F. MARION CRAWFORD

THE THREE FATES

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.

Table of Contents

Jonah Wood was bitterly disappointed in his son. During five and twenty years he had looked in vain for the development of those qualities in George, which alone, in his opinion, could insure success. But though George could talk intelligently about the great movements of business in New York, it was clear by this time that he did not possess what his father called business instincts. The old man could have forgiven him his defective appreciation in the matter of dollars and cents, however, if he had shown the slightest inclination to adopt one of the regular professions; in other words, if George had ceased to waste his time in the attempt to earn money with his pen, and had submitted to becoming a scribe in a lawyer’s office, old Wood would have been satisfied. The boy’s progress might have been slow, but it would have been sure.

It was strange to see how this elderly man, who had been ruined by the exercise of his own business faculties, still pinned his faith upon his own views and theories of finance, and regarded it as a real misfortune to be the father of a son who thought differently from himself. It would have satisfied the height of his ambition to see George installed as a clerk on a nominal salary in one of the great banking houses. Possibly, at an earlier period, and before George had finally refused to enter a career of business, there may have been in the bottom of the old man’s heart a hope that his son might some day become a financial power, and wreak vengeance for his own and his father’s losses upon Thomas

Craik or his heirs after him; but if this wish existed Jonah Wood had honestly tried to put it out of the way. He was of a religious disposition, and his moral rectitude was above all doubt. He did not forgive his enemies, but he sincerely meant to do so, and did his best not to entertain any hope of revenge.

The story of his wrongs was a simple one. He had formerly been a very successful man. Of a good New England family, he had come to New York when very young, possessed of a small capital, full of integrity, industry, and determination. At the age of forty he was at the head of a banking firm which had for a time enjoyed a reputation of some importance. Then he had married a young lady of good birth and possessing a little fortune, to whom he had been attached for years and who had waited for him with touching fidelity. Twelve months later, she had died in giving birth to George. Possibly the terrible shock weakened Jonah Wood's nerves and disturbed the balance of his faculties. At all events it was at this time that he began to enter into speculation. At first he was very successful, and his success threw him into closer intimacy with Thomas Craik, a cousin of his dead wife's. For a time everything prospered with the bank, while Wood acquired the habit of following Craik's advice. On an ill-fated day, however, the latter persuaded him to invest largely in a certain railway not yet begun, but which was completed in a marvellously short space of time. In the course of a year or two it was evident that the road, which Craik insisted on running upon the most ruinous principles, must soon become bankrupt. It had of course been built to compete with an old established line; the usual

war of rates set in, the old road suffered severely, and the young one was ruined. This was precisely what Craik had anticipated. So soon as the bankruptcy was declared and the liquidation terminated, he bought up every bond and share upon which he could lay his hands. Wood was ruined, together with a number of other heavy investors. The road, however, having ceased to pay interest on its debts continued to run at rates disastrous to its more honest competitor, and before long the latter was obliged in self-defence to buy up its rival. When that extremity was reached Thomas Craik was in possession of enough bonds and stock to give him a controlling interest, and he sold the ruined railway at his own price, realising a large fortune by the transaction. Wood was not only financially broken; his reputation, too, had suffered in the catastrophe. At first, people looked askance at him, believing that he had got a share of the profits, and that he was only pretending poverty until the scandal should blow over, though he had in reality sacrificed almost everything he possessed in the honourable liquidation of the bank's affairs, and found himself, at the age of fifty-seven, in possession only of the small fortune that had been his wife's, and of the small house which had escaped the general ruin, and in which he now lived. Thomas Craik had robbed him, as he had robbed many others, and Jonah Wood knew it, though there was no possibility of ever recovering a penny of his losses. His nerve was gone, and by the time people had discovered that he was the most honest of men, he was more than half forgotten by those he had known best. He had neither the energy nor the courage to begin life again, and although he

had cleared his reputation of all blame, he knew that he had made the great mistake, and that no one would ever again trust to his judgment. It seemed easiest to live in the little house, to get what could be got out of life for himself and his son on an income of scarcely two thousand dollars, and to shut himself out from his former acquaintance.

And yet, though his own career had ended in such lamentable failure, he would gladly have seen George begin where he had begun. George would have succeeded in doing all those things which he himself had left undone, and he might have lived to see established on a firm basis the great fortune which for a few brief years had been his in a floating state. But George could not be brought to understand this point of view. His youthful recollections were connected with monetary disaster, and his first boyish antipathies had been conceived against everything that bore the name of business. What he felt for the career of the money-maker was more than antipathy; it amounted to a positive horror which he could not overcome. From time to time his father returned to the old story of his wrongs and misfortunes, going over the tale as he sat with George through the long winter evenings, and entering into every detail of the transaction which had ruined him. In justice to the young man it must be admitted that he was patient on those occasions, and listened with outward calm to the long technical explanations, the interminable concatenation of figures and the jarring cadence of phrases that all ended with the word dollars. But the talk was as painful to him as a violin played out of tune is to a musician, and it reacted upon his nerves and produced physical pain of an acute

kind. He could set his features in an expression of respectful attention, but he could not help twisting his long smooth fingers together under the edge of the table, where his father could not see them. The very name of money disgusted him, and when the great failure had been talked of in the evening it haunted his dreams throughout the night and destroyed his rest, so that he awoke with a sense of nervousness and distress from which he could not escape until late in the following day.

Jonah Wood saw more of this peculiarity than his son suspected, though he failed to understand it. With him, nervousness took a different form, manifesting itself in an abnormal anxiety concerning George's welfare, combined with an unfortunate disposition to find fault. Of late, indeed, he had not been able to accuse the young man of idleness, since he was evidently working to the utmost of his strength, though his occupations brought him but little return. It seemed a pity to Jonah Wood that so much good time and so much young energy should be wasted over pen, ink, paper, and books which left no record of a daily substantial gain. He, too, slept little, though his iron-grey face betrayed nothing of what passed in his mind.

He loved his son in his own untrusting way. It was his affection, combined with his inability to believe much good of what he loved, that undermined and embittered the few pleasures still left to him. He had never seen any hope except in money, and since George hated the very mention of lucre there could be no hope for him either. A good man, a scrupulously honest man according to his lights, he could only see goodness from one point of view and virtue

represented in one dress. Goodness was obedience to parental authority, and virtue the imitation of parental ideas. George believed that obedience should play no part in determining what he should do with his talent, and that imitation, though it be the sincerest flattery, may lay the foundation for the most hopeless of all failures, the failure to do that for which a man is best adapted. George had not deliberately chosen a literary career because he felt himself fitted for it. He was in reality far too modest to look forward from the first to the ultimate satisfaction of his ambitions. His lonely life had driven him to writing as a means of expressing himself without incurring his father's criticism and contradiction. Not understanding in the least the nature of imagination, he believed himself lacking in this respect, but he had at once found an immense satisfaction in writing down his opinions concerning certain new books that had fallen into his hands. Then, being emboldened by that belief in his own judgment which young men acquire very easily when they are not brought into daily contact with their intellectual equals, he had ventured to offer the latest of his attempts to one editor and then to another and another. At last he had found one who chanced to be in a human humour and who glanced at one of the papers.

"It is not worthless," said the autocrat, "but it is quite useless. Everybody has done with the book months ago. Do you want to earn a little money by reviewing?"

George expressed his readiness to do so with alacrity. The editor scribbled half a dozen words on a slip of paper from a block and handed it to George, telling him where to take it. As a first result the young man carried away a

couple of volumes of new-born trash upon which to try his hand. A quarter of what he wrote was published in the literary column of the newspaper. He had yet to learn the cynical practice of counting words, upon which so much depends in dealing with the daily press, but the idea of actually earning something, no matter how little, overcame his first feeling of disgust at the nature of the work. In time he acquired the necessary tricks and did very well. By sheer determination he devoted all his best hours of the day to the drudgery of second class criticism, and only allowed himself to write what was agreeable to his own brain when the day's work was done.

The idea of producing a book did not suggest itself to him. In his own opinion he had none of the necessary gifts for original writing, while he fancied that he possessed those of the critic in a rather unusual degree. His highest ambition was to turn out a volume of essays on other people's doings and writings, and he was constantly labouring in his leisure moments at long papers treating of celebrated works, in what he believed to be a spirit of profound analysis. As yet no one had bestowed the slightest attention upon his efforts; no serious article of his had found its way into the press, though a goodly number of his carefully copied manuscripts had issued from the offices of various periodicals in the form of waste paper. Strange to say, he was not discouraged by these failures. The satisfaction, so far as he had known any, had consisted in the writing down of his views; and though he wished it were possible to turn his ink-stained pages into money, his natural detestation of all business transactions whatsoever made him extremely

philosophical in repeated failure. Even in regard to his daily drudgery, which was regularly paid, the least pleasant moment was the one when he had to begin his round from one newspaper cashier to another to receive the little cheques which made him independent of his father so far as his only luxuries of new books and tobacco were concerned. Pride, indeed, was now at the bottom of his resolution to continue in the uninteresting course that had been opened before him. Having once succeeded in buying for himself what he wanted or needed beyond his daily bread he would have been ashamed to ever go again for pocket-money to his father.

The nature of this occupation, which he would not relinquish, was beginning to produce its natural effect upon his character. He felt that he was better than his work, and the inevitable result ensued. He felt that he was hampered and tied, and that every hour spent in such labour was a page stolen from the book of his reputation; that he was giving for a pitiful wage the precious time in which something important might have been accomplished, and that his life would turn out a failure if it continued to run on much longer in the same groove. And yet he assumed that it would be absolutely impossible for him to abandon his drudgery in order to devote himself solely to the series of essays on which he had pinned his hopes of success. His serious work, as he called it, made little progress when interrupted at every step by the necessity for writing twaddle about trash.

It may be objected that George Wood should not have written twaddle, but should have employed his best

energies in the improvement of second class literature by systematically telling the truth about it. Unfortunately the answer to such a stricture is not far to seek. If he had written what he thought, the newspapers would have ceased to employ him; not that it is altogether impossible to write honestly about the great rivers of minor books which flow east and west and north and south from the publishers' gardens, but because the critic who has the age, experience, and talent to bestow faint praise without inflicting damnation commands a high price and cannot be wasted on little authors and their little publications. The beginner often knows that he is writing twaddle and regrets it, and he very likely knows how to write in strains of enthusiastic eulogium or of viciously cruel abuse; but though he have all these things, he has not yet acquired the unaffected charity which covers a multitude of sins, and which is the result of an ancient and wise good feeling entertained between editors, publishers and critics. He cannot really feel mildly well disposed towards a book he despises, and his only chance of expressing gentle sentiments not his own, lies in the plentiful use of unmitigated twaddle. If he remains a critic, he is either lifted out of the sphere of the daily saleable trash to that of serious first class literature, or else he imbibes through the pores of his soul such proportional parts of the editor's and the publisher's wishes as shall combine in his own character and produce the qualities which they both desire to find there and to see expressed in his paragraphs.

It could not be said that George Wood was discontented with what he found to do, so much as with being constantly

hindered from doing something better. And that better thing which he would have done, and believed that he could have done, was in reality far from having reached the stage of being clearly defined. He had never felt any strong liking for fiction, and his mind had been nourished upon unusually solid intellectual food, while the outward circumstances of his life had necessarily left much to his imagination, which to most young men of five and twenty is already matter of experience. As a boy he had been too much with older people, and had therefore thought too much to be boyish. Possibly, too, he had seen more than was good for him, for his father had left him but a short time at school in the days of their prosperity, and, being unable to leave New York for any length of time, had more than once sent him abroad with an elderly tutor from whom the lad had acquired all sorts of ideas that were too big for him. He had been wrongly supposed to be of a delicate constitution, too, and had been indulged in all manner of intellectual whims and fancies, whereby he had gained a smattering of many sciences and literatures at an age when he ought to have been following a regular course of instruction. Then, before he was thought old enough to enter a university, the crash had come.

Jonah Wood was far too conscientious a man not to sacrifice whatever he could for the completion of his son’s education. For several years he deprived himself of every luxury, in order that George might have the assistance he so greatly needed while making his studies at Columbia College in his native city. Then only did the father realise how he had erred in allowing the boy to receive the

desultory and aimless teaching that had seemed so generous in the days of wealth. He knew more or less well a variety of subjects of which his companions were wholly ignorant, but he was utterly unversed in much of their knowledge. And this was not all, for George had acquired from his former tutor a misguided contempt for the accepted manner of dealing with certain branches of learning, without possessing that grasp of the matters in hand which alone justifies a man in thinking differently from the great mass of his fellows. It is not well to ridicule the American method of doing things until one is master of some other.

It was from the time when George entered college that he began to be a constant source of disappointment to his father. The elderly man had received a good, old-fashioned, thoroughly prejudiced education, and though he remembered little Latin and less Greek, he had not forgotten the way in which he had been made to learn both. George's way of talking about his studies disturbed his father's sense of intellectual propriety, which was great, without exciting his curiosity, which was infinitesimally small. With him also prevailed the paternal view which holds that young men must necessarily distinguish themselves above their companions if they really possess any exceptional talent, and his peace of mind was further endangered by his sense of responsibility for George's beginnings. If he had believed that George was stupid, he would have resigned himself to that dispensation of Providence. But he thought otherwise. The boy was not an ordinary boy, and if he failed to prove it by taking prizes in

competition, he must be lazy or his preparation must have been defective. No other alternative was to be found, and the fault therefore lay either with himself or with his father.

George never obtained a prize, and barely passed his examinations at all. Jonah Wood made a point of seeing all his examiners as well as the instructors who had known him during his college life. Three-quarters of the number asserted that the young fellow was undeniably clever, and added, expressing themselves with professorial politeness, that his previous studies seemed to have taken a direction other than that of the college “curriculum,” as they called it. The professor of Greek presumed that George might have distinguished himself in Latin, the professor of Latin surmised that Greek might have been his strong point; both believed that he had talent for mathematics, while the mathematician remarked that he seemed to have a very good understanding, but that it would be turned to better account in the pursuit of classical studies. Jonah Wood returned to his home very much disturbed in mind, and from that day his anxiety steadily increased. As it became more clear that his son would never accept a business career, but would probably waste his opportunities in literary dabbling, the good man’s alarm became extreme. He did not see that George’s one true talent lay in his ready power of assimilating unfamiliar knowledge by a process of intuition that escapes methodical learners, any more than he understood that the boy’s one solid acquirement was the power of using his own language. He was not to be too much blamed, perhaps, for the young man himself was only dimly conscious of his yet undeveloped power. What made

him write was neither the pride of syntax nor the certainty of being right in his observations; he was driven to paper to escape from the torment of the desire to express something, he knew not what, which he could express in no other way. He found no congenial conversation at home and little abroad, and yet he felt that he had something to say and must say it.

It should not be supposed that either Jonah Wood's misfortunes or his poverty, which was after all comparative, though hard to bear, prevented George from mixing in the world with which he was connected by his mother's birth, and to some extent by his father's former position. The old gentleman, indeed, was too proud to renew his acquaintance with people who had thought him dishonourable until he had proved himself spotless; but the very demonstration of his uprightness had been so convincing and clear that it constituted a patent of honour for his son. Many persons who had blamed themselves for their hasty judgment would have been glad to make amends by their cordial reception of the man they had so cruelly mistaken. George, however, was quite as proud as his father, and much more sensitive. He remembered well enough the hard-hearted, boyish stare he had seen in the eyes of some of his companions when he was but just seventeen years old, and later, at college, when his father's self-sacrifice was fully known, and his old associates had held out their hands to his in the hope of making everything right again, George had met them with stony eyes and scornful civility. It was not easy to forgive, and with all his excellent qualities and noble honesty of purpose, Jonah

Wood was not altogether displeased to know that his son held his head high and drew back from the renewal of fair weather friendships. Almost against his will he encouraged him in his conduct, while doing his best to appear at least indifferent.

George needed but little encouragement to remain in social obscurity, though he was conscious of a rather contemptible hope that he might one day play a part in society, surrounded by all the advantages of wealth and general respect which belong especially to those few who possess both, by inheritance rather than as a result of their own labours. He was not quite free from that subtle aristocratic taint which has touched so many members of American society. Like the wind, no man can tell whence it comes nor whither it goes; but unlike the ill wind in the proverb it blows no good to any one. It is not the breath of that republican inequality which is caused by two men extracting a different degree of advantage from the same circumstances; it is not the inevitable inequality produced by the inevitable struggle for existence, wealth and power; but it is the fictitious inequality caused by the pretence that the accident of a man’s birth should of itself constitute for him a claim to have special opportunities made for him, adapted to his use and protected by law for his particular benefit. It is a fallacy which is in the air, and which threatens to produce evil consequences wherever it becomes localised.

Perhaps, at some future time yet far distant, a man will arise who shall fathom and explain the great problems presented by human vanity. No more interesting study could

be found wherewith to occupy the greatest mind, and assuredly none in the pursuit of which a man would be so constantly confronted by new and varied matter for research. One main fact at least we know. Vanity is the boundless, circumambient and all-penetrating ether in which all man’s thoughts and actions have being and receive manifestation. All moral and intellectual life is either full of it and in sympathy with it, breathing it as our bodies breathe the air, or is out of balance with it in the matter of quantity and is continually struggling to restore its own lost equilibrium. It is as impossible to conceive of anything being done in the world without also conceiving the element of vanity as the medium for the action, as it is to imagine motion without space, or time without motion. To say that any man who succeeds in the race for superiority of any sort is without vanity, is downright nonsense; to assert that any man can reach success without it, would be to state more than any one has yet been able to prove. Let us accept the fact that we are all vain, whether we be saints or sinners, men of action or men of thought, men who leave our sign manual upon the page of our little day or men who trudge through the furrows of a nameless life ploughing and sowing that others may reap and eat and be merry. After all, does not our conception of heaven suggest to us a life from which all vanity is absent, and does not our idea of hell show us an existence in which vanity reigns supreme and hopeless, without prospect of satisfaction? Let us at least strive that our vanity may neither do injury to our fellow-men, nor recoil and become ridiculous in ourselves.

Enough has been said to define and explain the character and life of the young man whose history this book is to relate. He himself was far from being conscious of all his virtues, faults, and capabilities. He neither knew his own energy nor was aware of the hidden enthusiasm which was only just beginning to make itself felt as a vague, uneasy longing for something that should surpass ordinary things. He did not know that he possessed singular talents as well as unusual defects. He had not even begun to look upon life as a problem offered him for solution, and upon his own heart as an object for his own study. He scarcely felt that he had a heart at all, nor knew where to look for it in others. His life was not happy, and yet he had not tasted the bitter sources of real unhappiness. He was oppressed by his surroundings, but he could not have told what he would have done with the most untrammelled liberty. He despised money, he worked for a pittance, and yet he secretly longed for all that money could buy. He was profoundly attached to his father, and yet he found the good man’s company intolerable. He shrank from a society in which he might have been a welcome guest, and yet he dreamed of playing a great part in it some day. He believed himself cynical when he was in reality quixotic, his idols of gold were hidden behind images of clay, and he really cared little for those things which he had schooled himself to admire the most. He fancied himself a critic when he was foredestined by his nature and his circumstances to become an object of criticism to others. He forced his mind to do what it found least congenial, not acting in obedience to any principle or idea of duty, but because he was sure that he knew his own

abilities, and that no other path lay open to success. He was in the darkest part of the transition which precedes development, for he was in that period during which a man makes himself imagine that he has laid hold on the thread of the future, while something he will not heed warns him that the chaos is wilder than ever before. In the dark hour before manhood’s morning he was journeying resolutely away from the coming dawn.

CHAPTER II.

Table of Contents

“It is very sad,” observed Mrs. Sherrington Trimm, thoughtfully. “Their mother died in London last autumn, and now they are quite alone—nobody with them but an aunt, or something like that—poor girls! I am so glad they are rich, at least. You ought to know them.”

“Ought I?” asked the visitor who was drinking his tea on the other side of the fireplace. “You know I do not go into society.”

“The girls go nowhere, either. They are still in mourning. You ought to know them. Who knows, you might marry one or the other.”

“I will never marry a fortune.”

“Do not be silly, George!”

The relationship between the two speakers was not very close. George Winton Wood’s mother had been a second cousin of Mrs. Sherrington Trimm’s, and the two ladies had not been on very friendly terms with each other. Moreover, Mrs. Trimm had nothing to do with old Jonah Wood, the father of the young man with whom she was now speaking, and Jonah Wood refused to have anything to do with her. Nevertheless she called his son by his first name, and the latter usually addressed her as “Cousin Totty.” An examination of Mrs. Sherrington Trimm’s baptismal certificate would have revealed the fact that she had been christened Charlotte, but parental fondness had made itself felt with its usual severity in such cases, and before she was a year old she had been labelled with the comic diminutive

which had stuck to her ever since, through five and twenty years of maidenhood, and twenty years more of married life. On her visiting cards, and in her formal invitations she appeared as Mrs. Sherrington Trimm; but the numerous members of New York society who were related to her by blood or marriage, called her “Totty” to her face, while those who claimed no connection called her “Totty” behind her back; and though she may live beyond three score years and ten, and though her strength come to sorrow and weakness, she will be “Totty” still, to the verge of the grave, and beyond, even after she is comfortably laid away in the family vault at Greenwood.

After all, the name was not inappropriate, so far at least, as Mrs. Trimm’s personal appearance was concerned; for she was very smooth, and round, and judiciously plump, short, fair, and neatly made, with pretty little hands and feet; active and not ungraceful, sleek but not sleepy; having small, sharp blue eyes, a very obliging and permanent smile, a diminutive pointed nose, salmon-coloured lips, and perfect teeth. Her good points did not, indeed, conceal her age altogether, but they obviated all necessity for an apology to the world for the crime of growing old; and those features which were less satisfactory to herself were far from being offensive to others.

She bore in her whole being and presence the stamp of a comfortable life. There is nothing more disturbing to society than the forced companionship of a person who either is, or looks, uncomfortable, in body, mind, or fortune, and many people owe their popularity almost solely to a happy faculty of seeming always at their ease. It is certain that neither

birth, wealth, nor talent will of themselves make man or woman popular, not even when all three are united in the possession of one individual. But on the other hand they are not drawbacks to social success, provided they are merely means to the attainment of that unobtrusively careless good humour which the world loves. Mrs. Sherrington Trimm knew this. If not talented, she possessed at all events a pedigree and a fortune; and as for talent, she looked upon culture as an hereditary disease peculiar to Bostonians, and though not contagious, yet full of danger, inasmuch as its presence in a well-organised society must necessarily be productive of discomfort. All the charm of general conversation must be gone, she thought, when a person appeared who was both able and anxious to set everybody right. She even went so far as to say that if everybody were poor, it would be very disagreeable to be rich. She never wished to do what others could not do; she only aimed at being among the first to do what everybody would do by and by, as a matter of course.

Mrs. Trimm’s cousin George did not understand this point of view as yet, though he was beginning to suspect that “Totty and her friends”—as he generally designated society—must act upon some such principle. He was only five and twenty years of age, and could hardly be expected to be in the secrets of a life he had hitherto seen as an outsider; but he differed from Totty and her friends in being exceedingly clever, exceedingly unhappy, and exceedingly full of aspirations, ambitions, fancies, ideas, and thoughts; in being poor instead of rich, and, lastly, in being the son of a man who had failed in the pursuit of wealth, and who could not prove even the most distant relationship to any one of

the gentlemen who had signed the Declaration of Independence, fought in the Revolution, or helped to frame the Constitution of the United States. George, indeed, possessed these ancestral advantages through his mother, and in a more serviceable form through his relationship to Totty; but she, on her part, felt that the burden of his cleverness might be too heavy for her to bear, should she attempt to launch him upon her world. Her sight was keen enough, and she saw at a glance the fatal difference between George and other people. He had a habit of asking serious questions, and of saying serious things, which would be intolerable at a dinner-party. He was already too strong to be put down, he was not yet important enough to be shown off. Totty's husband, who was an eminent lawyer, occasionally asked George to dine with him at his club, and usually said when he came home that he could not understand the boy; but, being of an inquiring disposition, Mr. Trimm was impelled to repeat the hospitality at intervals that gradually became more regular. At first he had feared that the dark, earnest face of the young man, and his grave demeanour, concealed the soul of a promising prig, a social article which Sherrington Trimm despised and loathed. He soon discovered, however, that these apprehensions were groundless. From time to time his companion gave utterance to some startling opinion or freezing bit of cynicism which he had evidently been revolving in his thoughts for a long time, and which forced Mr. Trimm's gymnastic intelligence into thinking more seriously than usual. Doubtless George's remarks were often paradoxical and youthfully wild, but his hearer liked them none the less

for that. Keen and successful in his own profession he scented afar the capacity for success in other callings. Accustomed by the habits and pursuits of his own exciting life to judge men and things quickly, he recognised in George another mode of the force to which he himself owed his reputation. To lay down the law and determine the precise manner in which that force should be used, was another matter, and one in which Sherrington Trimm did not propose to meddle. More than once, indeed, he asked George what he meant to do in the world, and George answered, with a rather inappropriate look of determination that he believed himself good for nothing, and that when there was no more bread and butter at home he should doubtless find his own level by going up long ladders with a hod of bricks on his shoulder. Mr. Trimm's jovial face usually expressed his disbelief in such theories by a bland smile as he poured out another glass of wine for his young guest. He felt sure that George would do something, and George, who got little sympathy in his life, understood his encouraging certainty, and was grateful.

Mrs. Trimm, however, shared her cousin's asserted convictions about himself so far as to believe that unless something was done for him, he might actually be driven to manual labour for support. She assuredly had no faith in general cleverness as a means of subsistence for young men without fortune, and yet she felt that she ought to do something for George Wood. There was a good reason for this beneficent instinct. Her only brother was chiefly responsible for the ruin that had overtaken Jonah Wood, when George was still a boy, and she herself had been one

of the winners in the game, or at least had been a sharer with her brother in the winnings. It is true that the facts of the case had never been generally known, and that George's father had been made to suffer unjustly in his reputation after being plundered of his wealth; but Mrs. Trimm was not without a conscience, any more than the majority of her friends. If she loved money and wanted more of it, this was because she wished to be like other people, and not because she was vulgarly avaricious. She was willing to keep what she had, though a part of it should have been George's and was ill-gotten. She wished her brother, Thomas Craik, to keep all he possessed until he should die, and then she wished him to leave it to her, Charlotte Sherrington Trimm. But she also desired that George should have compensation for what his father had lost, and the easiest and least expensive way of providing him with the money he had not, was to help him to a rich marriage. It was not, indeed, fitting that he should marry her only daughter, Mamie, though the girl was nineteen years old and showed a disquieting tendency to like George. Such a marriage would result only in a transfer of wealth without addition or multiplication, which was not the form of magnanimity most agreeable to cousin Totty's principles. There were other rich girls in the market; one of them might be interested in the tall young man with the dark face and the quiet manner, and might bestow herself upon him, and endow him with all her worldly goods. Totty had now been lucky enough to find two such young ladies together, orphans both, and both of age, having full control of the large and equally divided patrimony they had lately

inherited. Better still, they were reported to be highly gifted and fond of clever people, and she herself knew that they were both pretty. She had resolved that George should know them without delay, and had sent for him as a preliminary step towards bringing about the acquaintance. George met her at once with the plain statement that he would never marry money, as the phrase goes, but she treated his declaration of independence with appropriate levity.

“Do not be silly, George!” she exclaimed with a little laugh.

“I am not,” George answered, in a tone of conviction.

“Oh, I know you are clever enough,” retorted his cousin. “But that is quite a different thing. Besides, I was not thinking seriously of your marrying.”

“I guessed as much, from the fact of your mentioning it,” observed the young man quietly.

Mrs. Trimm stared at him for a moment, and then laughed again.

“Am I never thinking seriously of what I am saying?”

“Tell me about these girls,” said George, avoiding an answer. “If they are rich and unmarried, they must be old and hideous——”

“They are neither.”

“Mere children then——”

“Yes—they are younger than you.”

“Poor little things! I see—you want me to play with them, and teach them games and things of that sort. What is the salary? I am open to an engagement in any respectable calling. Or perhaps you would prefer Mrs. Macwhirter, my old nurse. It is true that she is blind of one eye and limps a

little, but she would make a reduction in consideration of her infirmities, if money is an object."

"Try and be serious; I want you to know them."

"Do I look like a man who wastes time in laughing?" inquired George, whose imperturbable gravity was one of his chief characteristics.

"No—you have other resources at your command for getting at the same result."

"Thanks. You are always flattering. When am I to begin amusing your little friends?"

"To-day, if you like. We can go to them at once."

George Wood glanced down almost unconsciously at the clothes he wore, with the habit of a man who is very poor and is not always sure of being presentable at a moment's notice. His preoccupation did not escape cousin Totty, whose keen instinct penetrated his thoughts and found there an additional incentive to the execution of her beneficent intentions. It was a shame, she thought, that any relation of hers should need to think of such miserable details as the possession of a decent coat and whole shoes. At the present moment, indeed, George was arrayed with all appropriate correctness, but Totty remembered to have caught sight of him sometimes when he was evidently not expecting to meet any acquaintance, and she had noticed on those occasions that his dress was very shabby indeed. It was many years since she had seen his father, and she wondered whether he, too, went about in old clothes, sure of not meeting anybody he knew. The thought was not altogether pleasant, and she put it from her. It was a part of her method of life not to think disagreeable thoughts, and

though her plan to bring about a rich marriage for her cousin was but a scheme for quieting her conscience, she determined to believe that she was putting herself to great inconvenience out of spontaneous generosity, for which George would owe her a debt of lifelong gratitude.

George, having satisfied himself that his appearance would pass muster, and realising that Totty must have noticed his self-inspection, immediately asked her opinion.

“Will I do?” he asked with an odd shade of shyness, and glancing again at the sleeve of his coat, as though to explain what he meant, well knowing that all explanation was unnecessary.

Totty, who had thoroughly inspected him before proposing that they should go out together, now pretended to look him over with a critical eye.

“Of course—perfectly,” she said, after three or four seconds. “Wait for me a moment, and I will get ready,” she added, as she rose and left the room.

When George was alone, he leaned back in his comfortable chair and looked at the familiar objects about him with a weary expression which he had not worn while his cousin had been present. He could not tell exactly why he came to see cousin Totty, and he generally went home after his visits to her with a vague sense of disappointment. In the first place, he always felt that there was a sort of disloyalty in coming at all. He knew the details of his father’s past life, and was aware that old Tom Craik had been the cause of his ruin, and he guessed that Totty had profited by the same catastrophe, since he had always heard that her brother managed her property. He even