fortune, before setting out for the Unknown. And Common Rooms, like Marcelle, asked the same perplexing question: Why?

The next day, in the grounds of Churton Towers, the young man, returning to his father's fascinating mystery, propounded the dilemma that had kept her from sleep the night before, and he, in his turn, asked: "Why?"

"The only solution of it is," said he, "that he burned the house down in order to roast the pig."

She flashed a glance at him. "You seem to know him better than I."

At that moment, John Baltazar, about whom there was all this coil, leaning over the gate of a derelict and remote moorland farmstead, perhaps asked himself the same question; for in moments of intellectual and physical