ST. JOHN HANKIN RECLAIMED

MINT THEATER COMPANY Presents Performance Texts of

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL & **THE CHARITY THAT BEGAN AT HOME**

ST. JOHN HANKIN RECLAIMED

Edited by

JONATHAN BANK

Introduction by Alan Andrews

GRANVILLE PRESS

The text for *The Return of the Prodigal* is based on the version performed at the Mint Theater Company and reflects cuts made by the director, Jonathan Bank. Individuals interested in using this text for performances, or in receiving an electronic version of the uncut text, should contact:

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INTRODUCTION

Alan Andrews

One summer morning in 1909, a thirty-year-old man, his health poor, spoke to the chambermaid at his hotel in the mid-Wales spa of Llandrindod Wells. He thanked Margaret Williams for her kindness and tipped her half-a-crown (perhaps fifty to sixty cents at the prevailing exchange rate). Just after noon, she later recalled, she saw him leave the hotel, dressed in a blue suit and carrying a small parcel. He went to the station and booked a ticket for a 12:30 train. He then headed in the direction of the River Ithon until he came to a spot known as Lover's Leap, where there was a quiet pool, some twelve feet deep. He strapped the parcel, which contained two seven-pound dumbbells, round his neck and jumped into the pool. Three days later, alarmed by this disappearance, Inspector Jones of the Radnorshire Constabulary, assisted by two constables, dragged the river and found his body. He was St. John Emile Clavering Hankin (christened Edward Charles St. John Hankin).

Hankin's death occasioned considerable shock. Bernard Shaw published a press statement, which he headed "A Public Calamity." "He was," wrote Shaw, " a most gifted writer of high comedy of the kind that is a stirring and important criticism of life." Arnold Bennett described him as "a curious, honest, and original dramatist, with a considerable equipment of wit and of skill," and asserted that "his most precious quality—particularly precious in England—was his calm intellectual curiosity, his perfect absence of fear at the logical consequence of an argument." Max Beerbohm, Shaw's successor as dramatic critic of the *Saturday Review*, called him "the sanest and most level-headed of men" and "an always amiable and witty companion."

In 1946, Shaw told readers of *Drama* that Hankin was "for the moment now forgotten, or neglected, but a master of serious comedy." Amends for this neglect are now being made with the productions of *The Charity that Began at Home* and *The Return of the Prodigal* at the

Mint Theater, and *Prodigal* and *The Cassilis Engagement* at the Shaw Festival in Canada. That this belated recognition is coming in North America rather than in Britain would have appealed to Hankin; he once wryly observed that he was more popular in Australia and New Zealand than in this native land.

Hankin originally published these plays in a collection he entitled *Three Plays with Happy Endings* (1907). The title was ironic. In "A Note on Happy Endings" with which he prefaced them, here reprinted for the first time since the 1912 edition of his collected plays, Hankin reported that people told him that his plays "ended unhappily," critics "that they do not 'end' at all." It is a mark of Hankin's modernity that such concerns are not likely to trouble an audience now. We can admire his substitution of a measure of realism and honesty about his subjects for a conventional dramatic morality which saw marriage as the solution to every problem life presents and success as the harbinger of happiness, and prescribed endings that confirmed this. Seeking to penetrate social hypocrisy, Hankin was interested in what the world considered failure, and took a hard look at the meaning of marriage. The title of one of his shorter plays, *The Burglar Who Failed*, indicates the kind of subject that interested him.

Before taking up playwriting, Hankin had spent some years as a journalist. After a year in India with the *Indian Daily News*, a bad attack of malaria sent him back to England. He wrote dramatic criticism, notably for the *Times*, and satiric verse and dramatic prose for *Punch*. His first book, *Mr. Punch's Dramatic Sequels*, already questioned the satisfactoriness of plays' endings, demonstrating, as he said, that famous plays were "capable of continuation." As he put it poetically:

> Plays end too soon. They never show
> The whole of what I want to know.
> The curtain falls and I'm perplexed
> With doubts about what happened next.

Thus he offered sequels to *Hamlet* ("The New Wing at Elsinore"), *She Stoops to Conquer* ("Still Stooping"), Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra* ("Octavian and Cleopatra"), Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* ("The Third Mrs. Tanqueray"), and eight more.

Hankin was in the habit of giving his plays subtitles. In the case of *The Return of the Prodigal*, it was "A Comedy for Fathers." Whether or not what happens after Eustace Jackson's return bears any relationship to his own experiences on his return from India, his father, walking away from the play, could only have smiled bitterly.

Hankin was a sharp observer of contemporary life, its hypocrisies and contradictions. By what seems to have been a remarkable coincidence, a

short story by him, which like *The Charity that Began at Home* satirized misguided philanthropy, was published in a new literary journal, Ford Madox Ford's *English Review,* in June 1909, the very month of his suicide. The "Man of Impulse" of the story's title is strolling at night along the Thames Embankment when he sees someone jump into the river. "Maxwell was an impulsive man who seldom stopped before interfering if he thought some one else was being guilty of an act of folly." He leaps to the rescue, only to find that the supposed victim, far from being grateful, is furious at this frustration of his planned suicide.

There have been various attempts to explain St. John Hankin's suicide. Bernard Shaw claimed in 1944, in the postscript that he wrote for *Back to Methuselah* when it was included as the 500th volume in the World's Classics series (published by Oxford University Press): "One of the masters of comedy among my playwright colleagues drowned himself because he thought he was going his father's way like Oswald Alving." Since this followed a sentence about Ibsen's *Ghosts*, with a reference to "inevitable syphilis", it has naturally prompted the view that Hankin feared he had inherited syphilis from his father. This seems improbable. It is clear that his health was continuing to deteriorate, that his visit to the spa, where he had been for two weeks, was not providing any encouragement, as similar previous treatment had not, and that he was depressed following his mother's recent death. The weakness in his health was almost certainly a consequence of the malaria he had contracted in India fifteen years before. Indeed, some obituary tributes noted that Hankin used to attribute his weak health to the aftereffects of malaria. Furthermore, there is reasonable evidence that suicide was something he had long considered, and that he committed it in a considered and deliberate way.

His father, incidentally, was eighty-seven when he died—of "old age" and "heart failure" according to the death certificate—in 1915.

Alan Andrews is an emeritus Professor of Theatre at Dalhousie University in Canada. He has often written and lectured about the theater of Bernard Shaw and his time, notably at the Shaw Festival in Ontario, and at the Mint, and has written several essays on St. John Hankin.

A NOTE ON HAPPY ENDINGS

by St. John Hankin

Adapted from an essay that originally appeared as a preface to the 1907 volume entitled Three Plays with Happy Endings*, which included* The Return of the Prodigal*,* The Charity that Began at Home*, and* The Cassilis Engagement.

People tell me that these plays "end unhappily." Dramatic critics have even suggested that they do not "end" at all. Well-meaning members of my audiences have even taken pen and ink and written me long letters to show how they could (and should) be improved in this respect. Thus Mr. Jackson's cloth mills should have caught fire, Eustace has performed miracles of heroism in extinguishing them, and Lady Faringford given him the hand of her daughter as a reward. While Verreker, melted by Margery's distress at losing him—"I cannot give you up, Hugh" she was to say passionately—should have gone away to Australia and taken up horse-breeding, thereby "redeeming his past" and rendering himself an eligible suitor for Lady Denison's daughter in the eyes of Mrs. Eversleigh!

I am afraid I am unable to accept either of these as "happy endings." I am far too fond of the Jackson family to rejoice at their cloth mills being burnt down. And I don't believe Margery would be at all satisfactorily mated with an Australian horse-dealer. In fact I demure to the whole conception of a "happy ending" as embodied in these suggested additions to the plays. Theatrical critics and theatrical audiences seem unable to conceive of any other ending to a play save a death or a marriage. But this is a wholly superficial view. "I can survive anything except death," says one of the characters in *A Woman of No Importance*. Had he reflected for a moment he would have withdrawn the exception. Philosophically considered, death ends nothing, not even an episode, and we really survive everything. While as for marriage, so far from ending anything it is simply the beginning of a fresh set of complica-

tions. All "endings" in fact are purely arbitrary, and my play "endings" are no more arbitrary than anyone else's. There is a sense, of course, in which nothing in life ever begins. With earth's first clay they did the last man knead, and, we all of us, like Melchizedek, have neither beginnings of days nor end of life. We began ages before our individual death. We exist forever in our causes and our results. But for practical purposes we find it convenient to assume that things do begin and do end at some particular point, and we divide our lives more or less arbitrarily into a series of episodes of which we say "This one began here" and "That one ended there."

That is what I do with my plays. I select an episode in the life of one of my characters or of a group of characters, when something of importance to their future has to be decided, and I ring up my curtain. Having shown how it was decided and why it was so decided, I ring it down again. The episode is over, and with it the play. The end is "inconclusive" in the sense that it proves nothing. Why should it? It is the dramatist's business to represent life, not to argue about it. It is, however, the "ending" of that particular episode, and, as such, forms a fitting termination for a play.

And if my plays "end" at all they unquestionably "end happily," in this respect comparing extremely favourably with the average conventional comedy, which sends you out of the theatre with a tolerable certainty that half the marriages which the author has so recklessly arranged during its progress will turn out disastrous failures. My plays, on the contrary, leave their characters at the fall of the curtain with a reasonable prospect of happiness in the future. That is the most that life can do for any of us, and the most that can be asked of plays which represent life or try to do so.

Take the plays which make up the present volume. In *The Return of the Prodigal*, a young man who has failed at most things and come to the end of his resources takes the desperate step of returning uninvited to the bosom of his family who had fondly hoped they were rid of him for good. So begins the episode of the Prodigal's return. He remains with his family ten days, satisfying a natural craving for food and replenishing his wardrobe. At the end of that time he extorts an allowance from his disgusted father and returns to London to live on it for the remainder of his life. That ends the episode of the Prodigal's return, and no one can pretend that it ends it otherwise than happily for the Prodigal. No more looking about for "jobs" that never come, no more adding up accounts in a filthy Hong Kong bank or playing steward on a filthier ocean liner. That phase is closed. And it is a "happy ending" for the father too. For it relieves him of all anxiety lest his son should be reduced to cab-running or selling matches on the Embankment, or even dying discreditably of starvation some fine day, as young gentlemen of Eustace's temperament have done before now. That relief is cheaply purchased at two hundred and fifty pounds a year paid quarterly. In-

deed some people think too cheaply. The only serious objection I have ever heard to the "happiness" of the ending of the Prodigal is that the allowance is too small. But as this objection was raised by a lady of immense wealth, perhaps her standard of expenditure for a ne'er-do-well was unduly high. And Eustace himself, it will be remembered, only assessed his needs at a modest three hundred.

Moralists will object that the ending is "unhappy" because it is ignoble. That Eustace ought to have "pulled himself together" and "*done* something," and generally have become an entirely different person from what nature and education and environment had made him. But moralists are unreasonable folk. Of course, the sensible and dignified course for the Eustaces of this world is to go away quietly and drown themselves, as Eustace very rightly points out. They are not properly equipped for the struggle for existence in an age of competition. They had better put themselves out of it. That would be the really "happy ending" for all parties. But the moralists won't allow this. Suicide is a wicked and cowardly "shirking of the question." (As if that was not the only thing to do with a question you cannot answer.) It is the paramount duty of every one to go on working at distasteful occupations for inadequate wages, or to live out his life as a pauper, a criminal, or a lunatic, rather than end it once and for all in a workmanlike manner with a pill or a revolver. That is your true employers' standpoint. But I am not so sure if the unemployed can be expected to go on agreeing with it forever. Or the employed either for that matter. However, the moralist is quite certain that Eustace must not destroy himself and the law says that if he does so he is either a madman or a felon. So Eustace, bowing to the measureless stupidity of society since he cannot alter it, accepts the situation and "sponges on the family."

And that is as near a happy ending as you are likely to get in this imperfect world.

The end of *The Charity that Began at Home* is an equally happy one, happier perhaps, for here even the moralist comes by his own. Margery Denison, a romantic idealist with a passion for unselfishness and a burning desire to "help people," gets engaged to an attractive hedonist named Verreker. The two are almost violently unsuited to one another and the marriage, had it taken place, would have been a tragedy. Luckily Verreker has brains enough to realize that passing the remainder of your days with a wife whose moral standard you cannot possibly live up to is a peculiarly reckless piece of stupidity. Moreover, like most hedonists, he does not like either seeing or making other people unhappy. It is one of their more amiable weaknesses. And Margery would certainly have been very thoroughly miserable as his wife before they had been married six months. From every point of view in fact, his and hers alike, the match had better be broken off. So he breaks it off, or rather gets her to do so, and I think it must be admitted that he behaved well.

Verreker had no money to speak of and Margery was something of an heiress and a very pretty one. If he had been a callous ruffian he would have married her and spent her money without greatly caring whether she cried her eyes out or not. Being a decent fellow at bottom he would not do this. In the words of Demosthenes, he bought not repentance at such a price. And so Margery's life was saved from shipwreck and the play ended happily.

Our dramatic critics when they enter a theatre seem to leave all sense of reality outside and judge what they see there by some purely artificial standard which they would never dream of applying to the fortunes of themselves or their friends. To them all engagements are satisfactory and all marriages are made in Heaven, and at the mere thought of wedding bells they dodder like romantic old women in an almshouse. No wonder they have reduced our drama to the last stage of intellectual decrepitude.

My plays "end" then, and they "end happily." But this does not mean that, like other people's plays, they are not capable of continuation. I myself once wrote a whole volume of *Dramatic Sequels* in which I provided additional acts for a dozen different plays, from *Hamlet* to *Caste*, from the *Alcestis* of Euripides to *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. If a second edition of that book is ever called for (which seems to me in the last degree unlikely), I shall make a point of adding to it the sequels to the plays in the present volume. Meantime if anyone has a curiosity to know the subsequent fortunes of the Jacksons and the Denisons, here they are in brief:

Eustace Jackson is living in London and we often have luncheon together at the club. He married a lady with a considerable income who is sensible enough never to expect him to be anything different from what he is. So they get on admirably together and he makes her the most amusing and delightful of husbands. In fact, they are an exceedingly happy couple, and old Jackson is so delighted that Eustace has at last "done something sensible" that he spontaneously increased his allowance—as soon as he no longer needed it. So Eustace really gets that three hundred a year after all. He is never, I think, likely to become a distinguished man. That requires will and Eustace has only brains. But his book on "How to Fail in Every Profession: By One Who Has Done It" had a certain success among his more intimate friends. Ultimately, I suppose, like all the other people who can write but have nothing to say, he will become a dramatic critic. But I hope not.

Margery Denison is married to Hylton and they have an enormous family. They still continue to "be kind to people" and their protégés continue to get themselves and each other into all kinds of hot water. But there is a providence which watches over good people and fools, and they never come to really serious grief. "The souls of the just are in the hands of God."

CAMPDEN, *September 1907.*

THE CHARITY THAT BEGAN AT HOME

A Comedy for Philanthropists

"The souls of the just are in the hands of God"

Mint Theater Company's production of *The Charity that Began at Home*, written by St. John Hankin, began performances on September 27, 2002, at the Mint Theater, 311 West 43rd Street, in New York City, with the following cast and credits:

LADY DENISON..... Kristin Griffith
MARGERY.....Harmony Schuttler
WILLIAM ..... Bruce Ward
ANSON ..... Pauline Tully
MRS. HORROCKS ..... Michele Tauber
HUGH VERREKER..... Karl Kenzler
GENERAL BONSOR..... Lee Moore
MR. FIRKET ..... Christopher Franciosa
SOAMES .....Troy Schremmer
MRS. EVERSLEIGH ..... Becky London
MISS TRIGGS .....Alice White
MR. HYLTON ..... Benjamin Howes

Directed by: Gus Kaikkonen
Set Design by: Charles Morgan
Costume Design by: Henry Shaffer
Lighting Design by: William Armstrong
Original Music: Ellen Mandel
Prop Specialist: Judi Guralnick
Wigs and Hair Design: The Broadway Wig Company
Production Stage Manager: Sara E. Friedman
Assistant Stage Manager: Diane M. Ballering
Dialects and Dramaturgy: Amy Stoller
Press Representative: David Gersten & Associates
Graphic Design: Jude Dvorak

SETTING

The action of the play passes at Priors Ashton, Lady Denison's house in the country, Acts One, Two, and Three in the drawing room, Act Four in the dining room. A week passes between Acts One and Two, one hour between Acts Two and Three, and a week between Acts Three and Four.

ACT ONE

Scene: The drawing room at Priors Ashton, LADY DENISON's house in the country; a handsome room in the Adam style. On the right are double doors leading from the hall. Similar doors on the left lead to LADY DENISON's own sitting room. At the back of the stage are French windows, one on each side of the fireplace. These give onto a terrace, of which the low brick boundary wall, ornamented at intervals by stone balls on squat brick piers, is seen through the windows. Beyond the terrace the garden stretches away into the distance. Beyond that the open country, bathed in the sunshine of a hot September afternoon. The French window on the left of the fireplace is closed, but that on the right stands wide open.

When the curtain rises the stage is empty. Then LADY DENISON is seen to pass the French window on the left, followed by her daughter MARGERY. A moment later they enter by the window on the right. LADY DENISON is a kindly, comfortable lady of about forty-eight. MARGERY is a very pretty girl of twenty-two.

LADY DENISON: I don't think I'll go out again, Margery. The sun is rather hot, and it tires my eyes. *You* go if you like.

MARGERY: I'd rather stay with you, Mother. The others will get on quite well without me for a little. Where will you sit?

LADY DENISON: Here, I think. *(Settling herself into an armchair with a sigh of contentment.)* I do hope they're enjoying themselves. Do you think they are?

MARGERY: *(Nods.)* I think so.

LADY DENISON: That's right. *(Looking round vaguely.)* I wonder where I put my work?

MARGERY: Here it is. Shall I bring it? *(Brings two wicker workbaskets from side table.)*

LADY DENISON: Thank you, dear. I knew I'd left it somewhere. I wish this strip was finished. I'm getting so tired of it. *(Gets out long strip of woollen crochet of a brilliant red hue.)*

MARGERY: Poor Mother! It'll soon be done now.

LADY DENISON: *(Beginning to crochet.)* How are *yours* getting on?

MARGERY: *(Who has begun on a blue strip of equal brilliancy.)* Nearly finished. This is my last.

LADY DENISON: *(Sighs.)* I've still two more to do.

MARGERY: I'll do one of them for you, Mother.

LADY DENISON: No, dear. I shall manage. But next time I shall give *blankets*.

MARGERY: But that wouldn't be the same as *making* something, would it?

LADY DENISON: That's why I should prefer it.

MARGERY: Lazy!

LADY DENISON: I'm so glad Mr. Hylton is coming down. He'll help us to entertain all these people.

MARGERY: Yes. Isn't it lucky he and Miss Triggs and Aunt Emily could all come by the same train! The carriage will only have to go to the station once.

LADY DENISON: I do hope Miss Triggs will like being here.

MARGERY: *(Cheerfully.)* I think she will. Poor thing, her lodgings looked dreadfully poor and uncomfortable when I went to see her. Here at least she'll have proper meals and feel she's among friends.

LADY DENISON: Where have you put her?

MARGERY: In the little room next mine. It's rather small, but the house is so full just now. I wanted to put her next Aunt Emily. But Aunt Emily always insists on having that room for her maid.

LADY DENISON: How long do you think she'll stay?

MARGERY: Two or three weeks, I hope. Long enough to give her a thorough rest and change.

(Further conversation is interrupted by the entrance of WILLIAM, the footman. His face wears an expression of portentous gravity.)

WILLIAM: Can I speak to you, my lady?

LADY DENISON: Certainly. What is it, William? *(Puts down crochet.)*

WILLIAM: *(Hesitating.)* If you please, my lady…I should like to give notice.

MARGERY: *(Astonished.)* Give notice, William?

WILLIAM: Yes, miss.

LADY DENISON: Why *now*, William?

WILLIAM: I'm very sorry, my lady, to have to give notice at all…after being with your ladyship so many years—

LADY DENISON: Yes, yes. But why give notice *now?* The proper time to give notice is surely ten o'clock in the morning, when I am seeing the housekeeper?

WILLIAM: Very good, my lady. *(Turns to leave the room.)*

MARGERY: Stop, William.

(WILLIAM stops and faces round.)

MARGERY: Why do you *want* to give notice? You've always been a good servant. Have you found another situation?

WILLIAM: No, miss. And I don't *want* to give notice. I hope you won't think that, miss.

LADY DENISON: *(Plaintively.)* Then why *do* it, William?

WILLIAM: *(Hesitating.)* Well, my lady… It's on account of Soames. *(Hesitates again.)*

MARGERY: Soames?

WILLIAM: Yes, miss. As long as Wilkins was here things were better. Not but what we had our quarrels in the servants' hall even then. On account of *Thomas*, you remember, miss?

MARGERY: I remember.

WILLIAM: But with Soames it's different, miss. Soames and I—

LADY DENISON: *(Interrupting.)* Have you spoken to the housekeeper?

WILLIAM: Yes, my lady. But Mrs. Meredith says *she* can do nothing. Soames is that violent and his language quite awful when spoken to. So she said I had better come to you, my lady.

LADY DENISON: *(Plaintive again.)* How very annoying of Mrs. Meredith.

MARGERY: *(Rather shocked.)* Has Soames been using bad language to *you*, William?

ANSON: *Quite*, thank you, miss. I'd *much* rather not have the doctor. *(Goes out.)*

MARGERY: I'm afraid something must be the matter with Anson. She's looked wretched lately. And she used to be so bright.

LADY DENISON: *(Placidly.)* I daresay she's only bilious.

(At this point, MRS. HORROCKS comes in from the terrace, followed by MR. HUGH VERREKER. MRS. HORROCKS is a thick-set, red-faced, pompous woman of no breeding. VERREKER is a handsome, rather devil-may-care young man of nine and twenty.)

MARGERY: *(Looking round, with a smile.)* Are you coming in, Mr. Verreker?

VERREKER: Yes. It's cooler here than on the terrace.

LADY DENISON: Margery, give Mrs. Horrocks a cushion.

(MRS. HORROCKS sinks massively onto a sofa, where MARGERY proceeds to make her comfortable.)

LADY DENISON: I hope you've had a pleasant afternoon?

MRS. HORROCKS: Quite, thank you.

VERREKER: *(Taking a seat by MARGERY.)* Mrs. Horrocks has had no end of a good time. She's been telling me the entire history of the Horrocks family from its remotest past. It appears the first of the Horrockses was a historian in the reign of Theodoric. His name was Orosius. Orosius…Horrocks, you perceive. Transliteration by Grimm's law.

LADY DENISON: *(Who never recognises sarcasm even when she can see it.)* How very interesting.

VERREKER: *(Blandly.)* It was!

MARGERY: Have you left General Bonsor in the garden?

VERREKER: No. He's just coming. He wants his tea. *He's* enjoyed himself, too, by the way. He's been telling Mr. Firket a story about India for the last two hours. Poor Firket! And it's going on still.

(Which indeed appears to be the case, for the loud voice of GENERAL BONSOR at this moment comes booming in from the terrace in the midst of one of his interminable stories. He and FIRKET are seen to pass the French window on the left, and then enter by that on the right. GENERAL BONSOR is a lean, liverish Anglo-Indian, of sixty-five or so, with a sparse, grizzled moustache. MR. FIRKET is a pallid, deprecating little man in spectacles, whose neat black clothes look rather pathetically seedy.)

GENERAL BONSOR: So I said to Fennesey—Fennesey was our senior major. Thorough sportsman he was! Shoot a tiger as soon as look at him! Got killed afterwards out in the Sunderbund. Tiger ate him. Very sad. However—I said to Fennesey: "Fennesey, my boy, if you don't keep that dash'd Khansamah of yours in order," I said, "you'll poison the whole cantonment." Fennesey laughed at that like anything. You should have seen how he did *laugh! (Laughs immoderately.)* So when the judge and I and Travers were dining with him a week or two later—

(Turning sharply on FIRKET, whose attention is clearly wandering.)

GENERAL BONSOR: —I told you about Travers, didn't I?

FIRKET: *(Pulling himself together with an effort.)* Eh? No, I think not.

GENERAL BONSOR: Ah! I must. Or you won't understand the story. Travers was in the Guides. He married—let me see,

whom *did* he marry? I shall remember in a moment. *(Pauses, cudgelling his brain.)*

LADY DENISON: Won't you sit down, Mr. Firket? You look quite tired.

MR. FIRKET: *(Faintly.)* Thank you.

(MR. FIRKET sinks onto chair as far as possible from the GENERAL. The GENERAL, however, pursues him relentlessly.)

GENERAL BONSOR: Blake—Blake—Blakesley! *That* was the name! She was the daughter of old Tom Blakesley of the Police. But I never knew him. He was on the Bombay side. Travers died afterwards of enteric at Bundelcund, I think, or was it Chittagong? Yes, it was Chittagong, I remember, because I had a touch of fever there myself a year or two later. Well, to go back to Fennessey—

MARGERY: *(Coming to the rescue.)* Can you spare Mr. Firket to me for a little, General? I want him to wind some wool for Mother.

GENERAL BONSOR: Eh? Oh, certainly, certainly.

(The GENERAL turns away pettishly, much annoyed at being interrupted in his story, which, he is convinced, was reaching its most enthralling moment. MR. FIRKET breathes a sigh of relief.)

MARGERY: Do you mind, Mr. Firket? You did the last for her so well.

MR. FIRKET: Not at all, Miss Denison. On the contrary!

VERREKER: *(To MARGERY, under his breath.)* I call that real tact!

MARGERY: Hush!

(MR. FIRKET is set to wind red wool, which he does contentedly till tea comes in. The GENERAL moons about sulkily for a minute or two, and then takes a seat on the sofa by MRS. HORROCKS, who makes room for him with marked unwillingness.)

MRS. HORROCKS: *(To LADY DENISON.)* What a lot of work you do, Lady Denison.

LADY DENISON: Yes. This is a crochet counterpane for old Mrs. Buckley. It's very ugly, isn't it? *(Holds it up disparagingly.)* Margery and I each have to do eight strips. Then we fasten them together, like this. *(Puts red and blue strips side by side, in which position the effect they produce is simply paralysing.)* Mrs. Buckley's eighty-three next week, and almost blind. That's why Margery chose such bright colours. So that she might be able to *see* them, you know. Aren't they *detestable?*

MARGERY: There's my last finished. *(Holds up strip in triumph.)* Sure you wouldn't like me to do one of yours, Mother?

LADY DENISON: No, thanks, dear. If I stopped doing this I should only have to begin on Mrs. Jackson's stockings. I'll do my share.

MARGERY: All right. Then I can get on with something else. *(Gets handkerchief-case out of basket.)*

VERREKER: *(Remonstrating.)* I say, you're not going to begin another thing straight off?

MARGERY: Not *begin*. This is half-done. It's a handkerchief-case.

VERREKER: Is it for yourself?

MARGERY: No, it's for Mr. Hylton.

VERREKER: The man who's coming down this afternoon?

MARGERY: Yes. Those are his initials. *(Shows them.)*

VERREKER: B. H.?

MARGERY: Yes; his name's Basil. It's a pretty name, isn't it? *(Starts working on them.)*

VERREKER: Why are you working him a handkerchief-case?

MARGERY: I thought he'd like one.

VERREKER: Well, *I'd* like a handkerchief-case. Why don't you work one for me?

MARGERY: Perhaps you don't deserve one.

VERREKER: I don't. But you said this morning when one did things for people one oughtn't to think of what they deserve but what they want.

MARGERY: And *you* said, "What rot."

VERREKER Well, I've changed my mind. I think you're quite right. And I want a handkerchief-case. *My* initials are H. V.

MARGERY: Isn't that rather a sudden conversion?

VERREKER: It's none the worse for that. Besides, now I come to think of it, I do deserve one. *(Dropping his voice.)* I played billiards with old Firket this morning—to please *you*.

MARGERY: *(Working steadily.)* To please *him*.

VERREKER: It didn't. I made a hundred while he made eight. He simply hated it. Old Firket's a perfect ass at billiards—though he says he can give me thirty percent off any kind of billiard table that's made.

MARGERY: Still, it was nice of you to play with him.

VERREKER: It was. I shan't do it again. And I think I ought to have a handkerchief-case for doing it at all.

MARGERY: Very well. You shall have the next.

VERREKER: Not the next. This one.

MARGERY: No, no. This is Mr. Hylton's. It's the first time he's been to stay with us. He works very hard while he's in London, and scarcely ever gives himself a holiday. So I promised if he'd come and spend a fortnight with us this summer I'd work him something. This is it.

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Looking at his watch testily.)* I thought you had tea at *five*, Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON: So we do, General. Is it five yet?

GENERAL BONSOR: Twelve minutes past. Twelve and a half.

LADY DENISON: I'm so sorry. I suppose they're waiting for the others. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Eversleigh, comes today. And Mr. Hylton. And Miss Triggs. You've met my sister-in-law, I think?

GENERAL BONSOR: Yes. Met her in Madrid when Eversleigh was at the Embassy there. I was at Gibraltar.

LADY DENISON: He's at Vienna now. I wish he wasn't. It's such a long way off. We see simply nothing of them.

GENERAL BONSOR: Not in London this season?

LADY DENISON: No. And my brother can't get away even now. So Emily is coming by herself. I do hope she's not going to be late.

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Unappeased.)* She *is* late. But everybody's late nowadays. It's the fashion. And a doosid bad fashion, too. When I was at Alleghur in '76—

LADY DENISON: I don't think it's her fault. Perhaps the train—

GENERAL BONSOR: Just so! Her train's late, of course. *That's* the English railway system all over. The trains run anyhow, simply anyhow. Why, when *I* was at Alleghur—

LADY DENISON: *(Interrupting him desperately in the hope of staving off a story—which for the moment she successfully does.)* It may not be the train, General. Perhaps one of the horses…However, I really don't think we'll wait any longer. Will you ring, Mr. Verreker?

(VERREKER does so.)

MR. FIRKET: *(Persuasively.)* You ought to have a motor, Lady Denison. Much more reliable than horses. I can get you twenty percent off any pattern you like to choose if you think of it.

LADY DENISON: Thank you very much, Mr. Firket. But I'm old-fashioned. I think I shall stick to horses.

MR. FIRKET: Well, if you *should* change your mind, just apply to me, that's all.

LADY DENISON: I won't forget.

(Enter SOAMES.)

LADY DENISON: Bring tea, Soames. We won't wait for Mrs. Eversleigh.

SOAMES: Very good, my lady. *(Goes out.)*

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Clears his throat.)* As I was saying, when I was at Alleghur—

MR. FIRKET: *(Insinuatingly, to LADY DENISON.)* I might make it five-and-twenty percent with some makers—

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Sternly.)* As I was saying…*as* I was saying…

(A hush falls.)

GENERAL BONSOR: When I was at Alleghur in '76… *(Annoyed.)* There now, I've forgotten what I *was* going to say!… *(Consoling them.)* But it'll come back to me…Ever at Alleghur, Verreker, when you were in India?

VERREKER: For a few months.

MRS. HORROCKS: *(Trying to head off the GENERAL.)* What was your regiment, Mr. Verreker?

VERREKER: Beastly place, I thought it.

MRS. HORROCKS: *(Louder.)* What *was* your regiment, Mr. Verreker?

VERREKER: I beg your pardon, Mrs. Horrocks. The Munsters.

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Delighted.)* Then you knew Toby Nicholson! He commands the Munsters, doesn't he?

VERREKER: *(Hesitates.)* Yes.

GENERAL BONSOR: Why, *I* know Toby. First-rate chap! Knew him when he was a subaltern. I must write to the old beggar. Where are the Munsters now?

VERREKER: *(Who seems bored with the subject.)* Shorncliffe, I believe.

(The sun begins to set in a glory of crimson, but is quite unable to stop the GENERAL. Nobody notices it, in fact, until the red glow attracts MARGERY's attention a few minutes later.)

GENERAL BONSOR: Good! I'll write tonight, by Jove. I'd like to hear from Toby again. I've not seen him since we were at Poonah together. *(Triumphantly.)* That reminds me of what I was going to tell you!…When I was at Alleghur in '76 we had a train from Goomti that was timed to arrive at Alleghur at 6:38. Just in time to change before dinner, don't you know. Well, that train was *always* late, *a1ways*, by Jove! So I said to Macpherson…he was superintendent of the Alleghur-Goomti line. Good chap Mac. Very good judge

of a horse. Died of cholera, I remember, in '81—or was it '82?…Anyhow, I said to him, "Mac, my boy, I'll race your dashed little train from the Boondi Bridge to the station"—that's the last three miles into Alleghur—"with my pony and trap for a hundred rupees."

(During this speech SOAMES and WILLIAM have brought in tea. A certain hostility is just visible between them, but very discreetly shown. They put the tea on the table by LADY DENISON, and go out. MARGERY goes to the table, sits down, and begins to pour out. Her questions about cream and sugar, and LADY DENISON's hospitable offers of tea cake, sadly interrupt the thread of the GENERAL's story, but he struggles on defiantly.)

MARGERY: Does everyone take cream?

MRS. HORROCKS: Milk for me, please. And *one* lump of sugar.

VERREKER: *Two* lumps for me.

GENERAL BONSOR: …Well, old Mac wasn't at all pleased at that. He was awfully proud of his little one-horse line. It was opened in '72, I remember. Pat Ellis was traffic manager. Ellis had been—

MARGERY: Will you give that to Mrs. Horrocks, Mr. Verreker? And this to Mother?

GENERAL BONSOR: Ellis had been—

LADY DENISON: You'll find some tea cake under that cover, Mrs. Horrocks.

GENERAL BONSOR: As I was saying—

MRS. HORROCKS: Thank you.

GENERAL BONSOR: *As* I was saying!… *(Glares.)*

(Silence falls.)

GENERAL BONSOR: …Ellis had been on the Bengal-Nagpore line before he came to Goomti. He was a son of old General Ellis, who was killed in the first Sikh war. He married—

VERREKER: *(Bringing cup.)* Your tea, General.

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Irritably.)* In a moment. In a moment…He married Nellie Tremayne, daughter of Tremayne of the Sixty-Third. Tremayne had four daughters, I remember—

LADY DENISON: *(Loud whisper.)* Will you cut that cake, Mr. Verreker, and see if anybody would like some?

(VERREKER does so, with elaborate precautions as to silence. GENERAL BONSOR meantime goes on steadily with his story in his loud authoritative voice, and enjoys himself thoroughly.)

GENERAL BONSOR: Kitty, the eldest, married Molyneux, who was afterwards commissioner at Ranigunj. One of his sons was gazetted the other day to the Shropshires. Another went into the Navy. Maud, the second girl, married Monty Robertson. He was a gunner. They lived in a little house outside Alleghur just where the road forks. One way leads to Balaghai, the other leads to…tut-tut, what's the name of that place the Alleghur road goes to, Verreker?

VERREKER: *(Who is handing tea cake.)* I don't know. Alleghur, I suppose.

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Annoyed.)* No, no! Kupri! *That's* the name. Kupri! There was one more daughter, but I don't remember what became of her…No, there were only three of them, I recollect. It was *Ainslie* who had four daughters. The Four Graces we used to call them—because there were four of them.

LADY DENISON: *(Still whispering.)* Some more tea, Mr. Firket?

(But MR. FIRKET murmurs "No" with infinite precaution, and puts down cup.)

GENERAL BONSOR: …Ainslie was Superintendent of Police, and afterwards went to Central India. But I was going to tell you about that race. Well, I took the trap—

SOAMES: *(Announcing.)* Mrs. Eversleigh, Miss Triggs, Mr. Hylton.

(SOAMES, having shown in the new arrivals in the order named, goes out. MRS. EVERSLEIGH is a prosperous, well-dressed, rather hard-looking woman of forty-five; MISS TRIGGS a lean, angular lady of thirty-four, with thin lips tightly compressed, clothed in meagre, tight-fitting black garments. HYLTON is a handsome man of forty. A good face, but not in the least solemn or ascetic. Clothes quite human and unclerical.)

LADY DENISON: *(Rising.)* Dear Emily, how are you? *(Kisses her.)* The General's story was so interesting I never heard the carriage. You know General Bonsor, don't you?

(GENERAL BONSOR and MRS. EVERSLEIGH shake hands.)

LADY DENISON: How do you do, Miss Triggs? How do you do, Mr. Hylton?

(Shakes hands with them.)

MARGERY: How do you do, Aunt Emily? *(Kisses her.)* I hope you've not had a tiring journey, Miss Triggs?

(MARGERY shakes hands with her and HYLTON, bestowing a smile of welcome on the latter.)

LADY DENISON: I must introduce you all. Mrs. Horrocks, this is my sister-in-law, Mrs. Eversleigh.

(Bow.)

Miss Triggs, Mr. Hylton: General Bonsor, Mr. Firket, Mr. Verreker.

(Confused bowing from everybody.)

MARGERY: And now you'll all have some tea. You must be dying for it. Do you know you're dreadfully late?

GENERAL BONSOR: I was just saying before you came in, Mrs. Eversleigh, the English railways are the most unpunctual in the world.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Frigidly.)* Indeed? I believe our train was *before* its time. But one of the horses got a stone in its shoe or something, and Hollings took about half an hour getting it out.

MR. FIRKET: *(Triumphantly.)* What did I tell you, Lady Denison. You'd much better have a motor.

(LADY DENISON shakes her head smilingly.)

MARGERY: Your tea, Aunt Emily. *(Takes it to her.)* Cream and sugar, Miss Triggs?

MISS TRIGGS: *(Crisply.)* No tea for me, thank you. I never drink tea unless it is *quite* fresh made.

MARGERY: *(Cheerfully.)* Then I'll order some fresh for you. Mr. Verreker, will you ring?

MISS TRIGGS: Pray don't trouble. I can do *quite* well without any tea.

MARGERY: It's no trouble.

(VERREKER rings.)

MARGERY: Bread-and-butter, Aunt Emily?

(MRS. EVERSLEIGH takes some.)

LADY DENISON: You look dreadfully overworked, as usual, Mr. Hylton. You must have a complete rest while you're

down here. *(To MISS TRIGGS.)* Mr. Hylton works a great deal among the poor in London.

MISS TRIGGS: Indeed? *(To HYLTON, sweetly.)* Do you find that does any good?

HYLTON: *(Smiling.)* I hope so…

MISS TRIGGS: What *kind* of work do you do?

HYLTON: Oh, preaching and writing and so on.

MISS TRIGGS: *(Interested.)* Preaching? Are you a clergyman?

MARGERY: Mr. Hylton is the Founder of the Church of Humanity.

MISS TRIGGS: *(Disappointed.)* Oh! Not a *real* clergyman.

(There is a general gasp from everyone at this remark, except from MISS TRIGGS herself, who seems quite unconscious of having said anything outrageous. Luckily, before she can commit herself further, SOAMES enters. He carries a teapot on a salver.)

MARGERY: Some fresh tea, Soames.

SOAMES: Yes, miss. *(Puts new teapot in place of old one, which he takes away. He goes out.)*

MARGERY: *(Hospitably.) Now* you can have your tea, Miss Triggs. *(Gives cup to her and takes MRS. EVERSLEIGH's.)*

MRS. HORROCKS: Where *is* the Church of Humanity, Mr. Hylton? I don't think I've ever been in it.

HYLTON: *(Quite simply.)* The Church of Humanity is everywhere.

MRS. HORROCKS: But the *church*, the building?

HYLTON: We have no building so far. I preach in halls and different places about London, which we hire.

MISS TRIGGS: I don't call that being *everywhere*. I call that being *nowhere*.

HYLTON: *(Quite good-tempered.)* In one sense, of course.

MARGERY: *(More to cover up MISS TRIGGS's second lapse than from a desire to feed MRS. EVERSLEIGH.)* Give that to Aunt Emily, Mr. Verreker.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(To VERREKER, who brings her back her cup.)* Are you one of the Norfolk Verrekers? I met Sir Montague in London two seasons ago.

VERREKER: He's my uncle.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I remember he was very full of some experiments he was making…with turnips. To combat agricultural depression, I think.

VERREKER: I daresay. Uncle Montague's always muddling round with that kind of thing.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: It doesn't interest you, apparently.

VERREKER: Not in the least. But it amuses him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Is he working at it still?

VERREKER: *(Carelessly.)* Probably. I've not seen him for the last four years.

(MARGERY notices the red glow of the setting sun which now fills the room, and turns to look through the window.)

MARGERY: *What* a lovely sunset! Come, all of you. *(Going onto terrace.)* We *must* go out and see it. Mrs. Horrocks, General, Aunt Emily. Come.

LADY DENISON: Margery! Emily hasn't finished her tea yet. Nor has Miss Triggs.

MISS TRIGGS: *(Rising.)* Thank you. I have quite done.

MARGERY: *(Who is standing just outside the French window.)* Come to the end of the terrace. You can't see it properly from here. Be quick, or it'll be gone. Come along.

(All the visitors troop off after MARGERY except MRS. EVERSLEIGH. They are seen to pass the window on the left before they disappear. LADY DENISON remains to entertain her sister-in-law.)

LADY DENISON: How did you leave Edward, Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Very well, I think. He's had a lot of work to do lately, and that always seems to suit him. How have *you* been?

LADY DENISON: Quite well, thanks.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH Who are all these dreadful people you've got down here?

LADY DENISON: *(Protesting.)* Not *dreadful*, Emily.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH Aren't they? I can hardly imagine a more dreadful visitor than General Bonsor. He's the greatest bore in London. Edward says he's nearly emptied three of the Service Clubs. I thought people had given up inviting him.

LADY DENISON: *(Placidly.)* That's why we asked him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Puzzled.)* I beg your pardon?

LADY DENISON: That's why we asked him. You see, he's getting an old man, and it seemed so unkind that nobody would have him to their houses. Of course, his stories *are* rather long. But I suppose he can't make them any shorter. So Margery thought if we asked him down for ten days he might enjoy it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I think it very unlikely *we* shall enjoy it. *(Rises and puts down cup.)*

LADY DENISON: Would you mind ringing while you're up, Emily? Then Soames can take away.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Does so.)* Who's that Miss Triggs?

LADY DENISON: She's a governess. She teaches German.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Is she going to teach you?

LADY DENISON: *(Emphatically.)* Oh, *no*, Emily. Margery did suggest it. But I refused. Miss Triggs is only here as a visitor.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I see. *(Returns to her seat.)*

LADY DENISON: Margery met her at the Hammonds'. She taught Cecily for a few weeks—till they could get someone else. She's very poor, I'm afraid, and doesn't get many pupils. So Margery thought it would be kind to ask her to stay.

(Enter SOAMES.)

LADY DENISON: You can take away, Soames. And turn on the lights.

SOAMES: Yes, my lady.

(SOAMES turns on the electric lights and removes the tea things. LADY DENISON resumes her interrupted crochet.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Are all your visitors invited on this penitential system?

LADY DENISON: Except you, Emily.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH Except me, of course. That Mr. Firker, for instance?

LADY DENISON: *(Correcting her.)* Fir*ket*. He's something in the City. I'm not sure what. But nothing very prosperous, I'm afraid. He used to be a stockbroker, but he failed. And now he sells things on commission. I believe that's what it's

called. He's always wanting to sell me a new billiard table or a bicycle or a sewing machine. Today it was a motor car. I shall have to buy something from him before he leaves, I know.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Where do you pick up these extraordinary people?

LADY DENISON: *(Quite simply.)* Margery found Mr. Firket. On the Underground Railway.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *Where?*

LADY DENISON: At South Kensington, I think. But it may have been Sloane Square. It was in a first-class carriage, and Mr. Firket only had a third-class ticket. An inspector came round and wanted to take him up. So Margery paid his fare, and then, of course, they became friends.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Naturally!

LADY DENISON: He's been with us nearly a week. He goes on Monday.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I'm glad to hear it.

LADY DENISON: Mrs. Horrocks we met in a hotel at Mentone. The other people at the hotel would hardly speak to her. They were quite rude about it. Which seemed very unkind, as she is only dull and rather vulgar. And she can't *help* that, can she? So Margery said we must be *nice* to her. And later on, when we were arranging whom to have down, we thought *she* should be asked.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Surely this is rather a new departure of yours, Muriel? You were always perfectly ridiculous about what you call being kind to people. But it never used to be as bad as this.

LADY DENISON: It's Mr. Hylton's idea. He calls it beginning one's charity at home. He wants everyone to do it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: How curious. He *looks* sane enough.

LADY DENISON: Of course he's sane, Emily. Mr. Hylton is a very clever man. He writes *books*.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: But why does Mr. Hylton think you should fill your houses with wild beasts in this way? Is it for the good of *their* souls or of yours?

LADY DENISON: *(Quite impervious to her sister-in-law's sarcasm.)* Both, I think. It was in a sermon he preached—on the true hospitality and the false. It was a beautiful sermon.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Which is this?

LADY DENISON: The *true*, of course. *False* hospitality is inviting people because you like them. *True* hospitality is inviting them because they'd like to be asked.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH Ah!…I wish you'd thought of mentioning in your letter that you were practising true hospitality just now. Then I wouldn't have come.

LADY DENISON: Now you're being worldly, Emily. And when people are worldly it always makes me drop my stitches. *(Does so.)*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Why was Mr. Verreker asked, by the way? I suppose there's something shady about him as *he's* here?

LADY DENISON: I don't think so. Margery met him at a dance at the Fitz Allens'. His parents are both dead and he's quarrelled with his uncle, and altogether seems rather alone in the world. So Margery thought he was *quite* a person to be asked.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Why did he quarrel with his uncle?

LADY DENISON: About his leaving the army, I think.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Why did he leave the army?

LADY DENISON: I don't know, Emily, I never asked.

(MRS. EVERSLEIGH shrugs her shoulders impatiently.)

LADY DENISON: That's all we've got at present.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: And quite enough, too. I hope they're all properly grateful?

LADY DENISON: *(Astonished that her sister-in-law should not have grasped this.)* They don't *know*. Of course, we shouldn't *dream* of telling them. It would spoil all their pleasure. They think they're asked here because we *like* them. If they didn't they wouldn't enjoy it half so much. People do so love to feel they're *wanted*.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: It must be an unusual sensation with the General!

(The sneer passes unregarded by LADY DENISON, who has dropped another stitch.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: How long has Mr. Hylton been preaching in this absurd way?

LADY DENISON: He has been working among the poor for years, I believe. But it was only this season that people one knew began to go to him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Does he make converts?

LADY DENISON: I suppose so. His services were crowded.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Indeed? I must remember to take Edward when next we are in London. Edward always enjoys a new religion.

LADY DENISON: Won't you talk to Mr. Hylton while he's down here?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I shall make a point of doing so. London is changing very much, Muriel. Twenty years ago everyone in society went to church—or, at least, pretended to do so. Nowadays people seem to go anywhere!

(MARGERY returns from her sunset, followed by MRS. HORROCKS and MISS TRIGGS. The glow has faded from the sky and twilight is falling.)

MARGERY: It's been *such* a lovely sunset, Aunt Emily. You *were* lazy not to come out.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Your mother and I have been talking.

MARGERY: Can Mrs. Horrocks write a letter in your room, Mother? The General's in the library with Mr. Firket, and that's rather disturbing.

LADY DENISON: Certainly. Will you turn on the lights, Margery? You'll find notepaper and things on my table, Mrs. Horrocks.

MRS. HORROCKS: *(Graciously.)* Thank you so much, Lady Denison.

(MARGERY turns on the switch by the door of LADY DENISON's room on the left. MRS. HORROCKS goes off. MARGERY closes the door after her, and turns to MISS TRIGGS.)

MARGERY: *Now* I can show you your room, Miss Triggs, if you will come upstairs.

LADY DENISON: I'm afraid we have had to give you a *very* small room, Miss Triggs. But the house is so full just now.

MISS TRIGGS: *(Sweetly.) Pray* don't apologise, Lady Denison. Of course, I know persons who are compelled to support themselves by *teaching* cannot expect

to be treated with *ceremony! Anything* will do for *me*.

LADY DENISON: I assure you—

MISS TRIGGS: Not at all. I *quite* understand.

LADY DENISON: But really, Miss Triggs—

MISS TRIGGS: *(Firmly.)* Please do not trouble to say any more. It is quite unnecessary. Shall we go, Miss Denison?

(She stalks out, followed by MARGERY.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: What an intolerable woman!

LADY DENISON: I do think she might have let me explain.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Explain! I should have packed her out of the house if I'd been in your place.

LADY DENISON: I don't think Mr. Hylton would approve of *that*.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Then Mr. Hylton should do his own entertaining. Why doesn't he have Miss Triggs to stay with *him?*

LADY DENISON: Emily! Mr. Hylton is a bachelor.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I suppose so. People with absurd theories about life usually *are* bachelors. But I don't think Miss Triggs would have come to any harm. She's excessively plain.

LADY DENISON: *(Shocked.)* Really, Emily, what dreadful things you say. I don't think living in Vienna can be at all good for you.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Ignoring this rebuke.)* What I can't understand is why, if you *must* be kind to people—which seems to me quite unnecessary—you shouldn't choose agreeable people instead of disagreeable ones.

LADY DENISON: *(Worried.)* I'm afraid I can't make it any clearer. But Mr. Hylton will tell you.

(HYLTON is seen to pass the window on the left.)

LADY DENISON: Here he is.

(He enters by the other window.)

LADY DENISON: Mr. Hylton, will you kindly explain to Mrs. Eversleigh why I have to be kind to disagreeable people? I never can remember, and Margery isn't here.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(With dangerous sweetness.)* My sister-in-law has been telling me about your peculiar doctrines, Mr. Hylton.

HYLTON: *(Quite sincere and matter of fact.)* You see, Mrs. Eversleigh, agreeable people don't need friends to be kind to them. They have plenty already. Disagreeable people have not.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Briskly.)* If people are disagreeable they don't deserve kindness.

HYLTON: *(Smiling.)* It's not what people *deserve* but what they *want* that matters, don't you think? In fact, often the less people deserve the more we ought to help them. They need it more.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I'm afraid that's hardly a view you can expect me to take seriously, Mr. Hylton. It's very *modern* and original, but it's not *serious*.

HYLTON: *(Gently.)* I should hardly have called it *modern*. Usen't we to be taught that it was our duty to love our enemies?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Yes. But only on Sundays. And no one ever *dreamed* of

doing it. So, of course, that didn't matter. You want Lady Denison to *do* it.

HYLTON: *(More gravely.)* I certainly think the world would be a happier place and a better place if people helped each other because they needed help irrespective of whether they deserved it or not.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: That is certainly a convenient doctrine for your friend Miss Triggs.

HYLTON: *(Smiling again.)* What has my friend Miss Triggs been about? I never met her till this afternoon, by the way.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Still, it's on *your* principles that she was invited. And her manners are insufferable.

HYLTON: A little brusque perhaps. But I daresay it's only shyness. She has never been here before, has she, Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON: No.

HYLTON: And lots of people are shy in a strange house, aren't they?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Her shyness certainly takes a singularly unpleasant form.

HYLTON: *(Cheerfully.)* Well, we must just set to work to be kind to her and make her enjoy her visit, and in a week or two she'll be a different woman. It's wonderful how a little kindness and goodwill soften people. Will you try?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Laughing.)* No, no, Mr. Hylton, *I'm* not going to join the Church of Humanity, not even to change Miss Triggs. Though I'm sure *any* change would be for the better.

HYLTON: *(Quite good-tempered.)* We shall convert you yet, you'll see.

(MARGERY returns from looking after MISS TRIGGS.)

LADY DENISON: Is Miss Triggs better satisfied with her room now, Margery?

MARGERY: Yes, I think so…I've put her into mine.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: What!

MARGERY: That's why I've been so long. I had to empty some of the drawers for her and move the bed.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Really, Margery!

MARGERY: *(Puzzled.)* What is it, Aunt Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: To turn out of your own bedroom, merely to please an ill-tempered German governess! I never heard of such a thing!

MARGERY: *(Who apparently has not considered the subject till now.)* Poor Miss Triggs. I suppose she *has* rather a curious temper. But I daresay she can't help it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Nonsense! She's a thoroughly ill-conditioned person.

MARGERY: *(Mildly.)* Well, Aunt Emily, there's no use being *angry* with her about it, is there? We must just be nice to her and try and make her stay pleasant, and then I daresay she'll be better.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Sarcastically.)* So Mr. Hylton was good enough to suggest.

MARGERY: *(Throwing a bright smile to HYLTON.)* Then it's sure to be right. Mr. Hylton always knows how to manage people.

HYLTON: *(Rising.)* After that handsome compliment I think I'd better go upstairs. I have a letter or two to write before post—if it's not gone, Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON: No. The box isn't cleared till a quarter past seven. Where have you put Mr. Hylton, Margery?

MARGERY: In the Blue Room, Mother. If you'll come, Mr. Hylton, I'll show you where it is.

HYLTON: Thank you.

(MARGERY goes out to show HYLTON his room. MRS. EVERSLEIGH looks after them thoughtfully for a moment. Then she turns to her sister-in-law and speaks.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Margery seems to have a great admiration for your Mr. Hylton, Muriel.

LADY DENISON: *(Quite unconscious of what her sister-in-law is thinking.)* Yes. She thinks a great deal of him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Um…Is he staying here long?

LADY DENISON: For a fortnight, I hope.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Is that *wise?*

LADY DENISON: What do you mean, Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: It would be so tiresome if there were to be any foolish entanglement between him and Margery. Girls are so romantic about clergymen. And Mr. Hylton is a *sort* of clergyman, isn't he? Couldn't you send Margery away somewhere while he's here?

LADY DENISON: *(Still not seeing the point.)* But I don't want to send Margery away. How am I to entertain Miss Triggs and Mrs. Horrocks without Margery?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Nonsense, Muriel. Do please understand that Margery's future is of more importance than entertaining Miss Triggs. If Mr. Hylton were in orders it would be different. Edward might get someone to give him a living—though livings aren't what they were, of course. He might even become a bishop in time. Or at least a dean. But as he's only some kind of dissenter there's no use thinking of that. And if he were to propose to Margery while he was down here it might give us a great deal of trouble.

LADY DENISON: *(Surprised.)* But is Mr. Hylton going to propose to Margery? I've heard nothing about it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: And won't—till it's too late. That kind of man has no proper feeling about these things. And, of course, he hasn't a sixpence.

LADY DENISON: Hasn't he, Emily? I thought he was quite well off.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *What!*

LADY DENISON: *(Placidly.)* I thought he had quite a large income. Only he gives it all away. At least, that was what Lady Wrexham told me. His place is close to theirs in Shropshire. But it's let just now.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(On whom a light seems to dawn.)* My dear Muriel, why on earth didn't you say so before?

LADY DENISON: I didn't think you wanted to know about Mr. Hylton's income.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Refusing to believe that her sister-in-law's obtuseness is anything but assumed.)* Not want to know? Of course I want to know. It makes *all* the difference. If Mr. Hylton is a rich man and has a place in Shropshire it explains everything.

LADY DENISON: *(Puzzled.)* Explains what?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Impatiently.)* Your asking him here. And turning your house into a bear garden because he tells you to. Of course, it flatters him. And it does no harm—for once. It's not as if you need know these people afterwards.

LADY DENISON: *(Shocked.)* Emily!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Ignoring this interruption.)* I wonder what his income really is? I must find out from Lady Wrexham. It'll be a great thing to have Margery properly settled. I was always afraid you might have some difficulty in finding a really suitable husband for her. She's so very *good*. And men don't like that. It frightens them. Yes, dear, you've done quite right, and I think you've been very clever about it. I didn't know you had it in you!

(LADY DENISON gazes at her sister-in-law in hopeless bewilderment—and the curtain falls.)

ACT TWO

Scene: LADY DENISON's drawing room, as in the previous act. Time, about half-past eleven in the morning. A week has elapsed since the events of the last act. All LADY DENISON's visitors are still with her save MR. FIRKET, who has returned to his obscure occupation in the City. When the curtain rises, LADY DENISON is discovered immersed in a German grammar, from which she is endeavouring to master the intricacies of the first declension.

LADY DENISON: Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder, Den Bruder, *O* Bruder. *(Looking up from book.)* Der Bruder, Des Bruder, Den Bruder…No, that's wrong. *(Consults book again.)* Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder, Den Bruder, *O* Bruder! What a language!

(LADY DENISON reads through the declension once more, with still greater emphasis on the "O," which she seems to find a relief for her feelings. She then puts down her book on her lap, and is about to try if she can repeat it correctly from memory, when she is interrupted by the entrance of her sister-in-law from the hall, carrying a half-finished letter. MRS. EVERSLEIGH is not in the best of tempers.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Here you are, Muriel. I was just going to your room to find you.

LADY DENISON: Miss Triggs is in there writing letters. *(Murmurs softly.)* Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder—

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Can you find a corner for me, too? When General Bonsor and Mrs. Horrocks are in the library together I feel like Daniel in the den of lions. It's impossible to write letters under those conditions.

LADY DENISON: *(Plaintively.) How* tiresome! I hoped they would get on better after that scene in the drawing room last night.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I'm sure I don't know why. If you ask impossible people to stay they may be civil to *you*, but they're perfectly certain to quarrel with each other. Mr. Hylton doesn't seem to have thought of that. *(Seats herself at writing table.)*

LADY DENISON: What are they quarrelling about *now?* Was it about the Peerage again?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Yes. Mrs. Horrocks—who really is the most vulgar person I have ever met—was explaining to Mr. Verreker that she could always tell whether a person was well-born or not the moment she set eyes on him. Good blood always told. Of course, this was meant for the General, whose father was a tailor in Regent Street, as everybody knows. The General took up the challenge at once, and growled out that good birth was all rubbish, and good blood came from eating good butcher's meat, not from being fifth cousin to a baronet. The reference was to Sir James Horrocks, who is Mrs. Horrocks's second cousin twice removed, as she's never tired of telling us. At that

Mrs. Horrocks flushed crimson, and said the General was no gentleman—and then I came away.

LADY DENISON: Didn't Mr. Verreker manage to soothe them?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: He didn't try. He seemed rather to enjoy the carnage.

LADY DENISON: *(Much depressed.)* I wonder if I ought to go? It'll interrupt my German dreadfully.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Your German?

LADY DENISON: Yes. I've had to learn German after all—to please Miss Triggs. She was getting restless at having nothing to do, and yesterday she said she really must be thinking of getting back to her work. Which was absurd, of course, as no one wants to learn German in September. However, Margery said we ought to find her a pupil, just to keep her amused. So she's to teach me. *(Sighs.)*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Why doesn't Margery learn?

LADY DENISON: *(Peevishly.)* Margery knows German already. Girls seem to know everything nowadays. *(Murmurs.)* Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder—

(But LADY DENISON seems fated never to get beyond the dative case of her declension this morning, for at this moment MRS. HORROCKS bursts into the room. She is purple in the face with indignation.)

MRS. HORROCKS: Lady Denison! I really must ask you to request General Bonsor to moderate his language. I have never been treated with such disrespect in any house before.

LADY DENISON: *(Meekly.)* I'm so sorry, Mrs. Horrocks. What has the General been saying?

MRS. HORROCKS: I couldn't possibly repeat it. But he has entirely forgotten the courtesy that is due to a *lady*, as I told him!

LADY DENISON: *(Deprecatingly.)* Was that wise? I should have thought it would only make the General worse.

MRS. HORROCKS: It *did!* He became so violent that I felt obliged to leave the room at once. General Bonsor ought to understand that this is not a barrack yard.

LADY DENISON: *(Trying to soothe her.)* You must make allowances, Mrs. Horrocks. The General's temper *is* violent at times, but I don't think he can help it.

MRS. HORROCKS: He *ought* to help it.

LADY DENISON: Still, he's an old man. And he's been in India. And when people have done that we must make allowances for them—on account of the climate. I hear it's so trying. *(Insinuatingly.)* And we all have failings of *some* kind, haven't we?

MRS. HORROCKS: *(Stiffly.)* I am not aware that *I* have failings.

(LADY DENISON accepts the correction with a meekness at which MRS. EVERSLEIGH's blood boils.)

LADY DENISON: Well. All the rest of us. Perhaps if you went back to him now you would find him a little cooler.

MRS. HORROCKS: I shall certainly not do anything so rash. If I go out onto the terrace do you think I shall be safe from his intrusion?

LADY DENISON: *(Delighted to get rid of her on any terms.)* Perhaps that would be best. You'll find chairs out there.

(MRS. HORROCKS stalks out onto the terrace. LADY DENISON turns to her sister-in-law, who has been endeavouring to go on with her letter.)

LADY DENISON: I wonder how the General is now. Do you think I ought to send Margery to him?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Looking up sharply.)* Certainly not. Leave him to Mr. Verreker.

LADY DENISON: *(Doubtfully.)* Mr. Verreker isn't always very successful with the General. He never seems to take him seriously. And the General hates that. But Margery can always manage him. *(Rising.)* Do you know where she is?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Irritably.)* With Mr. Hylton, let's hope. Do leave *her* in peace.

LADY DENISON: *(Sitting down again resignedly.)* Very well, Emily…Der Bruder, Des Bruders, Dem Bruder, Den Bruder, O—

(MARGERY and VERREKER enter from garden.)

LADY DENISON: Margery, will you please go to the library and see after the General? He's been quarrelling with Mrs. Horrocks.

VERREKER The General's not in the library now. We passed him a moment ago crossing the lawn.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Severely.)* I thought *you* were with Mr. Hylton, Margery.

MARGERY: *(Quite unconscious of the heinousness of this conduct.)* Mr. Hylton's correcting proofs. I've been to the kitchen garden—with Mr. Verreker—to order the vegetables for luncheon.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Tartly.)* I hardly think Mr. Verreker can have been of much assistance.

VERREKER: *(Blandly.)* On the contrary, I was invaluable. I prevented Miss Denison from ordering peas and substituted beans. It's too late for peas. Besides, I prefer beans. And I insisted on peaches. The gardener hesitated, but I was firm.

LADY DENISON: *(Persuasively.) Would* you mind being quite quiet all of you for the next ten minutes? Or I shall never know this declension in time for Miss Triggs. *You* might go back to the library, Emily, as the General has gone.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Rising.)* Well perhaps I shall be less disturbed there. *(Takes up unfinished letter.)* And you'd better go to the schoolroom and practise, Margery. You'll forget your music altogether if you aren't careful.

MARGERY: Very well, Aunt Emily.

(MRS. EVERSLEIGH returns to the library. LADY DENISON returns to her German grammar. MARGERY and VERREKER converse in confidential undertones. The effort is well meant, but if they talked at the top of their voices it could hardly interfere with her progress more.)

LADY DENISON: *(Murmurs.)* Die Schwester, Der Schwester, Der Schwester, Die Schwester, *O* Schwester. *(Aloud.)* You won't mind my going on with my German, will you, Mr. Verreker? I really *must* get it done.

VERREKER: *(Heartily.)* Not a bit. I *like* seeing other people work.

MARGERY: *(Laughing.)* Then you can stay and watch Mother while I go and practise.

VERREKER: I'll come and watch *you*.

MARGERY: *(Shaking her head.)* Oh no. I never allow anyone to be with me when I practise. On account of the wrong notes.

VERREKER: Well, don't practise then. Stay down here and talk.

MARGERY: And waste half the morning! Certainly not!

VERREKER: You needn't. You can work—at my handkerchief-case. You're taking an awful time over it.

MARGERY: What a shame! Why, I only began it two days ago, and it's half-finished.

VERREKER: Is it? Let me see.

MARGERY: *(Takes it out of basket.)* Look!

VERREKER: I say, it *is* getting on.

MARGERY: *(Looks at it contentedly.)* Yes. There are the initials. H. V. Aren't they nice and sprawly?

VERREKER: I say, it's really awfully nice of you to work it for me, Miss Denison.

MARGERY: *(Threading a needle.)* But I like working things for people.

VERREKER: Not for everybody, though?

MARGERY: Oh yes, if they want them. I'm making a whole lot of things for the Willises' bazaar at Christmas.

VERREKER: *(Disgusted.)* I hope you don't class me with a beastly bazaar?

MARGERY: It'll be a very nice bazaar. It's to pay off the debt on the Parish room.

(There is silence for a minute or two. MARGERY works away steadily at the handkerchief-case. VERREKER looks at her wonderingly.)

VERREKER: *(Genuinely curious.)* Miss Denison, don't you ever do *anything* to please yourself?

MARGERY: Of course I do. Lots of things.

VERREKER: Do you? I wish I could catch you at it.

MARGERY: *(Puzzled.)* What do you mean?

VERREKER: Why, you seem to me to spend your whole time looking after other people. All the morning you run round doing things for your mother.

MARGERY: I'm not "running round" now, am I?

VERREKER: No. Because you're making *me* a handkerchief-case. In the afternoon, if I ask you to come for a walk, you insist on taking Miss Triggs or that ridiculous old General, because it "wouldn't be kind not to ask them." I think that's the phrase? In the evening you play bezique to amuse Mrs. Horrocks. Don't you *occasionally* do something to amuse yourself?

MARGERY: *(Quite simply.)* I don't know. I've never thought about it.

VERREKER: That's just it! You've never thought about it! Well, I think it's not right. Nobody ought to be as unselfish as all that. It shows up the rest of us too much.

MARGERY: *(Laughing.)* How absurd you are.

VERREKER: I'm not absurd. Quite the contrary. *(Leaning back lazily in his chair as he makes this profession of faith.)* I like everyone to give his mind to getting a good time for himself in this wicked world. Then I know where I am. Of course, I don't mind his doing someone else a good turn now and then. But he oughtn't to overdo it. You *overdo* it.

(MISS TRIGGS opens the door on the right and pokes her head out of LADY DENISON'S room archly.)

MISS TRIGGS: I'm ready for you now, Lady Denison.

LADY DENISON: Very well. *(Rising dismally.)* I shall be in my room with Miss Triggs, Margery, if anyone wants me.

MARGERY: All right, Mother.

LADY DENISON: Der apfel, Des apfels, Dem apfel, Den apfel, *O* apfel. *(Repeats*

this to herself in a last desperate effort to imprint it on her memory as she disappears through the door on the right to join MISS TRIGGS.)

(There is a pause. MARGERY has been thinking over VERREKER's last remark gravely. She now takes him to task with charming seriousness.)

MARGERY: Mr. Verreker, why will you always pretend to be selfish and cynical? I'm sure you're not really.

VERREKER: I don't know about cynical, but I'm unquestionably selfish. I have no illusions whatever about that.

MARGERY: Then why don't you try to improve?

VERREKER: I don't want to improve. I'm quite contented to be as I am.

MARGERY: *(Rather shocked.)* Nobody can be that! We all have ideals of *some* kind.

VERREKER: *(Briskly.)* Only for other people. And they're usually great nonsense. If people would only give up bothering about ideals and face facts, what a much happier world this would be for all of us.

MARGERY: *(Earnestly.)* But that would be dreadful! Think what the world would lose! Think of all the saints and the martyrs who laid down their lives for ideals!

VERREKER: *(Equally in earnest.)* And think what a lot of harm they did!

MARGERY: *(Horrified.)* Mr. Verreker, you *can't mean* that! You must feel sometimes how splendid it would be to do something heroic, to lay down your life for a great cause, to make the world better.

VERREKER: *(Laughing.)* I don't want to make the world better. I think the world's all right as it is.

MARGERY: *(Astonished.)* But you can't *always* feel like that? There must be times when you feel that the world is full of suffering and injustice. That it's not all right, but all wrong.

VERREKER: *(Refusing to be impressed.)* Oh yes. When I'm not well, you mean?

MARGERY: *(Hurt.)* No, I don't. Seriously.

VERREKER: *(Thinks for a moment.)* Well, sometimes, perhaps—when I'm with *you*, for instance—I have a dim feeling that if we all put our backs into it we might improve things. But I struggle against it.

MARGERY: *(Wondering.)* Why struggle against it if you think it would make things better?

VERREKER: Because people who try to improve the world have rather an uncomfortable time, Miss Denison. And I've a great dislike of being uncomfortable.

MARGERY: Mr. Verreker!

VERREKER: Now you're shocked. But that's inevitable, I suppose. If one only knows enough about people one always does disapprove of them.

(At this point the conversation is interrupted by the entrance of HYLTON. MARGERY welcomes him with a smile. VERREKER, I am afraid, does not.)

MARGERY: Have you finished your proofs, Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON: For this morning.

MARGERY: Then will you come here and bring Mr. Verreker to a better frame of mind? His opinions are simply dreadful—if they *are* his opinions. You must convert him.

VERREKER: *(Rising.)* No. If I'm to be converted—which I sincerely hope will

not happen—I stipulate that it shall be by Miss Denison unaided. Two to one isn't fair. I shall go—unless Hylton does. *(Takes out cigarette case.)*

MARGERY: You're running away.

VERREKER: Yes—to smoke. *(Strolls out onto the terrace and then out into the garden.)*

(There is silence for a moment or two. Then MARGERY speaks thoughtfully, putting down her work and gazing straight before her.)

MARGERY: What a curious man Mr. Verreker is.

HYLTON: Is he?

MARGERY: Yes. He looks at things so strangely. I've never met anyone like him before.

HYLTON: In what way?

MARGERY: In what he thinks about life—if he does think it. He says he's selfish and isn't at all ashamed of it. He says ideals do more harm than good. And that he thinks the world would get along much better if only people would leave it alone and not keep trying to improve it. Have *you* ever met anyone who thought like that?

HYLTON: *(Lightly.)* Oh yes. It's a phase many men pass through.

MARGERY: *(Eagerly.)* But they do pass *through* it? They don't *stay* like that, I mean, do they?

HYLTON: It depends. Some men seem as if they were born blind—like kittens. Soul-blind, I mean. They have no perception at all of the spiritual side of things. Then one day something opens the eyes of their soul, and for the first time they *see.*

MARGERY: What kind of thing?

HYLTON: Who can say? There are many ways in which a man's soul may be awakened. A word may do it sometimes—a line in a poem, a sentence in a book. Or perhaps, someone comes into his life, someone who is kind to him or loves him, and then the eyes of his soul are opened.

MARGERY: *(Enthusiastic.)* How wonderful!

HYLTON: *(Gravely.)* Yes. But terrible, too. For perhaps no one comes, or the person who might have helped them is careless or indifferent, and then they may remain blind always.

MARGERY: *(Earnestly.)* But Mr. Verreker—and people like him—*only* need someone to come and open their eyes?

HYLTON: Yes. Verreker's quite a good fellow, I expect, underneath. He'll turn out all right if only he falls into good hands.

MARGERY: But if he falls into bad hands?

HYLTON: *(Sadly.)* Then he may never make anything of his life. But it won't be because there was no good in him. Only because no one came to bring it out.

MARGERY: *(Thoughtfully.)* I see.

HYLTON: *(The optimist in him coming to the surface again.)* It's astonishing what a lot of good there is in every man if only you look deep enough for it. Men seem selfish and heartless and indifferent on the surface and all the while there's a soul in every one of them! I could give you hundreds of instances from my work among the very poor, cases of people who seemed hopelessly brutish and degraded doing kind things and generous things that would seem incredible if they were not true.

MARGERY: *(Kindling at his enthusiasm.)* How splendid! But that was *you*, Mr.

Hylton. You've such a wonderful influence with people. *You* must make Mr. Verreker *see.*

HYLTON: *(Smiling.)* He didn't seem very anxious to listen to *me*, Miss Denison. You must try what *you* can do.

(Enter ANSON. She looks pale, and her eyes are suspiciously red. She draws back nervously on seeing who is in the room.)

ANSON: *(Hesitating.)* I beg pardon, miss. I thought I might find her ladyship here.

MARGERY: *(Looking up, surprised.)* Mother is in her room, Anson. But I think she's busy just now. Can *I* do anything?

ANSON: No thank you, miss. I wanted to speak to her ladyship. *(Going.)*

MARGERY: You can see if she's engaged, if you like.

ANSON: Thank you, miss. *(Crosses rapidly to the door of LADY DENISON's room and opens it.)* Can I speak to you, my lady?

LADY DENISON: *(Off.)* Yes. Come in, Anson. What is it?

(ANSON disappears into LADY DENISON's room, closing the door after her.)

MARGERY: *(Turning to HYLTON with a smile.)* Poor Mother. I expect she was delighted to be interrupted. I know *I* always was when *I* was learning German.

HYLTON: Is that your mother's maid? She looks as if she were in trouble of some kind. Is anything the matter?

MARGERY: I don't know. She's not looked herself for some time. I asked her about it a week ago. I wanted her to see the doctor. But she wouldn't.

HYLTON: Has she been with you long?

MARGERY: Four years. I daresay it's nothing serious. Servants are so silly about what they eat. And then they wonder why they aren't well. Or she may have had some quarrel with one of the other servants. Do you find *your* servants quarrel among themselves, Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON: No. You see I only keep one.

MARGERY: I sometimes wish *we* did! Only last week William actually gave Mother notice just because he couldn't get on with one of the others. But Mother told you about that, didn't she?

HYLTON: No.

MARGERY: She meant to. I suppose she forgot.

(Reenter ANSON, crying bitterly, followed by LADY DENISON, much flustered.)

LADY DENISON: There! There! Anson. *Do* try and control yourself. There's no use going on like that. Margery, will you go and find Aunt Emily for me? She's in the library, I think. I want her advice about something. And don't come back, dear, for a little.

MARGERY: Very well, Mother. *(Goes to find MRS. EVERSLEIGH, after a puzzled glance at her mother and ANSON.)*

HYLTON: *(Rising.)* Perhaps I'd better?…

LADY DENISON: *(Fussily.)* No, no! Please stay, Mr. Hylton. I shall want *your* advice, too.

HYLTON: Of course, if I can be of any use…

(Reseats himself. LADY DENISON sits also. A silence, broken only by the snufflings of poor ANSON.)

LADY DENISON: *(Half-irritable, half-plaintive.)* You'd better sit down, Anson. And would you *please* not snuffle like that if you can possibly help it. It *can't* do any good, and the sound is most distressing.

ANSON: Very well, my lady. *(Tries unsuccessfully to subdue her sobs.)*

LADY DENISON: *(Her nerves all on edge.)* I do wish Emily would come. Surely Margery ought to have found her by this time.

(MRS. EVERSLEIGH enters.)

LADY DENISON: Ah! here she is. *(Breaking out.)* Emily, a dreadful thing has happened! I thought you would advise me. *(Hesitates.)*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Testily.) Well*, Muriel. What is it?

LADY DENISON: *(With a miserable effort to pull herself together.)* Anson, my maid. *(Wanders off again.)* You remember Anson. She came to me from Lady Carberry.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Yes, yes. I know. Well?

LADY DENISON: *(Shying frantically at the subject, and taking refuge in irrelevant detail.)* I was in my room, doing my German. Fortunately Miss Triggs had gone out into the garden for a few minutes while I was trying to learn the second declension. Then Anson came in. She was evidently upset about something, and looked ready to cry. In fact, she *did* cry. She's been crying ever since.

(Fresh tears from ANSON.)

LADY DENISON: Oh, *please* Anson, don't begin again. Or if you do, make as little noise as you can.

ANSON: *(Sniffing dismally.)* Yes, my lady.

LADY DENISON: *(Still struggling desperately to postpone the moment when she must come to the point.)* I asked her what was the matter, and she said she wanted to give notice. I was very much astonished, because Anson has been with me four years and has never given me notice before. So I asked her why. And then she said that she and Soames…well, in fact, that Soames had—

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Interrupting.)* Muriel! If you are about to say what I suppose you are about to say, wouldn't it be better if Mr. Hylton—?

(HYLTON rises again.)

LADY DENISON: *(Almost weeping.)* No, Emily. I asked Mr. Hylton particularly to remain. I shall want his advice about this. I shall want everybody's advice. Besides, it's partly his fault. For if it weren't for Mr. Hylton I should never have engaged Soames.

HYLTON: *(Surprised.)* I didn't know—

LADY DENISON: Oh yes. Soames had a *very* bad character from his last place. In fact, no character at all—which is worse. He was with the Matthisons before he came to me, and Lady Frances gave the most dreadful accounts of him when Margery was staying with her. She said the champagne had disappeared in the most remarkable manner. And as for his *book*, no one could make head or tail of it. I'm not sure there wasn't something about the plate, too. Anyhow, she sent him away—without a character, as I said. And I always think that so hard for a servant. Don't you, Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: To have no character. Very.

LADY DENISON: Well, of course, he couldn't get another place. And Lady Frances got a letter from him while Margery was there, saying he was almost destitute. So Margery thought he ought to be given another chance. Mr. Hylton is always saying people ought to be given another chance. Aren't you, Mr. Hylton? And as Lady Frances didn't seem willing

to have him back and Wilkins was leaving me just then—on account of Thomas—I engaged him. I wish I hadn't now.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: And now Soames has—?

LADY DENISON: Yes. *(Lamentably.)* And I think it's most wicked of him. Anson has always been a good girl, and her mother is a most respectable woman. However, she is willing to forgive Anson and have her home, I'm glad to say, so that will be all right. *(Endeavouring to look on the bright side of things.)* She has no father, fortunately.

(Fresh sobs from ANSON.)

LADY DENISON: Oh, Anson, not *again!*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Impatiently.)* Hadn't you better send Anson to her room while we decide what is to be done? There's no use keeping her here if she can't control herself.

LADY DENISON: *(Meekly.)* I thought perhaps you might want to ask her something about all this, Emily? Or Mr. Hylton?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: There's nothing to ask. She's told you her story. Now we must send for Soames and hear what *he* has to say. I suppose we must let him give us *his* version before you dismiss him.

LADY DENISON: *(Much depressed at the prospect.)* I suppose so. But it's all very painful. Ring the bell, please, Anson, and then go away and cry somewhere else.

ANSON: Yes, my lady. *(Rings the bell and then goes out, snuffling to the last.)*

(Pause.)

HYLTON: *(Breaking silence.)* I'm extremely sorry, Lady Denison, if anything I have said has caused all this trouble, either to you or that poor girl. I never dreamed such a thing could occur.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(With bitter politeness.)* Really? Then you must be singularly lacking in imagination, Mr. Hylton. It seems to me the logical outcome of your theories—when applied to domestic service.

HYLTON: *(Meekly.)* Of course, there's a danger. But all reforms have an element of danger in them.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Triumphantly.)* Then why reform?

HYLTON: But without reform all progress would be impossible! The world would simply stagnate. We *must* risk *something.*

LADY DENISON: *(Dolorously.)* Well, I'd so much rather not have risked Anson. She was such an excellent maid.

(Enter SOAMES. For a full minute no one speaks. He looks inquiringly from one to the other, but his demeanor is perfectly respectful. Finally, as the silence is growing oppressive, he breaks it.)

SOAMES: Did you ring, my lady?

LADY DENISON: *(Flustered.)* Yes… What is this, Soames, that Anson tells me about you?

SOAMES: *(Not a muscle of his face moves.)* What *has* she told you, my lady?

LADY DENISON: That while we were in London three months ago, within a month of your coming to me, in fact, you…And now she's expecting a baby in the spring!

SOAMES: *(Bows.)* That is so, my lady.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Exasperated at the unruffled composure of the man.)* Well! Have you nothing else to say?

SOAMES: *(After a moment, during which he seems to be considering the point.)* No, madam—except, of course, that I'm very sorry this should have occurred.

LADY DENISON: *(Indignantly.)* Is that all?

SOAMES: *(After another moment's thought.)* I think that is all, my lady.

LADY DENISON: Of course, you're prepared to make all the amends in your power to poor Anson?

SOAMES: *(Bows.)* Of course, my lady.

LADY DENISON: Very well, then. You must marry her.

SOAMES: *(Respectfully.)* I'm afraid I can't do *that*, my lady.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: There, Mr. Hylton!

LADY DENISON: *(Indignant again.)* Nonsense, Soames. You will be acting very wickedly if you do anything else. Anson is a good girl. A very good girl. She is the best maid I ever had, and I'm very sorry to part with her. But you have brought this disgrace on her, poor thing, and you must certainly marry her.

SOAMES: *(Still perfectly respectful.)* I beg pardon, my lady. I should be perfectly willing to marry Anson. She seems a very respectable young woman, as you say. Unfortunately, I am already married.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Scandalised.)* What!

SOAMES: *(Turning to her.)* I have a wife already, madam—I am sorry to say.

LADY DENISON: *(Helplessly.)* Really, this is most unlucky. Mr. Hylton, can *you* suggest anything?

HYLTON: As things stand, I'm afraid there's nothing to suggest. We must do our best for this poor girl, of course *(More sternly.)* and Soames must help us in any way he can. That's all that I can think of.

SOAMES: *(Snubbing his interference with the most crushing politeness.)* Anything *Lady Denison* thinks right, sir, I shall be happy to fall in with.

LADY DENISON: *(Weakly.)* Very well. That will do then, Soames.

SOAMES: Thank you, my lady. *(Bows and goes out, preserving his dignity to the last.)*

(Everybody seems to breathe more freely when his imposing presence is withdrawn.)

LADY DENISON: *(Mournfully.)* Poor Anson. I am really dreadfully sorry about her. It's such a terrible thing to happen to a girl.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: If any *other* of your converts are engaging their servants on philanthropic lines, Mr. Hylton, you had better caution them to choose single men.

LADY DENISON: *(Cheered at this reflection.)* James, I'm glad to say, *is* unmarried.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: James?

LADY DENISON: The boy who helps in the garden. But, then, he's only sixteen.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Tck!… *(Pause.)* Of course Soames must be sent away.

LADY DENISON: *(Sighs.)* I suppose so.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Even Mr. Hylton must see that.

HYLTON: *(Thoughtfully.)* I'm not sure.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Not sure! After this disgraceful affair!

HYLTON: I am thinking of the future, Mrs. Eversleigh, not of the past. I'm very

sorry for what has happened to poor Anson, sorrier than I can say. But that can't be altered now. What is past is past. The question is how are we to help Soames?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Exasperated.)* But we don't *want* to help Soames. Soames has behaved abominably.

HYLTON: *(Quietly.)* That's no reason for not helping him, is it?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Gasps.)* It certainly seems so to *me.*

HYLTON: Surely not? Surely it's always our business to help anyone if we can, whatever he may have done. And in this case we *can* help Soames. If he's sent away now he may be absolutely ruined. You see, it's the second place he's had to leave without a character.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Acidly.)* Do I understand you to consider that in his favour, Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON: *(Mildly.)* No. But it gives him an added claim on our forbearance, doesn't it? Since it makes it more difficult for him to make a fresh start.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(With relentless logic.)* Then the more a servant disgraces himself the more we are bound to help him? And if he only does it often enough I suppose you'd pension him?

HYLTON: *(Gravely.)* I would still try to help him, whatever he had done.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Rubbish!

LADY DENISON: Hush, Emily!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I beg your pardon, Mr. Hylton, but really this is quite preposterous. It's trying to regulate one's life by a theory instead of by the light of common sense.

LADY DENISON: *(Worried.)* It certainly is rather confusing, you must admit, Mr. Hylton.

HYLTON: *(Gently.)* I think my view is defensible even from the commonsense standpoint—though it's not a standpoint I set much store by. What I want—what we all want, don't we?—is to prevent Soames from sinking into destitution and so perhaps into crime.

LADY DENISON: I don't want him to do *that*, of course.

HYLTON: The only way to prevent it is to get him some employment. Unhappily, he is probably unfitted for anything but domestic service. The only thing to do, therefore, is to find him a place, and give him a chance of retrieving his character. I would willingly engage him myself if I could, but my establishment has no place for a highly trained butler—or indeed, for a manservant at all. But if Lady Denison would keep him on—

LADY DENISON: *(Protesting.)* Oh no, I couldn't do that.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I should think not, indeed!

HYLTON: *(Earnestly.)* It needn't be for long. Say a year. If at the end of that time his work and his conduct generally have been satisfactory, Lady Denison can then send him away with a character, and he'll be able to get another place.

LADY DENISON: But I shan't want to send him away if his conduct is satisfactory.

HYLTON: *(Persuasively.)* Then why not try the experiment? Of course, I'm now putting this on the lowest grounds, the commonsense grounds. Morally it needs no defence. One should always forgive wrongdoing, shouldn't one?

LADY DENISON: I can't think *that*, Mr. Hylton! Wicked people must be punished. If they weren't it would be so discouraging for good people.

HYLTON: Wicked people are only weak people, Lady Denison. If they were strong they would resist temptation. But they are weak, and they yield to it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(With decision.)* If Soames is unable to resist temptation of *this* kind, I think Muriel had certainly better discharge him, on account of the other maids.

HYLTON: I don't think he'll offend in this way again. He's had a lesson.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: He had a lesson at the Matthisons'.

HYLTON: And profited by it. He has been quite honest since he came to you, hasn't he, Lady Denison?

LADY DENISON: I believe so.

HYLTON: *(Triumphantly.)* Very well, then. The experiment answered in that case.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Coming back resolutely to her old point.)* Oh, come, Mr. Hylton, we must be *practical*. Of course, this idea about being kind to unpleasant people and worthless people, and, in fact, to everybody one doesn't like and oughtn't to like, *sounds* very nice. But it's not *practical*.

HYLTON: *(Giving MRS. EVERSLEIGH up in despair.)* Well, Lady Denison, it's for you to decide.

LADY DENISON: *(Piteously.)* That's just it. I do so hate deciding things. If only I could ask Margery.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Certainly not.

HYLTON: *(Earnestly.)* It may save a soul.

LADY DENISON: Do you really think that?

(HYLTON nods.)

LADY DENISON: How very annoying! However, if that's so, I suppose he must stay. *(Sighs.)*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Muriel!

LADY DENISON: *(Goaded.)* Well, Emily, what *can* I do? If Mr. Hylton thinks so.

HYLTON: *(With splendid optimism.)* I do think so. Thank you so much, Lady Denison. I'm sure you'll never regret it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I'm quite sure she will. And I think it's very wrong of you, Mr. Hylton, to make my sister-in-law behave in this way. She doesn't like it.

HYLTON: You exaggerate my influence, Mrs. Eversleigh. It is Lady Denison's own goodness of heart that makes her want to help people. Without that I should be powerless.

LADY DENISON: *(Breaking into a smile of content. If you stroke LADY DENISON she purrs at once.)* How nice of you to say that, Mr. Hylton! But you always say the right thing. I was really feeling dreadfully dispirited about all this, and you've driven it all away. There's nothing like *tact*, is there?

(GENERAL BONSOR wanders in from the garden humming a tune.)

LADY DENISON: Is that you, General? Have you been in the garden with Mrs. Horrocks?

GENERAL BONSOR: *(With icy dignity.)* I have *not*, Lady Denison.

LADY DENISON: *(Flurried.)* Oh no, to be sure, I forgot. I mean, I remember…just so.

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Severely.)* I have been in the rose garden smoking a cigar.

LADY DENISON: *(Nervously.)* That's so kind of you. It's so good for the roses.

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Refusing to be propitiated.)* Where Mrs. Horrocks is I have no idea. *(Opens the door and stalks out, head in air.)*

LADY DENISON: *(Much concerned.)* Dear me, why *did* I say that! Of course, I oughtn't even to have *mentioned* Mrs. Horrocks. But I'd forgotten all about their quarrel this morning. This affair of Soames quite put it out of my head. And now I suppose the General will be offended. Really, what with quarrels among one's visitors and scandal in the servants' hall, life is hardly worth living.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Blandly.)* Mr. Hylton's system!

HYLTON: *(Rising.)* Shall I go and pacify the General?

LADY DENISON: *(Clutching at a straw.)* If you would, Mr. Hylton. It really is scarcely safe to leave him alone just now, in case Mrs. Horrocks should come in.

(HYLTON nods, and goes out to soothe the GENERAL.)

LADY DENISON: *(Sighs.)* It's been a very *tiring* morning, hasn't it, Emily?

(MISS TRIGGS puts her head in from LADY DENISON's room. She speaks with deadly politeness, the politeness of the boa constrictor to the rabbit.)

MISS TRIGGS: I've been waiting for you nearly twenty minutes, Lady Denison. Is that declension ready now?

LADY DENISON: *(Flurried again.)* Oh, dear, I'm afraid not. I've really had no time to attend to it since you left me, Miss Triggs.

MISS TRIGGS: *(Coming into the room, apparently unable to believe her ears.)* No *time?*

LADY DENISON: *(Volubly.)* No. I'm *so* sorry. I was called away on urgent business. Most urgent business. And it's no good trying to do anything before luncheon now, is it? It will be ready in two or three minutes.

(An awful pause.)

MISS TRIGGS: *(Words softer than butter, yet very swords.)* I am afraid it is useless for me to attempt to teach you German, Lady Denison, if you are unwilling to give even the *small* amount of time I ask to studying it.

LADY DENISON: *(Meekly.)* But really, Miss Triggs—

MISS TRIGGS: Apologies are unnecessary. I am accustomed to be treated in this way. It is the experience of all women, I believe, who earn their living by education. *(Turns towards door on the right.)*

LADY DENISON I assure you—

MISS TRIGGS: You need not. I *quite* understand. We will abandon our lesson until later in the day, when you may have leisure to apply yourself to it. *(Sweeps out into the hall, hugging her grievance to the last.)*

LADY DENISON: *(Almost in tears.)* Now *she's* offended. Really, it's *too* bad!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Mr. Hylton's system!

LADY DENISON: I'd no idea people who taught German were so sensitive. I ought never to have said I would learn it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Wrathfully.)* You ought never to have asked Miss Triggs here at all. Nor any of these people. Mrs. Horrocks, General Bonsor, Mr. Verreker. They're all impossible.

LADY DENISON: *(Protesting feebly.)* I don't see what's the matter with Mr. Verreker. *He's* not been doing anything tiresome, has he?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Wondering what fresh folly her sister-in-law is going to commit.)* What are you going to do?

LADY DENISON: Dismiss Soames!

(LADY DENISON rings—and the curtain falls.)

ACT THREE

Scene: Still the DENISONS' drawing room. Time, an hour later. When the curtain rises the stage is empty. LADY DENISON, MRS. EVERSLEIGH, MRS. HORROCKS, MISS TRIGGS, MARGERY, HYLTON, VERREKER, and GENERAL BONSOR troop in from luncheon. The GENERAL's voice is heard booming across the hall as he loses himself in another of his interminable stories, even before he actually reaches the room.

GENERAL BONSOR: …It was at Jubbulpore it happened. We were up there after Pig. Travers was there, I remember, and Hindley, of the 106th. *(Entering.)* No, not Hindley. He died the year before. Bellairs. First-rate chap Bellairs. In the Police. I'll tell you a story about *him* someday. He married Molly Henderson, daughter of old Henderson, the judge. Fat Henderson we used to call him because he was so stout. Well, as I was saying, Travers and I were *alone* together—

VERREKER: *(To MARGERY.)* Poor Travers!

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Wheeling round.) What*, sir!

VERREKER: Nothing.

GENERAL BONSOR: Did I hear you remark, *Poor* Travers?

VERREKER: I hope not, General. You were not intended to.

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Scorning this evasion.) Did* you remark it, sir?

LADY DENISON: *(Nervously.)* I think you must have misunderstood Mr. Verreker, General.

MRS. HORROCKS: *(In loud, grating tones, not looking at the GENERAL, but seeming to address the company at large.)* And, anyhow, the subject is scarcely worth pursuing, is it? Unless we are to be kept listening to this story the *whole* afternoon.

GENERAL BONSOR: I had not intended to detain Mrs. Horrocks. *(Glares.)*

MARGERY: *(Coming to the rescue.)* Don't you think we'd better all go out for a walk while the sunshine lasts? It's a pity not to make the most of it.

LADY DENISON: *(Who has been waiting in vain for a moment to speak to her daughter.)* Margery.

MARGERY: Yes, Mother. In a moment. Mrs. Horrocks, you'll come, won't you?

MRS. HORROCKS: Thank you. I shall be delighted.

MARGERY: Miss Triggs?

(MISS TRIGGS bows graciously.)

MARGERY: General?

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Decidedly, having noted that MRS. HORROCKS is to be of the party.)* No, thank ye.

MARGERY: Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON: I'm afraid I must stay at home and finish my proofs.

LADY DENISON: Margery, I want to speak to you before—What is it?

(This to WILLIAM, who has entered a moment before with letters on a salver.)

WILLIAM: The post, my lady.

(LADY DENISON takes her letters.)

WILLIAM: And could Mrs. Meredith speak to you for a moment?

LADY DENISON: *(Harassed.)* Oh, very well.

(LADY DENISON looks for a moment towards her daughter, but finding her still absorbed in the duty of peacemaking, gives up the attempt to speak to her in despair and goes out. MARGERY is quite unconscious of her mother's agitation, as she sat too far from her at luncheon to notice that she was not in her usual spirits, and, moreover, when you are practising True Hospitality, depression at the luncheon table is not sufficiently uncommon to excite remark.)

MARGERY: That makes three. Who else?

WILLIAM: *(To GENERAL BONSOR.)* A letter for you, sir.

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Taking it.)* Thank ye.

(WILLIAM goes out.)

GENERAL BONSOR: Excuse me. *(Opens it and begins to read.)*

MARGERY: Will you come, Aunt Emily?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: No, thanks. I am going to drive with your mother.

MARGERY: Very well. Hugh, four. That'll be all.

VERREKER: *(Chaffing her.)* You don't *ask* whether *I* want to come.

MARGERY: *(With mock severity.)* You've got to come whether you like it or not. As a penance.

VERREKER: All right—if it's clearly understood that it's a penance. I'd rather like a walk.

MARGERY: Let's all go and get ready, then. Come, Mrs. Horrocks. Meet in the hall in five minutes.

(All go out save HYLTON, the GENERAL, and MRS. EVERSLEIGH. MRS. EVERSLEIGH picks up a book which she is in the middle of, HYLTON glances through an article in the Fortnightly. *The GENERAL is reading his letter.)*

HYLTON: This article in the *Fortnightly* on Farm Colonies is worth reading, Mrs. Eversleigh.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Declining the suggestion firmly.)* Thank you. I've had *quite* enough philanthropy lately without that. *(Returns to her book.)*

(GENERAL BONSOR speaks with an emphasis which makes MRS. EVERSLEIGH positively jump.)

GENERAL BONSOR: Well!!!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Irritably.)* Really, General Bonsor, these sudden exclamations are most disconcerting. Is anything the matter?

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Too full of his subject even to notice the rebuke.)* Mrs. Eversleigh, *is* Lady Denison aware of the character of that young man?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Bored.)* Of Mr. Hylton?

GENERAL BONSOR: No! No! Of that young man who has just left the room. What's his name? Verreker.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Interested at once.)* I don't know. You'd better ask her.

GENERAL BONSOR: I shall certainly do so. I venture to think she is *not* aware of it. I venture to think that when she has read what my old friend Nicholson, Toby Nicholson, says about him *(Taps letter fiercely)* she will scarcely consider him a fit person to invite to meet *me!*

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(With elaborate irony.)* I shouldn't build on *that* if I were

you. My sister-in-law has peculiar views about hospitality.

(But the irony is completely wasted on the GENERAL, as he is not in the secrets of the HYLTONIAN system of philanthropy.)

GENERAL BONSOR: Can you tell me where I shall find her?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: She'll be back in a moment, I believe. She only went to speak to the housekeeper. Here she is.

(And, in fact, LADY DENISON reenters at this moment, but her interview with the housekeeper seems to have been of a depressing kind, for she looks more woebegone than ever.)

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Breaking out.)* Lady Denison—

LADY DENISON: *(To MRS. EVERSLEIGH, fussily.)* Emily, the *cook* wants to leave now. She has found out about Anson, and says she can't remain with me after the month. I told her Soames was leaving, but she said… *(Suddenly becoming conscious that GENERAL BONSOR is in the room, and is burning to speak to her.)* I beg your pardon, General. I thought Emily was alone.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(With icy distinctness.)* General Bonsor has some news to communicate to you about Mr. Verreker. I needn't say of an unfavourable character.

LADY DENISON: Emily! *(Collapses.)*

HYLTON: *(Rising.)* Perhaps I'd better—

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Grimly.)* On the contrary. Mr. Hylton had better remain. It's all *his* doing, as usual.

HYLTON: *(Puzzled.)* Mine?

LADY DENISON: *(Almost distracted with anxiety.)* Never mind that now, Emily. But, General, if you *have* anything unpleasant to say, *will* you say it as quickly as possible? Then we shall get it over.

GENERAL BONSOR: I will do so, Lady Denison. *(Clears his throat.)* I have just received a letter from my friend, Colonel Nicholson, who commands the Munster Regiment…Nicholson is an old friend of mine. I met him first at Poonah in '72…or was it '73—

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *Please* do not bother about *dates*, General Bonsor! If you will *kindly* come to the *point*.

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Rearing like an old warhorse under this affront.)* Certainly, Mrs. Eversleigh…I wrote to Colonel Nicholson a week ago. And as I happened to hear Verreker say he had been in the Munsters, I mentioned that he was staying down here… *(Off again.)* The Munsters are the Old Forty-Third you know. The Fighting Forty-Third. I remember them in the old days when Tom Ferguson was in command. Ferguson and I—

LADY DENISON: *(Pathetically.)* General, *would* you mind leaving that part out and telling us what Colonel Nicholson said about Mr. Verreker—if he said anything? It's really important.

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Stiffly.)* I was about to do so—when you interrupted me, Lady Denison. I will do so now…Colonel Nicholson says…Where the deuce does he say it? I'll give it you in his own words. *(Fumbles for glasses.)*

(LADY DENISON is nearly wild with nervous impatience.)

GENERAL BONSOR: "I'm surprised to hear you've got young Verreker staying with you." *(Looks up at LADY DENISON.)* …He means with *you*, of course. *(Returns to letter.)* "I thought people fought rather shy of asking him. Small blame to 'em. He got into an ugly scrape while he was with us. Spent money belonging to the mess which he couldn't pay back. Might have gone to prison if

the thing hadn't been hushed up. Had to send in his papers. Deuced ugly business altogether. Old Wakley, whom you remember at Dum Dum …" *(Looking up again.)* That's all.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Feeling the situation to be beyond her powers of comment.) There*, Mr. Hylton!

HYLTON: *(Completely fogged.)* What is it, Mrs. Eversleigh? I'm really quite in the dark.

LADY DENISON: Hush, Emily. You forget Mr. Hylton doesn't know yet. Nobody knows. *(To the GENERAL, with an earnestness absurdly out of proportion to the importance of the request.)* General, would you mind leaving us with Mr. Hylton for a few minutes? My sister-in-law and I would like to consult him. We are *very* much obliged to you for letting us hear the letter—and would you please go at once?

GENERAL BONSOR: Certainly. *(Goes out into the garden, much offended.)*

(The moment he is gone, LADY DENISON turns to HYLTON and pours out her lamentable tale.)

LADY DENISON: Mr. Hylton, what is to be done? You heard what General Bonsor said about Mr. Verreker just now? Mr. Verreker proposed to my daughter this morning and she accepted him.

HYLTON: *(Horrified.)* Impossible!

LADY DENISON: *(Dolefully.)* I wish it were. Margery came and told us about it just before luncheon. Of course I was most indignant, and meant to tell her at once that I couldn't think of allowing it, but the luncheon gong rang, and I've had no opportunity of speaking to her since. And it's all your fault, Mr. Hylton, as Emily says, for if it hadn't been for you I should never have asked Mr. Verreker to the house. I really knew nothing about him, and only did it out of kindness. And now the General tells us this!

HYLTON: *(Much moved.)* Lady Denison, I can't say how distressed I am that this has occurred. I would have done anything to prevent it.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I'm glad to find there are limits even to *your* toleration, Mr. Hylton.

HYLTON: *(Indignantly.)* Surely you never supposed I could *approve* of such a marriage?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I don't know. You champion Miss Triggs as a visitor—and Soames as a butler. Why not Mr. Verreker as a son-in-law?

HYLTON: *(Distressed.)* You can't really think that, Mrs. Eversleigh. Knowing what I now know about Verreker how could I possibly think him a fit husband for a girl like Miss Denison?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Shrugging her shoulders.)* Well, well, you don't think so. That's the main thing. The question is, what is to be done?

LADY DENISON: Of course I shall forbid the engagement. I meant to do so before. But this puts it absolutely out of the question.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: And Mr. Hylton must use his influence with Margery. It's the least he can do.

HYLTON: Anything I can do, Mrs. Eversleigh, you may be quite sure will be done.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: And let's hope she'll prove amenable for everybody's sake.

HYLTON: *(Confidently.)* I've no fears on *that* score. When Miss Denison learns Verreker's true character she won't *wish*

to marry him any longer. It would be impossible.

LADY DENISON: *(Eagerly.)* Yes. Wouldn't it! It's not as if Margery were an *unprincipled* girl or a *bad* girl in any way. She's a very *good* girl. And a *religious* girl. And so she'll do what we tell her.

HYLTON: *(Who has been pacing restlessly about, and is now by the open French window, turns round sharply.)* Here *is* Miss Denison, coming across the lawn. With Verreker.

LADY DENISON: *(Feeling that this is the last straw.)* With Mr. Verreker? *How* unfortunate!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I don't see that it matters. He would have to be told what we think about him in any case. Why not now?

LADY DENISON: *(Flustered.)* Very well. You must help me, Mr. Hylton. I'm so unaccustomed to having to manage Margery. She generally manages me.

(MARGERY comes in from the terrace. VERREKER limps by her side, leaning a little on her arm. MARGERY is so full of VERREKER's mishap that she is quite unconscious of the frigidity with which it is received by her audience.)

MARGERY: Is that you, Mother? Poor Hugh has sprained his ankle. *(To VERREKER.)* Be careful of that step. *(To her mother again.)* Isn't it unfortunate? He slipped as we were going down the bank in the old spinney. I sent the others on, and brought him back by the short way across the lawn. *(To VERREKER.)* Is it hurting much?

VERREKER: Oh no. It's nothing.

MARGERY: Sit down here. *(Drags up sofa.)* And you must put your foot up and give it a complete rest. And if it's not better this evening we'll send for Dr. Jenkins. *(To LADY DENISON.)* Wasn't it lucky we hadn't got farther from the house when it happened, Mother? It's so bad to walk with a sprain.

VERREKER: It's not a sprain really, Margery. Just a twist. That's all.

LADY DENISON: *(Sternly.) Will* you please not call my daughter Margery, Mr. Verreker?

MARGERY: *(Astonished.)* Not call me Margery? But Mother, we're *engaged!*

LADY DENISON: You are *not* engaged, Margery. I cannot allow you to be engaged—at least, not to Mr. Verreker.

MARGERY: *(Still more astonished.)* Why not, Mother?

LADY DENISON: He knows quite well. And I think he's not behaved honourably in asking you to be engaged to him. When you know his true character you will think so too.

MARGERY: Do you mean about his leaving the army?

LADY DENISON: Yes.

MARGERY: But I know about that.

LADY DENISON: I don't think you do. Not *all* about it. You imagine, as I did, that he left the army because he had been foolish or got into debt or something. It was not that. Mr. Verreker left the army for a far more serious reason, which you know nothing about.

MARGERY: Oh yes, I do, Mother dear. Hugh told me all about it this morning.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: He *told* you!

MARGERY: Yes. Before he asked me to marry him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Really!

LADY DENISON: *(Bewildered.)* Margery! It's impossible. You would never have accepted him if he had told you. Mr. Verreker is not a fit person for any girl to marry. He is dishonest.

MARGERY: *(Laying hand instinctively on VERREKER's shoulder.)* Mother!

LADY DENISON: He spent money that didn't belong to him, money that had been entrusted to him.

MARGERY: *(Bravely.)* I know. And when the time came he couldn't pay it back. He told me all that quite fully before he proposed to me. I thought it was very honourable of him.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Honourable!

MARGERY: Yes. Wasn't it honourable? To tell me, I mean. He might have said nothing about it, or at least concealed the worst part hoping we should never find out. But he didn't. He told me everything. *(Softly.)* I think that was partly what made me say "yes."

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Margery! You must be out of your senses.

MARGERY: Why? It's all over now, quite over and done with. What is past is past.

(HYLTON starts guiltily as he recognises this fatal phrase.)

MARGERY: It happened four years ago. Surely we might forget it now?

LADY DENISON: No, Margery. A thing like this can never be forgotten.

MARGERY: I can't think that. One should always forgive wrongdoing, shouldn't one? And if one forgives, why not forget?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Rubbish!

LADY DENISON: Mr. Verreker, I must speak very seriously to my daughter about this. But there's no need for *you* to stay if you'd rather not. It would only be painful for you to hear. Would you rather leave us for a little?

VERREKER: *(Calmly.)* Thank you, Lady Denison. I don't mind. *(Settles himself more comfortably on his sofa.)*

(Pause.)

MARGERY: *(Gently.)* Mother, aren't you all being rather hard on poor Hugh? We all do things we're ashamed of sometimes. Not quite the same things as this perhaps, but still *wrong* things. And if we're sorry, and try not to do them again, oughtn't that to be enough?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Snaps.)* No!

MARGERY: *(Confidently.)* I'm sure Mr. Hylton thinks so.

HYLTON: No, Miss Denison. In this matter I agree with Mrs. Eversleigh.

MARGERY: Mr. Hylton!

HYLTON: Your mother has told you what she wishes. I think you should obey her. It is your duty.

(Pause.)

MARGERY: *(Slowly.)* Of course, one should obey one's parents I know…But there are other duties as well.

HYLTON: *(Earnestly.)* Miss Denison, I've no right to speak to you about this, or to urge you in any way. And if you resent it I cannot complain. But the friendship I feel for you and your mother, the kindness you have always shown me, makes me risk that. Break off this engagement. Break it off, I beg of you. It is impossible that a girl like you should be happy with such a man as Mr. Verreker.

MARGERY: *(Quite simply.)* But one shouldn't only think of *happiness* when one marries, should one?

HYLTON: What do you mean?

MARGERY: I mean there are other things. One would like to be happy, of course. But other things are more important. Helping people, for instance.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Outraged.)* Are you going to marry Mr. Verreker because you want to *help* him?

MARGERY: *(Eagerly.)* Of course. This morning when Mr. Hylton and I were talking about Hugh, he said there was so much that was good in him that only needed bringing out. That the eyes of his soul had not been opened yet. And he said that if he fell into good hands he would be all right, but if he fell into bad hands he might go on being careless and indifferent always. *(Brightly.)* So I thought if he married me I might prevent him from falling into bad hands.

HYLTON: *(Much distressed.)* But when I was talking to you about Mr. Verreker this morning I never dreamed of your *marrying* him.

MARGERY: Nor did I—then. But afterwards, when he asked me, I remembered. And so I said yes. I'm sure I did right. *(Lays hand on VERREKER's.)*

HYLTON: *(At his wits' end.)* Miss Denison, this is terrible. I assure you what you are doing is not right but wrong. It is quite right that you should want to help Mr. Verreker, of course. But it is not right that you should marry him.

MARGERY: But perhaps it is only by marrying Hugh that I *can* help him? You see, it's not easy for a girl to help a man, however much she may wish to. They see so little of each other. And if you're really to influence people you must be *with* them, mustn't you? But when people are married they are always together, and then it's easy. So I'm sure I'm doing right in marrying Hugh. When a girl marries she should choose someone she can do good to, someone who needs her. Now I think perhaps Hugh *does* need me, for he's not always been a very good man so far. He's been lazy and rather selfish, and not very thoughtful for others. I'm going to cure him of *that!* Am I not, Hugh?

VERREKER: *(Half-smiling.)* If you can, Margery.

MARGERY: *(Her face kindling.)* And that's really *worth* doing, isn't it? You see, if I married a *good* man—like you, Mr. Hylton—I couldn't help *him* at all. He'd be quite good already. But Hugh has done foolish things and wrong things, as we know. I can help him.

LADY DENISON: Margery, I think you ought to listen to what Mr. Hylton says, and what I say, and do what we ask. It's very wrong of you to be so obstinate. You know we're thinking only of your good.

MARGERY: Yes, but are you thinking of *Hugh's* good, Mother?

LADY DENISON: *(Plaintively.)* What *does* she mean?

MARGERY: Would it help *him* if I broke it off?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Losing patience.)* Tck! Who ever heard of marrying a man to *help* him.

MARGERY: Why not, Aunt Emily? *(Feeling that her logic is irrefragable.)* Mr. Hylton always says the only real way of helping people is to love them. And if one *loves* people of course one should *marry* them.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *Loves* them! So that's it, is it! You're not marrying Mr. Verreker because you want to help him but because you've fallen in love with him. And you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

MARGERY: Of course I love Hugh. What is there to be ashamed of in that?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Angrily.)* Is there nothing to be ashamed of in wanting to marry a worthless man knowing him to be worthless? You have heard of men marrying worthless women, I suppose? Nobody thinks *they're* performing a moral duty and setting an example to their fellows. On the contrary, we think them weak or vicious. What you are doing is exactly what they do. Only they have the grace not to talk morality about it.

MARGERY: *(Giving MRS. EVERSLEIGH up as HYLTON has done before her.)* I don't expect *you* to understand, Aunt Emily. You never do like the way Mother and I look at things, do you?

LADY DENISON: *(Miserably.)* Oh, don't bring *me* into this, please.

MARGERY: Very well, Mother. But I did think *you* would be on my side. And Mr. Hylton. *(Laying her hand on VERREKER's protectingly.)* I love Hugh, and I want to help him. There's nothing strange in that, is there? When one wants to help people one always does get to love them. That's the splendid thing about helping people.

(Pause.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Well, there's no use arguing with Margery while she's like this. She evidently has no moral sense whatever!

LADY DENISON: Mr. Verreker, I appeal to *you*. You see what Margery is doing. Release her from this engagement. She is merely sacrificing herself from a fantastic sense of duty.

VERREKER: *(With dangerous politeness.)* Surely not? If so, I have gravely misunderstood Mrs. Eversleigh. I thought it was Margery's fantastic sense of affection she objected to?

MARGERY: Hugh, dear!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Fiercely.)* If you are going to insult me, Mr. Verreker—!

VERREKER: I really beg your pardon. Perhaps I oughtn't to have said that. But some not very pleasant things have been said about *me*, haven't they?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: And with reason. A man of your antecedents has no right to propose to the daughter of the house in which he is staying. It is taking advantage of her inexperience. It is dishonourable.

VERREKER: *(Calmly.)* Is that so? Then I'm probably rather lacking in the finer sense about these things…But I suppose everyone is inclined to find excuses for his own misdeeds while remaining inflexibly severe towards his neighbours'. That's the foundation of all morality, isn't it, Hylton?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I should have thought *stealing…!*

VERREKER: *(As if he were considering the point.)* Yes. Stealing's an ugly word, isn't it? It even makes *me* uncomfortable…And yet if you understood the whole circumstances you might take a more lenient view. But that, of course, would be a very bad thing for morality. So no doubt you'd rather not.

HYLTON: Lady Denison, if Mr. Verreker has anything to tell you that will put a more favourable light on the General's story—

VERREKER: The General's? So *he* told you?

LADY DENISON: He heard it from Colonel Nicholson, who commands your old regiment.

VERREKER: Yes, yes. I remember. He said he was writing to him. Poor General, so he really has been able to finish a story for once!

HYLTON: I was going to say that it would be only fair to give Mr. Verreker every chance of defending himself.

(There is a moment's pause, during which they wait for him to speak. Then he begins. His tone is quiet and unimpassioned, almost as if the case were not his own but someone else's, and his voice never falters. It is a statement of fact, not an appeal for pity, and therefore any display of emotion would be out of place. Perhaps he feels this. Anyhow, he makes none.)

VERREKER: Oh, I don't think it amounts to a defence. Merely a statement of the case from the person who knows most about it—the criminal, as Mrs. Eversleigh would say. I was an extravagant young fool. The regiment was an expensive one. I had a small allowance. I had lost money over cards—and other things—to richer men than I was—who, by the way, ought never to have played with me at all. Like an idiot, I thought I must pay my debts to *them* whatever happened. You know the nonsense that is talked about a debt of *honour. (With a bitter sneer on the word.)* To do that I used money belonging to the mess which happened to be in my hands. Of course I hoped to pay it back at once, or I shouldn't have done it. Equally, of course, I failed to do so. The horse that was simply bound to win lost, and I played cards for a whole week and never held a trump. The usual thing. When things were pretty desperate I cabled to Uncle Montague—I was in India at the time—asking him to send me a hundred pounds by return. *(Wearily.)* Of course, I lied to him about the reason. Everybody does lie, I suppose, about that sort of reason. I said I owed it to tailors and people, I remember. Naturally, Uncle Mont didn't see the force of sending me a hundred pounds without haggling about it. Uncles always do haggle about money, I believe. At least, mine do. So Uncle Mont haggled, and like a young ass, instead of going straight to the Colonel or the moneylenders I faked the accounts. It was purely a temporary expedient. I knew the money would turn up in a week or two. It was merely a question of gaining time. But, as luck would have it, someone with an elementary knowledge of arithmetic happened to glance at the accounts. He spotted something was wrong and told the others, and instead of coming to me they went to the Colonel. The Colonel sent for me, and there was no end of a row. I tried to make him understand, but he couldn't. The stupidity of military men has been proverbial in all ages. I'm a bit of a fool myself, as you will have noticed. He stormed, and I was sulky. My borrowing the money intending to repay it he could *just* understand, but faking the accounts to conceal the fact was beyond him. Though it was the logical consequence of the other if the thing was to be kept dark. When the fat was in the fire Uncle Mont's cheque turned up. But by that time we'd all lost our tempers, the Colonel was prancing round about the *honour* of the regiment, *(Another bitter sneer.)* and I had to send in my papers.

HYLTON: *(Half to himself.)* Poor fellow.

VERREKER: Eh?

HYLTON: Nothing.

MARGERY: *(Triumphant.)* Mr. Hylton, I knew *you'd* understand. Thank you.

(Pause.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Acidly.)* Well, Mr. Verreker, you've made out a very clever case, and you've put it very glibly. It must have taken you some time to prepare.

VERREKER: *(His tone if possible more cold and unimpassioned than before.)* Just four years, Mrs. Eversleigh. It happened four years ago, and I've not had much else to think of since. It was a confoundedly silly thing to do, as I said, and I've been wondering ever since how I came to do it. The result of my consideration is the story I've told you. I don't ask you to believe it, of course. But it's quite true.

HYLTON: *I* believe it, Verreker. And I'm more sorry for you than I can say. If I've said anything that was harsh or unjustifiable please forgive me.

VERREKER: Not at all, my dear fellow.

LADY DENISON: It's all dreadfully sad, Mr. Verreker. I see that. But still, it doesn't alter the facts, does it? You have had to leave the army. Your reputation is ruined. And that makes you not a fit husband for Margery.

VERREKER: I feel that, Lady Denison.

MARGERY: Hugh!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Then why did you propose to her?

VERREKER: *(Shrugs.)* A sudden impulse, I suppose. That's how most people propose, isn't it? If they stopped to think they'd think better of it, and then no one would ever marry at all. Which would perhaps be the wisest plan for all parties.

LADY DENISON: Still, in your case you must admit there were special reasons.

VERREKER: *(Dispassionately.)* I don't know. How many men are fit husbands for the girls they marry? One in a hundred? One in a thousand? Girls are so ridiculously innocent. And men are so ridiculously depraved. I'm not so very much worse than the others. Only I was stupider. And that ruined me. But it was four years ago. And I'm not likely to do it again. A man doesn't play the fool like that twice. One pays too dear for it. Considered as a husband, I'm probably the better for the experience. I've learnt by it.

(Pause.)

LADY DENISON: *(Making a last appeal.)* Mr. Verreker, what you say is quite true. And I daresay you're not really worse than many men, though the world judges things like this more hardly than other things. But we are *in* the world, and we must accept its judgment as we cannot alter it. If you marry Margery *she* will have to suffer for what *you* have done. I don't think you want her to do that. Be generous and release her from her promise.

VERREKER: *(Quite sincerely.)* My dear Lady Denison, I put myself entirely in Margery's hands. If she wishes to end our engagement she is absolutely free to do so. I assert no claim over her whatever. I agree with you that she would only be acting wisely to break it off, and I shan't dream of blaming her if she does so. But you mustn't ask *me* to break it off. A man can't do that. But if Margery wants her freedom she has only to speak.

HYLTON: *(Enthusiastic.)* That's fine of you, Verreker. That's noble, on my soul. You really *are* a good fellow. I know what it must cost you to give up a girl like Miss Denison. I honour you for it. *(Holds out hand.)*

VERREKER: *(Taking it.)* Thanks, my dear chap. But you mustn't be too precipitate. I haven't given her up yet. Margery hasn't spoken.

LADY DENISON: Margery, dear, you *will* break it off?

MARGERY: *(Firmly.)* No, Mother. As long as Hugh wants me I shall stand by him.

LADY DENISON: *(Tearfully.)* Then you don't love your mother.

MARGERY: *(Going to her impulsively, and putting her cheek against hers.)* Of course I love you, Mother dear. But I love Hugh, too.

(Pause.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Firing a parting shot.)* Well, I suppose there's no more to be said. If Margery is determined to ruin herself nobody can prevent her. *You*, of course, will continue to forbid the engagement, Muriel, but Margery is of age, and if she chooses to defy you and marry this Mr. Verreker she can do so. But in that case I hope you will entirely refuse to make her any allowance, and, in fact, will disinherit her.

LADY DENISON: What nonsense, Emily. Of course Margery must have an allowance. What else is she to live on? Especially as, I suppose, Mr. Verreker has nothing.

VERREKER: Next to nothing.

LADY DENISON: Very well, then. Naturally I shall have to help them. And as for disinheriting her, that's impossible, even if it were just, as I've no other children. No, Margery must be provided for in any case. I'm sorry she is unwilling to do as I wish, and I think this engagement terribly unwise and unsuitable. But I suppose she's very fond of Hugh *(Sighs.)* just as I was very fond of Charlie before I married him. And so she must do as she likes.

MARGERY: Darling Mother! *(Kisses her.)* Now you're being like yourself again instead of being like Aunt Emily—which doesn't suit you one bit. I always knew you'd agree with me really—*and* Mr. Hylton *(With a bright glance at him.)* —though you took rather longer than I expected. Hugh, give Mother a kiss like a dutiful son-in-law, and say you think her the best woman in the world.

VERREKER: *(Drily.)* I think I'll spare poor Lady Denison *that.* She's had a great deal to put up with during the past hour.

MARGERY: *(Remorsefully.)* Poor Mother! I suppose she has.

VERREKER: I hope, however, later on she'll get more reconciled to things. She can't really dislike me as much as she thinks, otherwise she wouldn't have asked me here.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(With a bitter smile.)* I'm afraid I really must disabuse you of *that* idea, Mr. Verreker. My sister-in-law has curious views of hospitality. She doesn't ask people to her house because she likes them or thinks them pleasant acquaintances, but because they are disagreeable or disreputable, or haven't anywhere else to go. It's a new form of philanthropy. Mr. Hylton invented it.

(VERREKER bursts into a shout of delighted laughter.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: You seem amused.

VERREKER: I am. *(Laughs again.)* How delicious! So *that's* why I was invited! Because I was down on my luck and wasn't asked to many houses! And I thought it was because of my delightful society.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Venomously.)* You were certainly strangely mistaken.

VERREKER: *(Much amused.)* So it seems. And *that* explains why all these other people are here, I suppose? I thought they were rather a damaged lot. Old Bonsor, Miss Triggs, Firket, that appalling Mrs. Horrocks, Hylton, who's an excellent chap but quite mad. *(Mischievously.)* And you too, I daresay, Mrs. Eversleigh?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *I*, sir! Certainly not! *I* am here because I am Lady Denison's sister-in-law.

VERREKER: *(Easily.)* That's no reason. Lots of people hate their sisters-in-law. I know I simply loathe my brothers.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I am glad to think that Lady Denison is unlike you in that as in every respect.

LADY DENISON: *(Soothing her.) Of course*, Emily. I asked you because I like to have you here. And Mr. Hylton, too. I must invite the people I like occasionally.

VERREKER: I see. Well, Lady Denison, I think it's a splendid idea of yours, far more amusing than the ordinary way of inviting people. And the more dreadful they are the more amusing it must be. Margery and I must certainly take to it when *we* have a house.

LADY DENISON: I don't see anything *amusing* in it, Mr. Verreker. In fact, it's often extremely unpleasant, and leads to most regrettable complications.

VERREKER: *(Genially.)* Such as *my* getting engaged to Margery?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Snaps.)* That among other things.

VERREKER: *(To whom the finer shades of "beginning one's charity at home" have scarcely yet revealed themselves.)* Do none of them *know?*

LADY DENISON: No.

VERREKER: Why not? They'd be awfully amused.

(The voice of the GENERAL is heard on the terrace humming a cheerful stave. VERREKER looks round at the sound, just in time to see him approaching the French window on the left of the fireplace. A smile of reckless mischief lights up his face.)

VERREKER: By Jove, here's the General! I *must* tell *him*.

LADY DENISON: *(Despairing entreaty.)* Please! Please!

VERREKER: *(Laughing gaily.)* Yes, I *must*. I owe him one for telling you all that about me. *You* owe him one, too. He's given you a most uncomfortable afternoon.

(The GENERAL enters by the window on the left, unconscious of his doom.)

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Quite amiable, but feeling that these modern habits of unpunctuality must not be allowed to go unremarked.)* Isn't it tea time, Lady Denison? I think so.

VERREKER: *(In high good humour.)* Long past. I say, General, why have you been telling tales about me to Lady Denison?

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Turning on him fiercely, all his feathers up, like an angry turkey cock.)* If it comes to my knowledge, sir, that a man who is staying in a lady's house with me is not a person whom *other* people wish to meet, I make it a rule to inform my hostess of the fact.

VERREKER: *(Heartily.)* And a very good rule, too. Only Lady Denison doesn't ask people to her house whom *other* people wish to meet. It's against her principles.

LADY DENISON: *(Protesting.)* Mr. Verreker!

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Gobbling with indignation.)* Upon my word, sir…!

(But VERREKER declines to be interrupted either by the GENERAL's anger or LADY DENISON's anguish, and goes on relentlessly. The others listen in horrified fascination. Everyone is too much absorbed to notice the return of MRS. HORROCKS and MISS TRIGGS, who select this unlucky moment to enter by the French window on the right. They listen spellbound.)

VERREKER: *(Enjoying himself immensely.)* Lady Denison selects her visitors on philanthropic grounds—because they're disagreeable or disreputable or merely boring. It's a form of self-denial with her. That's why she asked you. That's why she asked me. That's why she asked all of us.

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Stunned.)* What!

MRS. HORROCKS: *(Defiant.)* What!!!

VERREKER: *(Swinging round as if he were shot at the sound of MRS. HORROCKS's raucous voice. To himself.)* Good Heavens! Mrs. Horrocks!

MRS. HORROCKS: *(Sternly.)* Yes, sir, Mrs. Horrocks. Miss Triggs and I returned from our walk just in time to hear your extraordinary statement.

(Bleat from MISS TRIGGS.)

MRS. HORROCKS: May I ask what truth, if any, it contains?

VERREKER: Really, Mrs. Horrocks, I'm very sorry you should have heard what I said—

MRS. HORROCKS: *(Cutting him short.)* Is it true, sir?

(VERREKER makes hopeless gesture, but says nothing.)

MRS. HORROCKS: Lady Denison, perhaps *you* will inform me?

GENERAL BONSOR: *(More in sorrow than in anger.) Why* was I invited here, Lady Denison?

MISS TRIGGS: *(Bleating again.)* And *I?*

LADY DENISON: *(Completely flustered.)* I never meant you to know. I never meant Mr. Verreker to know. It's very unfortunate. Please accept my apologies all of you. I'm most distressed this should have happened.

MRS. HORROCKS: Then it *is* true!

MISS TRIGGS: Really!

LADY DENISON: *(Meekly.)* I don't think Mr. Verreker need have told the General. It was most inconsiderate of him. But I hope you won't hold *me* responsible.

MISS TRIGGS: *(With tearful dignity.)* Will you kindly order the carriage to take me to the station, Lady Denison? I shall leave by the six o'clock train.

MRS. HORROCKS: *(Haughtily.)* Of course you will not expect *me* to remain.

GENERAL BONSOR: *(In hollow accents.)* Nor me! Boring!

LADY DENISON: *(Much distressed.)* Oh, *need* you all go like that? After all, there's nothing so very dreadful in what you've heard. It was Mr. Hylton's idea.

MISS TRIGGS: That dissenting person! I always *felt* he was an impostor. He tried to make me believe he was a clergyman, I remember.

LADY DENISON: He meant it kindly. We all meant it kindly.

MRS. HORROCKS: *(Drawing herself up to her full height.)* Lady Denison, if you cannot understand how insulting this is to *me* I cannot make you do so. But I *should* have thought, considering my birth and connections, I might have claimed a somewhat different treatment. The carriage, please, for the six o'clock train. *(Sweeps out majestically to pack.)*

MISS TRIGGS: *(Equally unappeased.)* And will you please send some tea to my room. I shall not come down again before I leave. *(Follows MRS. HORROCKS.)*

GENERAL BONSOR: *(Too broken with the world's ingratitude to protest further.)* Boring! *(Follows* MISS TRIGGS, *shaking his poor old head.)*

(There is a pause while we realise that one of the most tragic things in life is to be a bore—and to know it. MRS. EVERSLEIGH, however, not being cursed with the gift of imaginative sympathy, wastes no pity on the GENERAL. Instead of this she turns to her sister-in-law, and, metaphorically speaking, knocks her out of the ring.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: This, Muriel, is what comes of beginning one's Charity at Home!

(LADY DENISON has no reply, as the worm is too crushed to turn—and the curtain falls.)

ACT FOUR

Scene: The dining room at Priors Ashton. A week has passed since Act Three, and the time is after dinner. The party is sadly reduced in numbers, for MRS. HORROCKS, MISS TRIGGS, and the GENERAL no longer grace the board with their presence. But HYLTON and VERREKER and MRS. EVERSLEIGH remain, and they, and LADY DENISON and her daughter, are sitting over their dessert, shepherded by WILLIAM, who is in sole charge for the present, the abandoned SOAMES having taken his departure. The room is lighted by electric lights on the walls, but there are also shaded candles in silver candlesticks on the table. When the curtain rises WILLIAM is handing fruit.

WILLIAM: *(To MRS. EVERSLEIGH.)* Grapes, madam?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Taking some.)* What fine grapes you have this year, Muriel.

MARGERY: Aren't they? I took some to old Biddy Porter today. She's been ill.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Who is old Biddy Porter?

MARGERY: She lives at Ashton Parva in one of those little houses before you get to the church. And she's had influenza, so I thought it would be nice to take her some grapes. She was so pleased.

VERREKER: *(Grimly.)* The gardener wasn't.

MARGERY: No. Poor Thomson. He's so funny about the fruit. He seems to think we grow it entirely for ourselves. He's quite angry when I give any of it away. He doesn't even like my sending any to the cottage hospital.

LADY DENISON: *(Anxiously.)* You will be careful with Thomson, won't you, Margery? He's so easily offended. I remember last year when you took all the early peaches to the Workhouse Infirmary just before we were giving some dinner parties he nearly gave warning. And I don't want to lose him. He's such an excellent gardener.

(WILLIAM, having finished his duties, goes out.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(As soon as he has closed the door.)* The new butler hasn't come yet?

LADY DENISON: No. We expect him tomorrow. I do hope he'll be a success. He has the highest references.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Sweetly.)* That must be very distressing to Mr. Hylton.

MARGERY: Aunt Emily, you're not to scratch Mr. Hylton. He's been working at proofs all day and now he wants a rest.

VERREKER: Lucky chap!

MARGERY: What do you mean?

VERREKER: To have *you* prescribing *rest* for him. You don't prescribe much rest for *me!*

LADY DENISON: Has Margery been working you very hard, Hugh?

MARGERY: Of course not, Mother. Hugh's only talking nonsense.

VERREKER: Am I! Just you listen. This morning I left some soup with Mrs. Green while Margery was taking Biddy Porter her grapes. She stopped the carriage at Mrs. Green's and dropped me there. It was nearly half an hour before she came back for me, and I had to hear the history of every disease from which the old lady had ever suffered and to look at her bad leg.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Scandalised.)* Really, Mr. Verreker!

VERREKER: *(Yielding the point with cheerful alacrity.)* Arm, then. I know it was some part of her poor old body, though I couldn't recognise it. It was quite disgusting. I should have gone away, only Mrs. Green lives four miles from here, and I hate walking when it's hot. However, the carriage came back at last, and then we drove on to the church, which Margery is decorating for some reason or other. I think because the harvest has failed. There I sat in a pew and made a wreath of mangel-wurzels to adorn the font.

MARGERY: Not *mangel-wurzels.*

VERREKER: Well, some kind of vegetable. We got back to lunch at last—late, of course. The wreath took so long. And in the afternoon—after a brief interval of repose—I wrote letters on behalf of a certain Mary Gamage who wants to get into an orphanage at Basingstoke—which seems an odd taste. I wrote twenty-five of them.

MARGERY: Only after you'd been coaxed for a whole quarter of an hour. You were quite cross about it, and said you weren't a galley slave.

VERREKER: Well, I was wrong.

MARGERY: You were very disagreeable.

VERREKER: *(Equably.)* I know. I hoped we were going to quarrel. But you wouldn't. That's the worst of Margery. She never will quarrel.

HYLTON: It's a good fault.

VERREKER: Is it! However, I wrote twenty-five letters on behalf of Mary Gamage, as I said. And I've got seventy-five still to do. They were to ask subscribers to the orphanage for their votes. I gather some five hundred other people are busily engaged in writing the same number of letters on behalf of *their* orphans, and the subscribers, in common politeness, will have to write to the whole five hundred of us to say they have given their votes to the 501st. They can only vote once. The mere expenditure in postage stamps would suffice to endow another orphanage, not to speak of the waste of my time and theirs. Moreover, I'm given to understand that this ritual is gone through every time the orphanage has a vacancy, and that there are more than a hundred orphanages similarly conducted in this distracted country. Whoever heard of such tomfoolery!

MARGERY: It *is* troublesome, of course. But I don't see how else you could settle whom to let in. There are so many orphans.

VERREKER: *(Briskly.)* You should put the names in a hat, shake it, and take the one that fell out first.

LADY DENISON: But would people subscribe to orphanages if they didn't get a vote?

VERREKER: What on earth do they want votes for?

LADY DENISON: In order that *their* orphans may get in instead of the others.

VERREKER: Another illusion gone! I used to think charitable people gave their money because they were genuinely anxious to do good. I now find on the highest authority that they do it to keep out each other's orphans. Margery, I won't write another letter.

MARGERY: *(Protesting.)* Oh, Hugh, how horrid of you. If you don't *I* shall have to do them, and you said you would.

VERREKER: *(Resigned.)* Very well, I suppose I must as I said so. But my faith in charity is shattered. Nothing survives a closer acquaintance. Not even orphanages.

MARGERY: *(Laughing.)* How absurd you are, Hugh. You know you only talk like that because you think it will shock us. And it doesn't shock us one bit. We only think it silly.

VERREKER: As you please, dear. But if that's the only way in which orphans can be kept alive I think you'd better drown them—and I've been an orphan myself.

LADY DENISON: Do you mind talking about something else for a moment, Hugh? I think I hear William with the coffee, and he mightn't like it.

(WILLIAM comes in and hands coffee, and departs again. While he is doing so HYLTON obligingly comes to the rescue with a new subject.)

HYLTON: Did you get as far as Croome this afternoon, Mrs. Eversleigh?

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Yes. Poor Lady Seathwaite is still in bed. But the doctor says she may be able to come down on Monday.

VERREKER: What's the matter with Lady Seathwaite?

(MRS. EVERSLEIGH ignores him.)

LADY DENISON: She has a bad attack of gout. She has it every autumn.

VERREKER: I see. *(Tersely.)* Overeats herself.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *(Sharply.)* Mr. Verreker, will you kindly remember that Lady Seathwaite is a friend of mine? And that I do not care to hear her insulted?

VERREKER: *(Blandly.)* I'd no intention of insulting her, Mrs. Eversleigh. It was only a suggestion to account for her indisposition.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: A most uncalled-for suggestion.

VERREKER: *(With exasperating amiability.)* Very well. I withdraw it. I daresay she eats too little, and suffers from poverty of the blood. Margery shall drive me over tomorrow afternoon, and we'll ask her which it is.

MARGERY: Hugh, Hugh, you're not to laugh at Aunt Emily. She doesn't like it. And we can't possibly go over tomorrow afternoon because you're coming with me to tea at the Vicarage.

VERREKER: Let's skip the tea.

MARGERY: Certainly not. The Willises would be dreadfully hurt if we didn't go. And it's so unkind to disappoint people.

(The electric light suddenly goes out, leaving only the candles on the table alight.)

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Good Heavens! What's that?

LADY DENISON: *(Calmly.)* Only the electric light, Emily.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: *Only* the electric light!

LADY DENISON: It does happen sometimes. You see, Basset, who looks after the dynamo, isn't really an electrician. He was a footman.

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Then why does he look after the dynamo?

LADY DENISON: Well, he was out of a place—

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: Muriel!

LADY DENISON: *(Worried.)* What's the matter *now*, Emily? Nothing else has happened, has it?… *(Going on with her story placidly.)* He was out of a place, as I said. He had been second footman at the Fox-Wilkinsons', at Abbots Ashton. But I'm afraid he sometimes took more to drink than was good for him. At least, he was found one day after luncheon in the dining room quite intoxicated. So they had to send him away. When Margery heard of it she wanted to have him here—under Soames. But Soames didn't seem to like the idea. He was quite indignant about it, in fact. So as the electric light was being put in just then, Margery said that Basset could be taught to look after the engine. But he's not very skilful as yet, so the light sometimes goes out for hours at a time. I hope it isn't going to tonight.

(The light comes on again.)

LADY DENISON: *(Cheerfully.)* That's better! *(Depressed.)* Now it's gone again.

(This as the light goes out afresh. A moment later it recovers, then has a series of spasms, and finally settles to work again.)

LADY DENISON: *(Heaves a sigh of relief.)* That's right!

MRS. EVERSLEIGH: I thought you had given up engaging your servants on altruistic principles, Muriel?

LADY DENISON: *(Quite simply.)* So I have. But I couldn't send Basset *away*, could I? I don't think he could get another place. Besides, he's really wonderfully improved. He hardly ever takes too much now. Shall we go? *(Rises.)*

(LADY DENISON, MRS. EVERSLEIGH, and MARGERY go out, HYLTON holding open the door for them. VERREKER strolls to the fireplace and leans against the mantelpiece lazily, stretching himself. HYLTON returns to his seat.)

VERREKER: *(Laughing.)* Lady Denison really is the most absurd person in the world.

HYLTON: Is she?

VERREKER: Yes. But good people always are more or less absurd, aren't they?

HYLTON: *(Smiling.)* The children of this world *are* wiser than the children of light certainly.

VERREKER: Exactly. And she'll never learn wisdom now, poor lady. She's listened to *you* too long. She'll never get the poison out of her system.

HYLTON: She dismissed Soames.

VERREKER: But keeps Basset. You've won after all. Cigar? *(Brings silver box from mantelpiece.)*

HYLTON: Thanks.

VERREKER: *(Reseating himself.)* Poor Mrs. Eversleigh! How she loathes me! She'll never forgive me for having proposed to Margery.

HYLTON: It doesn't matter. You've Lady Denison on your side.

VERREKER: Thanks to *you*.

HYLTON: *(Lightly.)* I don't think *I'd* much to do with it.

VERREKER: I know better. If it hadn't been for you, Lady Denison would be still unreconciled. I've no illusions on that point.

HYLTON: Miss Denison would have made your peace for you.

VERREKER: Yes. Margery has been a brick all through. She always would be. But you backed her up. I wonder why. *(Pause.)* Why was it?

HYLTON: *(Hesitates.)* Perhaps I felt I owed you some amends for the way I behaved when I first heard of your engagement.

VERREKER: *(Raising his eyebrows.)* I don't know. Your attitude was a perfectly reasonable one. It *was* a most ridiculous engagement for Margery. *Is*, in fact.

HYLTON: *(Cheerfully.)* Oh no.

VERREKER: Oh yes. I am a young man with a discreditable past and no future. Margery will have a good deal of money one day. Considered as a match for her it's preposterous.

HYLTON: *(Shrugs.)* I wasn't thinking of money.

VERREKER: You never are, my dear fellow.

HYLTON: *(Laughing.)* Besides, you won't be able to squander Miss Denison's money even if you want to. It'll all be tied up strictly in trust.

VERREKER: Yes. I shall be like a dog with a biscuit perpetually on his nose, and nobody ever saying "Paid for."

HYLTON: *(Laughing again.)* Something like that.

VERREKER: However, I didn't propose to Margery for her money, so I don't know that that matters.

HYLTON: Of course not. You proposed to her because you loved her. Because you couldn't help seeing how good and unselfish and noble she is.

(VERREKER raises his eyebrows again.)

HYLTON: No one could help loving Miss Denison. She has all sweet and lovable qualities. She is the most wonderfully good woman I've ever known. *(And the face of the altruist glows with enthusiasm.)*

VERREKER: Yes. *(Reflectively.)* It's a great pity.

HYLTON: *(Astonished.)* What do you mean?

VERREKER: People really ought to have some redeeming vices, don't you think? But Margery's quite impeccable, poor dear. I remember I spoke to her about it before I ever thought of proposing to her.

HYLTON: *(Deciding that this must be a joke.)* Scoffer!

VERREKER: Not at all…Margery's simply riddled with philanthropy and unselfishness, and the Devil knows what. *I* call it morbid. I don't believe she ever thinks of herself at all. I've never known anyone like her before. I don't believe there *is* anyone like her.

HYLTON: *(Serious again.)* Miss Denison has a curiously perfect character.

VERREKER: *(Ruefully.)* That's what worries me.

HYLTON: Tck!

VERREKER: It's all very well for you, Hylton. You've not got to live up to it. And if you had I daresay you wouldn't mind. You're a bit of a saint yourself. But for a healthy, easygoing mortal like me it's rather alarming.

HYLTON: *(Rallying him.)* You'll get used to it.

VERREKER: You think so?

HYLTON: Yes—with Miss Denison's help. Why, she's helped you already more than you realise. You're a different man from what you were a week ago.

VERREKER: *(Peevishly.)* I know. That's what's so annoying. Fancy *me* distributing soup to old ladies and soliciting votes for a blighted orphan! It's simply disgusting.

HYLTON: *(Quite sure this is a joke.)* Nonsense, my dear fellow. You like it really, you know.

VERREKER: I beg your pardon! My whole soul—I think that's what you call it?—revolts against it. But I *do* it. That's the miracle. And I did think the age of miracles was past!

HYLTON: The age of miracles will never pass while there are men and women like Miss Denison in the world!

(The utter sincerity with which HYLTON says this makes it impossible to laugh at him, even good-naturedly, as VERREKER would like to do. HYLTON, with the glow in his face and the look of the mystic in his eyes, is not a man one can laugh at, while his absolute unconsciousness, his total lack of anything like pose or insincerity, makes VERREKER feel that he has never liked him or admired him so much before. It may be madness, but it is a divine madness. There is silence between them for a moment while VERREKER looks at his companion curiously. Then a slow smile comes into his face, and he speaks quietly.)

VERREKER: You're a queer chap, Hylton.

HYLTON: *(Returning to ordinary life with a start.)* Why?

VERREKER: *(Thinking better of it.)* Nothing.

HYLTON: *(With utter conviction.)* Yes. Faith can move mountains, now as always. And Miss Denison has faith, faith in goodness and in truth and in self-surrender. She'll convert you yet.

VERREKER: *(Firmly.)* No!

HYLTON: She *will*. You laugh at altruism now. In a year you'll be an altruist yourself. And it's your marriage that will have done it.

VERREKER: *(A light dawning on him.)* So *that's* why you approve of this absurd marriage.

HYLTON: *(Nods.)* It's to save a soul.

VERREKER: More philanthropy!

HYLTON: *(Accepting the scoff good-humouredly.)* More philanthropy. This marriage is going to be the making of you. It will help you to find yourself. Your true self.

VERREKER: *(Sardonically.)* I should have thought I'd managed *that.*

HYLTON: *(All the optimist coming out in him.)* You're wrong. Your real self is not the healthy, easygoing person you talk of. It's the strong, self-restrained, self-denying man Miss Denison will put in his place. *(Enthusiastic.)* There's nothing the love of a really good woman can't do for a man. It brings out all that is fine in his nature, and drives out all that is base. That is what your marriage will do for you!

VERREKER: The deuce it will!

HYLTON: *(Collapsing under this cold douche—as I'm afraid VERREKER meant him to do.)* But I must apologise for talking to you like this. I'm afraid it bores you.

VERREKER: *(A little penitent.)* Not a bit. I like it.

HYLTON: *(Shaking his head.)* No.

VERREKER: Yes, I do. In fact, I'm rather interested in the Psychology of Benevolence just now. Please go on.

HYLTON: *(Laughing.)* Not tonight. Besides, we ought to be moving. *(Rises.)*

VERREKER: Perhaps so. *(Rises. He seems to reflect for a moment.)* Will Margery

always be as good as she is now, do you suppose?

HYLTON: *(Unhesitatingly.)* I'll stake my life on it.

VERREKER: *(Eyebrows raised.)* No chance of her outgrowing it?

HYLTON: *(Firmly.)* None!

VERREKER: Ah! I hoped she might… Well, Hylton, I'm glad to have had this chat with you. You really are a good chap, you know. And if you can go on being friends with a sweep like me I shall be grateful.

HYLTON: *(Smiling.)* I think I shall manage that.

VERREKER: *(Half to himself.)* I'm not so sure.

(They stroll towards the door; but before they have had time to reach it, MARGERY enters, and at once begins to scold them, in high good humour.)

MARGERY: You *rude* people! You've stayed *much* too long over your cigars. How is poor William to clear away?

VERREKER: Can't he do that tomorrow morning?

MARGERY: That shows how much *you* know about managing a household!

HYLTON: We were just coming, Miss Denison.

MARGERY: You're too late now. Mother's gone to bed. She's tired. And Aunt Emily's going too. She's cross. And so am I. I'm offended.

VERREKER: Stay five minutes. Sit down here.

MARGERY: No!

VERREKER: Yes.

(Puts her gently in his own chair. He sits on an arm of armchair.)

VERREKER: And give me a cigarette.

MARGERY: Ought you to smoke anymore?

VERREKER: No. But I will. *(Does so.)*

MARGERY: *(Cheerfully.)* I've been getting some more letters done for Mary Gamage.

VERREKER: That infernal orphan!

MARGERY: Sh! So you won't have *quite* seventy-five more to write.

VERREKER: Thank heaven!

MARGERY: *(Gaily, quite blind to the enormity of the suggestion from VERREKER's point of view.)* I think you might get up and do a few before breakfast tomorrow, just to show your gratitude. I'll help. I *should* like to get them all off before we go to the Vicarage.

VERREKER: Margery, I refuse!

MARGERY: *(Unruffled.)* Very well. But you're very foolish. Before breakfast is the nicest part of the day at this time of year. You lazy people who don't come down till half-past nine don't know what you're missing.

VERREKER: We'll take your word for it.

MARGERY: *(Ignoring this sarcasm.)* Will you come to tea at the Mackworths' on Friday, Mr. Hylton?

HYLTON: Certainly, if you like.

MARGERY: *You* must come too, Hugh.

VERREKER: All right. Who are the Mackworths?

MARGERY: *(Seemingly unconscious of the appalling character of the programme.)* They

live in a *funny* little house in the village. Old Mrs. Mackworth's very deaf, and *he* can't hear much either, so they don't have many visitors. It's so tiring talking to deaf people, isn't it? One has to shout so. But I always try to go at least once when we're down here. It cheers them up, I think. I'm glad you're both coming.

(VERREKER takes cigarette from between his lips and groans.)

MARGERY: And now I really must go to bed. Good night.

VERREKER: *(Detaining her.)* No. Stop a bit longer.

MARGERY: *(Shaking her head with mock firmness.)* Can't.

VERREKER: Yes, you can. Just till I've finished this. Besides, I've something rather particular to say to you.

HYLTON: *(Rising.)* In that case perhaps I'd better retire to the library?

VERREKER: Do. I'll be with you in two minutes.

(HYLTON goes out, and there is a brief silence. VERREKER is plunged in thought, and his brow puckers.)

MARGERY: *(Merrily.)* Well? What is this *important* thing you've got to say to me?

VERREKER: I'll tell you. *(Pause. Looks at her fixedly for a moment or two.)* By Jove, you *are* pretty, Margery.

MARGERY: I don't think *that's* very important.

VERREKER: Then you're very much mistaken!…However, that's not what I had to say. *(Pause. He pulls himself together with an effort, and speaks gravely but kindly.)* Margery, I want you to break off our engagement.

MARGERY: *(Unable to believe her ears.)* Hugh!

VERREKER: *(Gently.)* My dear, I don't like saying it, and I hope you don't like hearing it—though I don't want it to hurt you too much either. But I've been thinking things over, and I'm quite sure we two oughtn't to marry.

MARGERY: Why not?

VERREKER: For lots of reasons. I'm not good enough for you, Margery, and that's the long and short of it.

MARGERY: What nonsense!

VERREKER: It's not nonsense at all, unfortunately. It's a painful truth. Mrs. Eversleigh was right. I ought never to have proposed to you.

MARGERY: *(Sadly.)* Do you mean you don't love me, Hugh, as you thought you did?

VERREKER: No. I don't mean that. I love you as much as ever, more perhaps now that I'm going to lose you. But on every ground except love I'm quite unfit to marry you.

MARGERY: *(Pleading.)* Surely love is enough?

VERREKER: *(Almost impatient at what he considers the colossal ineptitude of that remark.)* No. It isn't. Margery, let's face facts, and not shirk them as everyone else seems to do. Marriage isn't a thing to be romantic about. It *lasts* too long.

MARGERY: Hugh!

VERREKER: My dear, it may last forty years. Surely that's long enough in all conscience. *(Recovering from his momentary irritability.)* Very well, then. As one marries for a long time one should choose carefully, reasonably. One mustn't be carried away by passion. Passion's a great thing in marriage, but common sense is a greater. Now what sort of a life should we make of it together if we married, you

and I? Why, my dear, we've not an idea or a taste in common. Everything you say makes me laugh, and almost everything I think would make you blush. It's simply absurd for a girl like you to marry a fellow like me. Let's say so frankly and end it.

MARGERY: *(Puzzled.)* But, Hugh, you *liked* being engaged to me at first, didn't you? Why have you changed your mind? Have *I* done anything?

VERREKER: No, dear. You've been absolutely sweet and good, as you always would be. Only you're *too* good, and that's all about it.

MARGERY: *(Rather hurt. She is convinced that this must be one of HUGH's jokes, and she naturally thinks it rather heartless of him to joke at such a moment.)* Now you're laughing at me.

VERREKER: *(Absolutely serious.)* I never was further from laughter in my life. I say you're too good and I mean it. You look on life as a moral discipline. I look on it as a means to enjoyment. You think only of doing what you imagine to be right. I think only of getting what I know to be pleasant. *(With an ironical smile.)* They call it incompatibility of temper in the Law Courts, I believe.

MARGERY: *(Puzzled again.)* I don't understand you, Hugh. Sometimes you seem quite serious, and then you say something horrid that spoils it all.

VERREKER: I know, dear. You don't understand me, and it's just as well you don't. But that makes the idea of marriage between us rather ridiculous, doesn't it? The sort of man you ought to marry is Hylton—who, by the way, is over head and ears in love with you. You should have heard his eulogies over you ten minutes ago. He was simply lyrical! Yes, you must marry Hylton. Will you?

MARGERY: *(Half-laughing, half-crying.)* I'm still engaged to you, dear, so far.

VERREKER: *(Briskly.)* I'll release you. And you really will be happy with Hylton. He's a first-rate chap. Promise me that when you've stopped mourning for me—say in about a fortnight's time—you'll seriously consider the possibilities of Hylton.

MARGERY: *(More hurt and more puzzled than ever.)* Are you really heartless, Hugh, or do you only pretend to be?

VERREKER: *(Shrugging his shoulders.)* I don't know. Ask Hylton.

MARGERY: *(Sadly.)* I thought we'd been so happy together since we'd been engaged.

VERREKER: *(Heartily.)* So we have, dear—in spite of Mary Gamage. But then we've only been engaged a week. And I feel *years* older for it!

MARGERY: *(Asking the question in complete good faith.) Seriously*, Hugh?

VERREKER: I'm *serious* enough. *(But he uses the word in a different sense.)* You think everybody can be as self-denying as you are, Margery. You're wrong. Some people are born self-denying just as other people are born self-indulgent.

MARGERY: *(Encouragingly.)* But you may change.

VERREKER: *(Another moment of impatience.)* Men don't *change*, Margery. They *repent*, but they don't *reform*. *(The moment passes.)* And so our engagement has been a mistake. It's my fault, I know. I ought to have thought of all this before I asked you to marry me. But you were so pretty and—well, I didn't. Will you forgive me?

MARGERY: *(Gravely and a little sadly.)* Of course I forgive you, Hugh. It's not

your fault. You thought you loved me and you asked me to marry you. Now you find you don't, and you ask me to release you. You've been quite kind and straightforward. There's nothing to forgive.

VERREKER: *(With the nearest approach to emotion that he has allowed himself since the beginning of this scene.)* My dear, my dear, it's not that. I loved you before. I love you still. I believe I shall always love you—so long as I don't marry you. But married we should be miserable.

MARGERY: *(Gently.)* I don't think *I* should be miserable.

VERREKER: *(Briskly.)* I know *I* should. At first I should be as unselfish as the deuce just to oblige *you*. But after a bit I shouldn't be able to stand it, and I should strike. And then you'd be disappointed, and I should be disagreeable, and our marriage would become a tragedy. *(Sincerely.)* I don't want that to happen. I'd rather you found me out now while you're still fond of me than later when you had come to hate me.

MARGERY: I should never *hate* you, Hugh.

VERREKER: You couldn't help yourself, my dear. An unhappy marriage would demoralise even you. They say some forms of suffering ennoble people, and putting up with what one doesn't like is supposed to be good for the character—though I'm sure I don't know why. But an unhappy marriage never ennobled man or woman. It makes them peevish and unreasonable. It sours their tempers and ruins their digestions. *My* parents didn't get on together, and I know. If the parsons cared two straws about morality instead of thinking only of their dogmas, they'd make divorcing one's wife as easy as dismissing one's cook. Easier.

MARGERY: Hugh!

VERREKER: They would! When married people don't hit it off, they jar. There's no middle course. And when the jarring has gone on for a certain length of time it gets past bearing. Human nerves won't stand it. Nothing will enable them to stand it. Not love, nor religion, nor all the seven deadly virtues. Socrates was a good man, but he made his wife pretty unhappy.

MARGERY: *(The tears are dangerously near her eyes.)* And you think I should make you unhappy?

VERREKER: *(Cheerfully.)* I'm sure of it. So let's behave accordingly.

(VERREKER continues more gently. The danger of tears has been averted.)

VERREKER: Come, Margery, say you release me and get it over.

MARGERY: *(Slowly.)* Very well. If you really wish it…you're sure you *do* wish it?

VERREKER: Quite. Thanks, dear. You've behaved like a trump, as you always do. And I think I must kiss you goodbye. *(Does so tenderly.)* Don't say anything to the others till after I've left. I rather dread Mrs. Eversleigh's unconcealed satisfaction. I shall go tomorrow.

MARGERY: Very well. If you'd rather not.

VERREKER: *(Looking at her half-ironically.)* I'm afraid you think I've been a selfish beast about this?

MARGERY: *(Wistfully.)* A little selfish, perhaps.

VERREKER: You're wrong. For the first, and I hope the last, time in my life I've done an unselfish action. I'm a pauper, you know, and you're something of an

heiress. And I've given you up without compensation. *(Dispassionately.)* It's rather to my credit.

MARGERY: *(Sadly.)* Only because you wouldn't be happy.

VERREKER: No. Because *you* wouldn't be happy. *I* should have been all right. But I had to put it the other way or you wouldn't have let me go. *I* should have given up philanthropy after the first six weeks and had no end of a good time. But *you'd* have been wretched. We've done the right thing. *(Rising.)* And you won't forget about Hylton, will you? Shall we go?

(He goes and opens the door for her. They go out as the curtain falls.)

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

A Comedy for Fathers

"Character is fate"

Mint Theater Company's production of *The Return of the Prodigal,* written by St. John Hankin, began performances on May 23, 2007, at the Mint Theater, 311 West 43rd Street, New York City, with the following cast and credits:

Samuel Jackson.....Richard Kline
Mrs. Jackson.....Tandy Cronyn
Henry Jackson.....Bradford Cover
Eustace Jackson..... Roderick Hill
Violet Jackson..... Leah Curney
Sir John Faringford, Bart.....Lee Moore
Lady Faringford.....Kate Levy
Stella Faringford..... Margot White
Dr. Glaisher.....W. Alan Nebelthau
Mrs. Pratt..... Cecelia Riddett
Baines.....Robin Haynes

Directed by: Jonathan Bank
Set and Costume Design by: Clint Ramos
Lighting Design by: Tyler Micoleau
Sound Design: Jane Shaw
Associate Set Design and Props: Craig Napoliello
Production Stage Manager: Kimothy Cruse
Assistant Stage Manager: Rebecca C. Monroe
General Manager: Sherri Kotimsky
Press Representative: David Gersten & Associates
Graphic Design: Jude Dvorak

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The uncut text for *The Return of the Prodigal* is both distinctly Edwardian and strikingly modern. Our production strove for accessibility, attempting to make the play look and feel as contemporary as it seemed when I first read it, while still respecting the context in which it was written. I cut lines that rooted the play in 1905: about the recent addition of electricity and its impact on the running of the Jackson's cloth mill, for example, and references to carriages and lanterns. However, I was reluctant to update the text by re-writing lines; so I left the various sums of money discussed as Hankin specified and otherwise made no changes. Individuals interested in using this text for performances, or in receiving an electronic version of the uncut text, should contact:

Jonathan Bank
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ACT ONE

The JACKSONS' drawing room, a handsome room suggesting opulence rather than taste. Not vulgar but not distinguished. Too full of furniture, pictures, knick-knacks, chair covers, plants in pots. Too full of everything. The door is on the right. On the grand piano, which is on the opposite side of the room from the door, are large bowls of flowers, photograph frames, and other inappropriate things. There are also plants in the fireplace, as it is summer and that is the JACKSONS' conception of the proper way to adorn a fireplace and a suitable place for growing plants. Easy chairs everywhere. After dinner on a summer evening.

When the curtain rises the stage is empty. Then the door opens and LADY FARINGFORD enters, followed by her daughter STELLA, MRS. PRATT, VIOLET JACKSON, and, after an interval, MRS. JACKSON.

MRS. JACKSON: *(Heard calling to her husband before she enters.)* You won't stay too long over your cigars, will you, Samuel? *(She comes in.)* Now, Lady Faringford, where will you sit? Try this sofa.

LADY FARINGFORD: *(Selecting the most comfortable corner of the sofa.)* Thank you.

MRS. JACKSON: That's right. Mrs. Pratt, where shall I put you? No, don't go there. That's such a long way off. Come here.

(She drags up armchair near LADY FARINGFORD with hospitable inelegance. MRS. PRATT sits.)

MRS. JACKSON: Are you all right, Stella?

STELLA: *(Who has already found a seat.)* Quite, thanks, Mrs. Jackson.

VIOLET: Where will you go, Mother?

MRS. JACKSON: I'm going to sit here.

(MRS. JACKSON takes seat by LADY FARINGFORD. VIOLET sits by STELLA and, after a decent interval, draws work-basket towards her and quietly begins to knit.)

LADY FARINGFORD: Mr. Jackson seems pretty cheerful about his election prospects.

MRS. JACKSON: Yes. I do hope he'll get in. It will be such an amusement for him.

MRS. PRATT: It would certainly be most regrettable if Mr. Ling were elected. The Rector says a clergyman should have no politics, but I say a clergyman with no politics is never made a bishop.

LADY FARINGFORD: I trust the Rector won't allow Mr. Ling to use the Parish Room for any of his meetings.

MRS. PRATT: I'm afraid he will. He says he can't make distinctions between the two parties. If he lends the room to one he must lend it to the other.

LADY FARINGFORD: Then he had better lend it to neither. That will answer the purpose quite well. Mr. Jackson can easily hire some place for his meetings while Mr. Ling cannot. It is such a comfort that all the rich people about here are Conservatives. I believe the same thing may be noticed in other parts of the country. It almost seems like a special Providence.

MRS. JACKSON: I hope Sir John thinks my husband will get in?

LADY FARINGFORD: Oh yes, I think so. It's unfortunate that Mr. Ling is so popular. Only with quite vulgar people no doubt. But even then they have votes unfortunately. Still Mr. Jackson employs a large number of people and they'll vote for him of course—or what's the use of being an employer?—And if he is sufficiently liberal with his subscriptions—

MRS. JACKSON: I believe my husband subscribes to *everything*.

LADY FARINGFORD: Then I'm sure he'll get in.

(Silence falls upon the company; STELLA breaks the awkward pause.)

STELLA: *(To VIOLET.)* What are you working at?

VIOLET: A pair of socks for old Allen. I always give him a pair for his birthday. That's about a month from now.

MRS. PRATT: I hope you and Mrs. Jackson have got a lot of things ready for the Bazaar, Violet? We want to clear off our debt, and, if possible, have something in hand as well.

VIOLET: Oh yes. I've done some things and so has Mother. I'll send them up in a day or two.

MRS. PRATT: And thank *you* so much, Lady Faringford, for the embroidered tea-cloth you sent. It is *sure* to sell!

LADY FARINGFORD: Let us hope so. It's extremely ugly. I bought it last year intending to give it to my poor sister Adelaide. But afterwards I hadn't the heart. So I sent it to your bazaar instead.

(Another awkward pause. Poor MRS. PRATT smiles nervously.)

MRS. JACKSON: Vi, my dear, won't you play us something?

STELLA: Do, Vi. We never have any music at the hall now Fraulein Schmidt has gone.

LADY FARINGFORD: *(To MRS. JACKSON.)* You remember her? She was Stella's governess. I always think German governesses so much more satisfactory than English. You see, there's never any question about having to treat *them* as ladies. And then they're always so plain. That's a great advantage.

(BAINES, the JACKSONS' butler, enters.)

BAINES: *(Going up to MRS. PRATT, and speaking in an undertone.)* If you please, madam, Simmonds is here asking if you could see him. They sent him on from the Rectory.

MRS. PRATT: Simmonds? Did he say his business?

BAINES: *(Coughs discreetly.)* Something about Mrs. Simmonds, I think, madam.

MRS. PRATT: Of course, I remember. I'll come in a moment. *(Rising.)* You'll excuse me, won't you, dear Mrs. Jackson? It's Mrs. Simmonds. Foolish woman, she's had another baby. Her husband is in the hall. I shall probably have to run over to the Rectory for some things for her.

MRS. JACKSON: *(Rising at once.)* Oh no, you mustn't do that. I am sure we have everything necessary here, soup and jelly and flannel, and anything else you think wise. And , of course, they will want some money. I had better come and see Simmonds with you.

MRS. PRATT: But it's giving you so much trouble.

MRS. JACKSON: Not in the least. It's no trouble.

VIOLET: Can I do anything, Mother?

MRS. JACKSON: No, dear. You stay here and entertain Lady Faringford and Stella. We shan't be five minutes.

(MRS. JACKSON hurries out, beaming with benevolence, closely attended by MRS. PRATT. BAINES follows them out with dignity, refusing to allow his composure to be ruffled by so trivial an incident as the arrival of a cottager's baby.)

VIOLET: Poor Mrs. Simmonds. I do hope the baby will be all right.

LADY FARINGFORD: I have no doubt it will. When people have far more children than is either convenient or necessary their babies always exhibit extraordinary vitality. Nothing seems to kill them. But you were going to play to us, dear.

VIOLET: Very well, if you'd really like it. *(Rises and goes to piano. The piece selected is the second movement of Beethoven's twenty-seventh sonata, sometimes called "The Conversation with the Beloved.")*

LADY FARINGFORD: *(Goes over to sit by STELLA; begins to talk to her under cover of the music.)* By the way, Stella, how are things going between you and Henry?

STELLA: What do you mean, Mother?

LADY FARINGFORD: Has he asked you to marry him yet?

STELLA: No.

LADY FARINGFORD: Strange! I thought he would have done so before now. I have given him several opportunities.

STELLA: Mother!

LADY FARINGFORD: He is going to, I suppose?

STELLA: I don't know.

LADY FARINGFORD: Nonsense, child. Of course you do. A girl always knows when a man wants to propose to her, unless she is perfectly idiotic. He will certainly propose if you give him proper encouragement. *(Persuasively.)* And when he does you will accept him?

STELLA: *(Thoughtfully.)* I'm not sure.

LADY FARINGFORD: Why not? You like him, don't you?…I can't think who invented music after dinner. One can hardly hear oneself speak…

STELLA: Oh yes. I like him.

LADY FARINGFORD: Then of course you will accept him. When a man proposes to a girl and she likes him, and he is well off and otherwise eligible, she should always accept him.

STELLA: But— *(Hesitates.)* —I don't love him, Mother.

LADY FARINGFORD: My dear, you must not expect impossibilities. Love matches aren't very common among people of our class. And they're by no means always successful either. Quite the contrary. If you marry a man you like you may come to love him—in time. But if you marry the man you love you may easily come to loathe him.

STELLA: *(Sighs.)* Well, I suppose I shall have to marry him in the end.

LADY FARINGFORD: Of course you will. And I'm sure you might do a great deal worse. The Jacksons are very well off. The business has grown enormously in the last few years. Of course, they're *parvenus*. But everybody one meets nowadays is either a *parvenu* or a pauper. And really girls can't afford to be as particular as they were. Henry is the only son.

STELLA: No, Mother. There's Eustace.

LADY FARINGFORD: I don't count Eustace. He went away years ago—to one of the Colonies, I believe—and doubtless came to a bad end. Probably he's dead by now.

STELLA: Mother! How can you say such terrible things!

LADY FARINGFORD: Nonsense. Of course he's dead. And a very good thing, too…Really, what a noise our good Violet is making…If he weren't dead one would have heard something of him. That sort of young man always makes himself felt

by his relatives as long as the breath's in his body.

STELLA: But if he's abroad—

LADY FARINGFORD: Then he would write—for money. People in the Colonies always do write for money. You don't remember him, do you?

STELLA: Hardly at all. I've seen him, of course.

LADY FARINGFORD: Ah! He was a handsome fellow. Clever, too. But a thorough detrimental. It's just as well he went to the Colonies. No, my dear, you can't do better than accept Henry. He'll be quite a rich man some day, and he's very fairly presentable. And his father will get into Parliament. Not that that means anything nowadays. Here he is.

(LADY FARINGFORD leans back in her corner of the sofa, and makes a decent pretence of having listened to the music as the men enter from the drawing room. They are SIR JOHN FARINGFORD, MR. JACKSON, and HENRY.)

MR. JACKSON: Hullo, all alone, Lady Faringford? What's become of Maria—and Mrs. Pratt?

VIOLET: *(Breaking off in the middle of her playing and rising from the piano.)* Simmonds came to ask if he could see Mrs. Pratt. Mrs. Simmonds is ill. Mother and Mrs. Pratt are putting some things together for him to take to her.

LADY FARINGFORD: *(Sweetly.)* Your daughter has been entertaining us with her charming music while Mrs. Jackson was away. What was that little piece you were playing, dear?

VIOLET: A sonata of Beethoven, Lady Faringford.

LADY FARINGFORD: Indeed? Very pretty.

SIR JOHN: Stella hardly plays a note. I always tell my wife it's the result of having had a German governess. How can you expect a child to learn music in German?

LADY FARINGFORD: I believe all modern music is written in German. It certainly sounds like it.

(HENRY joins STELLA, who has made her escape from her mother to the other side of the room at the first opportunity.)

HENRY: I hope you haven't been bored while my mother has been out of the room. It's shocking of her to leave her guests in this way.

STELLA: Not at all. Vi has been playing to us. It's been delightful.

HENRY: You're very fond of music, aren't you?

STELLA: Yes. It's curious, when I was a child they made me learn, of course, but I didn't care a bit about it. I was awfully troublesome over my lessons, I remember. So I made nothing of it. And now, when I'd give anything to be able to play, I can't.

HENRY: Why don't you take it up again?

STELLA: I know, but I don't. I suppose I'm lazy. But that's like me. I want to do things. I see I *ought* to do them. But somehow they don't get done. I expect you can't understand that?

HENRY: I'm afraid I can't. If I want a thing I take the necessary steps to get it. That's what "wanting" means with me.

STELLA: *(Thoughtfully.)* And do you always get it?

HENRY: Generally. A man can generally get a thing in the end if he gives his mind to it.

STELLA: Most people wouldn't say that.

there's a point on which I want your advice. The local branch of the Independent Order of Good Templars wrote to me ten days ago asking for a subscription. So I sent five guineas.

SIR JOHN: Quite right. The Temperance Vote must be reckoned with.

MR. JACKSON: Just so. But the Good Templars published the fact in the local newspaper.

SIR JOHN: Well, that's what you wanted, wasn't it?

MR. JACKSON: Ye-es. No doubt. But I forgot that the Secretary of the local branch of the Licensed Victuallers' Association would be sure to see the paragraph, and write to me for an explanation.

SIR JOHN: I see. Did he?

MR. JACKSON: Yes.

SIR JOHN: Ah! What did you do?

MR. JACKSON: I was in some doubt. But my agent told me the Licensed Victuallers had a Benevolent Fund or something. So I sent ten guineas to that. That seemed the best way out of the difficulty.

SIR JOHN: Much the best, much the best. *(Trying to escape.)*

MR. JACKSON: *(Detaining him.)* But that's not the end of the matter. For now the Good Templars have written to ask if I am prepared to support any legislation designed to combat the evil of the Drink Traffic. And the Licensed Victuallers want to know if I will pledge myself to oppose any Bill which aims at the reduction of the sale of intoxicating liquors.

SIR JOHN: Hum! They rather had you there!

MR. JACKSON: Yes…However, I think I've got out of it all right. I've written to the Licensed Victuallers to say I'm not in favour of unduly restricting the sale of liquor in the interests of Temperance Propaganda. And I've written to the Good Templars saying that I'm quite in favour of Temperance Propaganda providing it doesn't unduly restrict the sale of intoxicating liquor. I think that meets the case?

SIR JOHN: I see. Running with the hare and hunting with the hounds, eh? Quite right. I think you got out of it very well. And now we really must be saying good night. *(To LADY FARINGFORD.)* Come; my dear, it's time we were going.

LADY FARINGFORD: *(Rises.)* Stella, my dear, we must be putting on our things. Good night, then, Mrs. Jackson. Such a *pleasant* evening. Come, Stella.

(General adieux. The FARINGFORDS and STELLA go out escorted by HENRY and MR. JACKSON.)

MRS. PRATT: I think *I* ought to be going, too.

MRS. JACKSON: No, no. You mustn't run away like that. I'm sure Vi will want to talk to you about the next concert. Sit down again, Mrs. Pratt.

(Reenter MR. JACKSON. MRS. JACKSON sits down beside MRS. PRATT on the sofa. There is a sudden noise of footsteps outside. Then the door opens hurriedly, and BAINES appears. He crosses at once to MR. JACKSON, and speaks in a sort of breathless undertone.)

BAINES: If you please, sir—

MR. JACKSON: Well, what is it, Baines?

BAINES: If you please, sir, it's… *(Confidentially.)* Mr. Eustace.

(MR. JACKSON turns sharply round.)

BAINES: He was lying just by the front door.

MR. JACKSON: Mr. Eustace?

MRS. JACKSON: *(Hearing the name and jumping up from her seat.)* Eustace!

BAINES: Yes, sir. Yes, madam. Thomas saw him just as he was coming in after shutting the front gate. He's fainted, sir. At least, I think so.

MRS. JACKSON: I must go to him. *(Hurries towards door.)*

MR. JACKSON: No. Not you, Maria. I'll go.

(MR. JACKSON exits followed by BAINES; they return with HENRY and BAINES carrying a draggled and dishevelled body by the shoulders and the heels. The room becomes a scene of excitement and confusion, everybody talking at once and getting into each other's way.)

MRS. JACKSON: Oh, my poor boy! My poor dear boy! *(Rushes to him.)*

VIOLET: Wait a minute. Put him here.

MRS. JACKSON: Oh, he's dead! He's dead! I know he's dead.

VIOLET: Hush, Mother. Some brandy, quick, Baines. And some cold water. I think he's only fainted. *(Puts cushion under his head and opens shirt at neck.)*

MRS. PRATT: *(Noticing the condition of EUSTACE's boots.)* Oh, Mrs. Jackson. Your sofa! It will be utterly ruined.

MRS. JACKSON: *(Bending over him, wild with anxiety.)* Oh, I wish they'd be quick with the brandy. Henry, go at once for Dr. Glaisher.

MRS. PRATT: Let me go. I pass his house anyway. And I mustn't stay any longer. I should only be in the way here.

(Enter BAINES with brandy and jug of water.)

MRS. PRATT: Goodbye, dear Mrs. Jackson. No. You mustn't stir. Don't come with me, Henry. Stay and look after your brother. I'll send Dr. Glaisher round at once.

(MRS. PRATT flurries out, followed by BAINES. Meantime MRS. JACKSON has been trying to force some brandy between the clenched teeth of the patient.)

VIOLET: Your handkerchief, Henry. Quick.

(HENRY gives it to her. She dips it in jug, wrings it out, and, kneeling beside the sofa, puts it over patient's forehead by way of bandage.)

MRS. JACKSON: *(Lamentably.)* He doesn't stir.

MR. JACKSON: I can feel his heart beating a little, I think. But I'm not sure.

MRS. JACKSON: I *wish* Dr. Glaisher would come. If he were to die!

VIOLET: *(Soothing her.)* Hush, Mother. He's only fainted. Didn't you hear Father say he could hear his heart beating?

MRS. JACKSON: Is there anything else we could do? My salts!

VIOLET: *(Rising.)* I'll get them, Mother.

MRS. JACKSON: They're on my dressing table.

(VIOLET nods and goes out quickly.)

MRS. JACKSON: …No, I remember I had them in the library this morning. I'll go and look. Or was it the breakfast room? I'm not sure. Oh dear, oh dear, poor darling Eustace! *(And the poor old lady exits in a burst of tears.)*

MR. JACKSON: She'll never find them. You go, Henry, and help her. Try the breakfast room.

(HENRY goes out after his mother, and MR. JACKSON is left alone with his prostrate son. For a minute or so he fusses round, making futile and rather grotesque efforts to restore him to consciousness, re-moistening the bandage on his forehead and renewing the attempt to administer brandy. VIOLET's voice is heard through the door, which is left open.)

VIOLET: Father!

MR. JACKSON: *(Going to door, hurriedly.)* Yes, yes, what *is* it?

(Enter VIOLET.)

VIOLET: Have you your keys? Mother thinks she may have left her salts on your desk in the library, and it's locked.

MR. JACKSON: *(Frantic with nervous irritation.)* Tck! Here they are. I'd better come or you'll disturb all my papers.

(MR. JACKSON fusses out after his daughter, and for a minute or so the patient is left alone. The patient takes advantage of this to raise himself cautiously from his recumbent posture and wring out the bandage on his forehead, which he finds disagreeably wet. Hearing noise of returning footsteps, he hurriedly replaces the bandage on his forehead, and resumes his fainting condition as his mother reenters with HENRY.)

MRS. JACKSON: *(Piteously.)* They're *not* in the library. Where *can* I have put them?

HENRY: Violet is looking in your bedroom. She always finds things.

(Enter VIOLET with salts in her hand, followed at a short interval by MR. JACKSON.)

MRS. JACKSON: Thanks, dear. *(Bending over the patient and holding the salts tremulously to his nose, but entirely forgetting to take out the stopper.)*

HENRY: *(Irritably.)* There's no use holding those salts to his nose unless you take out the stopper, Mother.

(MRS. JACKSON fumbles with stopper. Patient stirs slightly and turns away his head.)

MR. JACKSON: He's coming round. He moved a little. Try him with some more brandy.

(MRS. JACKSON puts down salts and takes up brandy, which she pours into patient's mouth. He chokes a little, heaves a realistic sigh of returning consciousness, opens his eyes, then raises himself and looks around.)

EUSTACE: *(Faintly.)* Is that you, Mother?

MRS. JACKSON: *(Overjoyed.)* Yes, dear, yes.

EUSTACE: *(Closing his eyes again.)* Where am I?

MRS. JACKSON: At home, dear. Your own home. Oh, he's not dead! He's not dead!

(Embraces him, sobbing passionately as the curtain falls.)

ACT TWO

The breakfast room at the JACKSONS'. A round breakfast table occupies the centre of the stage, laid with cloth, tea and coffee things, and various dishes. The fireplace is on the left, and on either side of it are leather-covered armchairs. There is a large French window, open, at the back of the stage, through which is seen the garden bathed in summer sunshine. A door on the left leads to the hall. A night has passed since the Prodigal's return. MR. JACKSON, HENRY, and VIOLET are at breakfast, VIOLET having charge of the coffee, MR. JACKSON of the bacon dish. HENRY is reading the Gloucester Chronicle *in the intervals of eating his bacon. VIOLET is reading letters.*

HENRY: *(Holding out cup.)* More coffee, please, Violet. *(To MR. JACKSON.)* Wenhams have failed, Father.

MR. JACKSON: It's only what we expected, isn't it?

HENRY: Yes. Forty thousand they say here. But, of course, it's only a guess. No one can know till the accounts are made up.

MR. JACKSON: They've been shaky for some time. Well, how is he?

(This is to MRS. JACKSON, who enters at this moment from hall. She has quite recovered her normal placidity, and bears no resemblance to the tragic, tear-stained old lady whom we last saw.)

MRS. JACKSON: Much better. He looks quite a different person.

MR. JACKSON: Did he eat any breakfast?

MRS. JACKSON: He hasn't had any yet. He says he'd rather come down.

VIOLET: Didn't Dr. Glaisher say he was to stay in bed?

MRS. JACKSON: Yes. But if he wants to come down I don't think it can do any harm. He can lie down on the sofa till lunch if he feels tired.

MR. JACKSON: What time is Glaisher coming?

VIOLET: Half past ten, he said.

HENRY: Has Eustace explained how he came to be lying in the drive in that state? Last night we could get nothing out of him.

MRS. JACKSON: No wonder. He was dazed, poor boy. He had walked all the way from London, and had had nothing to eat.

HENRY: *(Irritably.)* How was it he was *in* London? He was sent to Australia.

MRS. JACKSON: He *had* been in Australia. He worked his passage home.

MR. JACKSON: His money is all gone, I suppose—the thousand pounds I gave him?

MRS. JACKSON: *(Placidly.)* I don't know, Samuel. I didn't ask.

MR. JACKSON: Humph!… *(Pause.)* I'll trouble you for the toast please, Henry.

HENRY: I suppose we'd better make inquiries about Wenhams, Father? It might be worth our while to buy the mill if it goes cheap. Then we could run it and ours together.

MR. JACKSON: Just so. Will you see to that?

HENRY: *(To his father.)* Very tiresome Eustace turning up in that disreputable condition last night. What will Stella think?

MR. JACKSON: It's lucky the Faringfords had gone before he was brought in.

HENRY: Mrs. Pratt will have told the entire village before lunch time.

VIOLET: I don't see why we should mind if she does. There's nothing to be ashamed of. *(Rising and going over to fireplace, having finished her breakfast.)*

HENRY: *(Impatiently.)* Well, we won't discuss it. *(Returns to his paper.)*

MR. JACKSON: *(Moving toward HENRY, and speaking in an undertone.)* By the way, Henry, did you say anything to Stella last night?

HENRY: *(Hesitates.)* No.

MR. JACKSON: I thought you were going to.

HENRY: I was. In fact, I did begin. But she didn't let me finish. I suppose she

didn't understand what I was going to say.

MR. JACKSON: Don't put it off too long. There may be an election any day now, and the Faringford influence means a great deal.

HENRY: You've got Faringford's influence already. He's chairman of your Committee.

MR. JACKSON: He'll take more trouble when I'm one of the family, so to speak. Yes, I shouldn't put it off if I were you.

HENRY: Very well, Father.

MR. JACKSON: Of course, Faringford is as poor as Job. The estate's mortgaged up to the hilt. Stella won't have a sixpence. Still, they're good people—position in the county and all that. And *you'll* have enough money for both.

HENRY: Especially if we get hold of Wenhams' mill. I'm sure I could make a good thing out of that. *(Rising.)* Well, are you coming?

MR. JACKSON: In a moment. *(Finishes his coffee and rises.)*

VIOLET: Shall I get your hat and stick, Father?

MR. JACKSON: Do, dear.

(VIOLET goes out in quest of these.)

MRS. JACKSON: *(To HENRY, who has collected his hat and papers, and is about to start for the mill.)* Won't you wait and see Eustace before you go, Henry? He'll be down in a moment.

HENRY: It doesn't matter. I shall see him soon enough. Coming, Father? *(Goes out by French window, crosses the lawn, and disappears.)*

MRS. JACKSON: I wish Henry could have stayed to see Eustace before he started.

MR. JACKSON: I daresay he'll be over in the course of the morning.

VIOLET: *(Reentering.)* Here're your hat and stick, Father.

MR. JACKSON: That's a good girl. *(Kisses her.)* Goodbye. I shall be in for lunch. *(Goes out by French window, following HENRY.)*

MRS. JACKSON: *(Going to bacon dish and lifting cover.)* We must order some more bacon. Or do you think Eustace had better have an egg?

VIOLET: Shall I go up and ask him?

MRS. JACKSON: Do, dear. And I wonder if you'd see cook at the same time and ask her if she's wanting anything? I have to go into the village.

VIOLET: Very well, Mother.

(VIOLET goes out on these errands. MRS. JACKSON takes away plates to sideboard, clears a place for EUSTACE where HENRY sat, and lays for him.)

BAINES: *(Announcing.)* Dr. Glaisher.

(DR. GLAISHER enters, very fussy and self-important, a worthy, seedy little man, who has long since forgotten all the medicine he ever knew.)

MRS. JACKSON: *(Shaking hands.)* Oh, Doctor. Good morning. *(To BAINES.)* Tell Mr. Eustace Dr. Glaisher is here.

(BAINES goes out.)

Dr. GLAISHER: *(Drawing off gloves in his best professional manner, and dropping them one after the other into his silk hat, which he has placed on the table.)* Well, how does he seem? Going on well?

MRS. JACKSON: Quite well, I think.

DR. GLAISHER: Did he have a good night?

MRS. JACKSON: Excellent, he says.

DR. GLAISHER: Ah! *(Nods sagely.)* Just so. Shall I go up to him?

MRS. JACKSON: He's coming down for breakfast. He'll be here in a moment.

DR. GLAISHER: Coming down, is he? Come, that looks satisfactory! Still, we must be careful. No over-fatigue! His condition last night gave cause for considerable anxiety. Indeed, I may say that if I had not been sent for at once and applied the necessary remedies, there was distinct danger of collapse—um! Distinct danger.

MRS. JACKSON: Oh, Doctor!

(With singular want of tact, EUSTACE elects to enter at this moment, looking in quite robust health, and wearing an admirable suit of clothes.)

DR. GLAISHER: Ah, here he is.

EUSTACE: *(Cheerily.)* Good morning, Mother. *(Kisses her.)* Hullo, Doctor. Come to see me?

DR. GLAISHER: *(Shaking hands.)* Well, and how are we this morning?

EUSTACE: Getting on all right, I think. A bit limp and washed-out perhaps.

DR. GLAISHER: Just so. The temperature normal? No fever? *(Touches forehead.)* That's right. Pulse? *(Feels it.)* A little irregular, perhaps. But nothing serious. Excitement due to over-fatigue, no doubt. Now let me see your tongue.

(EUSTACE does so.)

DR. GLAISHER: *(Nods sagely.)* Just so. As I should have expected. Just as I should have expected, dear Mrs. Jackson. Appetite not very good, I suppose?

EUSTACE: Er—not very.

DR. GLAISHER: Just so. Just so. *(Nods more sagaciously than ever.)*

EUSTACE: *(Gaily.)* Not dead yet, eh, Doctor?

MRS. JACKSON: My dear!

DR. GLAISHER: *(With heavy geniality.)* We shall pull you through. Oh, we shall pull you through. But you must take care of yourself for a few days. No excitement! No over-fatigue. The system wants *tone* a little, wants *tone*.

EUSTACE: I see. I'm to take it easy, in fact, for a bit, eh?

DR. GLAISHER: Just so.

EUSTACE: I won't forget. How clever you doctors are! You feel a fellow's pulse and look at his tongue, and you know *all* about him at once. Don't you?

DR. GLAISHER: *(Pleased.)* Not *all* perhaps. But there are indications, symptoms, which the professional man can interpret…

EUSTACE: *(Interrupting.)* Quite extraordinary. I say, what do you think of these clothes? Not bad, are they? They're Henry's. But *I* chose them—out of his wardrobe. Poor old Henry!

MRS. JACKSON: How naughty of you, Eustace. I'm sure Henry won't like it.

EUSTACE: Of course he won't, Mother dear. Nobody like his clothes being worn by someone else. But I must wear something, you know. I can't come down to breakfast in a suit of pyjamas. Besides, they're Henry's pyjamas.

MRS. JACKSON: But I told Thomas specially to put out an old suit of your father's for you. Didn't he do it?

EUSTACE: Yes. But I can't wear the governor's clothes, you know. We haven't

the same figure. I say, I'd better ring for breakfast.

MRS. JACKSON: Have you ordered it, dear? I sent Vi up to ask whether you'd like bacon or eggs.

EUSTACE: Yes. Violet asked me. I said bacon *and* eggs. Hullo, Vi, you're just in time to pour out my coffee.

(This to VIOLET, who reenters at this moment from interviewing the cook and otherwise attending to her mother's household duties. DR. GLAISHER shakes hands with VIOLET.)

DR. GLAISHER: Well, I must be off to my other patients. *(To MRS. JACKSON.)* Goodbye, Mrs. Jackson. He is going on well—quite as well as can be expected, that is. There are no fresh symptoms of an unfavorable character. But you must keep him quiet for a few days. There are signs of nervousness about him, a sort of suppressed excitement, which I don't like. The system wants *tone*, decidedly wants *tone*. I'll send him up a mixture to take. He has evidently been through some strain lately. I knew that directly I saw him last night. You can't deceive a doctor!

(BAINES brings in breakfast—rack of toast on table, coffee and rolls on sideboard.)

MRS. JACKSON: *(Anxiously.)* You don't think there's anything *serious* the matter?

DR. GLAISHER: No! No! Let us hope not. The general constitution is sound enough. Not over strong perhaps, but sound. And with youth on his side. Let me see, how old is he?

MRS. JACKSON: Nine and twenty.

DR. GLAISHER: *(Taking refuge in his sage nod again.)* Just so. Just so…*(Cheering up.)* Well, *good* morning. *(To EUSTACE.)* *Good* morning. And remember, quiet, perfectly quiet. I'll look in again tomorrow and see how he's getting on.

EUSTACE: *(Nods.)* Goodbye.

(EUSTACE goes towards breakfast table, where BAINES by now has placed coffee, toast, and bacon and eggs. DR. GLAISHER shakes hands with VIOLET and goes out, followed by BAINES. VIOLET seats herself at table to pour out EUSTACE's coffee. MRS. JACKSON draws up a chair, and sits by his side with placid contentment, watching him eat.

EUSTACE: *(Beginning his breakfast.)* Mother, I think I must become a doctor. It's the only profession I know of which seems to require no knowledge whatever. And it's the sort of thing I should do rather well.

MRS. JACKSON: I daresay, dear. You must speak to your father about it…And now you must tell us *all* about yourself. What have you been doing all this time? And why did you never write?

EUSTACE: There was nothing to tell you—that you'd have liked to hear.

MRS. JACKSON: My dear, of course we should have liked to hear everything about you.

EUSTACE: I doubt it. No news is good news. I bet the governor thought that—and Henry.

MRS. JACKSON: No, no, dear. I assure you your father was quite anxious when we never heard—at first.

EUSTACE: Ah, well, if the governor was so anxious to know how I was he shouldn't have packed me off to Australia. I never could endure writing letters.

VIOLET: Still, you might have sent us word. It would have been kinder to Mother.

EUSTACE: *(Laying his hand on his mother's as it lies on the arm of her chair.)* Poor Mother. I suppose I was a brute. But I've not been very prosperous these five years, and as I'd nothing pleasant to say I thought I wouldn't write.

MRS. JACKSON: But what became of your money, dear? The thousand pounds your father gave you?

EUSTACE: I lost it.

MRS. JACKSON: *(Looking around vaguely as if EUSTACE might have dropped it somewhere on the carpet, in which case, of course, it ought to be picked up before someone treads on it.)* Lost it?

EUSTACE: Yes. Part of it went in a sheep farm. I suppose I was a bad farmer. Anyhow, the sheep died. The other part I put in a gold mine. I suppose I wasn't much of a miner. Anyhow, there was no gold in it. I was in the Mounted Police for a time. That was in Natal. It wasn't bad, but it didn't lead to anything. So I cleared out. I've been in a bank at Hong Kong. I've been a steward on a liner. I've been an actor, and I've been a journalist. I've tried my hand at most things, in fact. Finally, I came home. That was when my experience as a steward came in. I worked my passage as one—if you can call it work! I was sick all the time.

MRS. JACKSON: How dreadful!

EUSTACE: It was—for the passengers.

VIOLET: How long ago was that?

EUSTACE: Only about a month. Since then I've been picking up a living one way or another. At last, when I found myself at the end of my tether, I started to walk here. And here I am.

MRS. JACKSON: My dear boy! You must have found it terribly muddy!

EUSTACE: I did. But life always is rather muddy, isn't it? At least, that's my experience.

MRS. JACKSON: But weren't you *very* tired?

EUSTACE: I was tired, of course. Give me some more coffee, Vi.

(She does so. EUSTACE takes advantage of this to change the subject, gently but firmly.)

EUSTACE: Well, how have you all been at home? How's the governor?

MRS. JACKSON: He's been very well on the whole. His lumbago was rather troublesome at the end of last year.

EUSTACE: Does he stick to business as close as ever?

MRS. JACKSON: Not quite. You see, Henry's a partner now, and *he* takes a good deal of work off your father's shoulders.

(EUSTACE nods.)

MRS. JACKSON: Your father gives more of his time to public affairs now. He's a magistrate, and been on the County Council for the last three years. And now he's standing for Parliament.

EUSTACE: The family's looking up in the world. The business is flourishing, then?

MRS. JACKSON: Oh yes. They've put in all new machinery in the last three years. That was Henry's idea. And now they can turn out a cheaper cloth than any of the mills round here.

EUSTACE: Cheaper? The governor used to despise cheap cloth.

MRS. JACKSON: Yes. But Henry said it was no use making cloth that would last a lifetime if people only wanted it to last twelve months. And now they don't make

any *good* cloth at all, and your father has trebled his income.

EUSTACE: Bravo, Henry!

MRS. JACKSON: *(Rises.)* And now I really must go down to the village and do my shopping. Have you got cook's list, Vi?

VIOLET: Yes, Mother. But I'm coming, too. I promised Mrs. Pratt I'd call at the Vicarage before twelve.

MRS. JACKSON: *(To EUSTACE.)* I'll ring for them to clear away. And remember, dear, *(Kisses him gently on the forehead.)* Dr. Glaisher said you were to keep *quite* quiet.

EUSTACE: All right, Mother. I'll remember.

(MRS. JACKSON and VIOLET go out to their shopping in the village. EUSTACE, who has risen to open the door for them, closes it, and returns slowly towards the table. The smile dies out of his face, and he gives a perceptible yawn. Then he takes up a paper, selects an armchair by the fireplace, sits down, and begins to read. After a moment or two, enter BAINES, with a tray in his hand.)

EUSTACE: You can clear away, Baines.

BAINES: Thank you, sir.

(There is silence for an appreciable time, while BAINES goes on clearing the table. Then he speaks, but without pausing in his work.)

BAINES: I hope you're feeling better this morning, sir?

EUSTACE: Thanks, Baines, the doctor thinks I'm getting on all right. So my father is standing for Parliament, is he?

BAINES: Yes, sir.

EUSTACE: Will he get in?

BAINES: It's thought so, sir.

EUSTACE: By the way, which side is he on?

BAINES: *(Puzzled.)* I beg pardon, sir?

EUSTACE: Which side? Liberal or Conservative?

BAINES: Conservative, of *course*, sir. All the people round here are Conservative. All the gentry, that is.

EUSTACE: Most respectable, eh, Baines?

BAINES: Yes, sir. *(BAINES, who has tray in his hand, hears bell, has a moment of indecision, then puts tray down on table.)* Excuse me, sir.

(BAINES goes out to answer the bell. EUSTACE returns to his newspaper. After a minute or so BAINES returns, and wanders about the room looking for something. Presently this proceeding gets on EUSTACE's nerves, and he looks up irritably.)

EUSTACE: What is it, Baines? Do you want anything?

BAINES: If you please, sir, Miss Stella has called for a book Miss Violet promised to lend her. *(Continues to search.)*

EUSTACE: Miss Stella?

BAINES: Lord Faringford's daughter, sir. But I daresay you wouldn't remember her. Only came out about a year ago.

EUSTACE: *(After pause.)* Have you found it?

BAINES: No, sir.

EUSTACE: *(Bored, putting down paper on other armchair, and rising.)* I suppose I'd better see her.

(He goes out. BAINES folds tablecloth and puts it away in sideboard drawer. Is just about to go out carrying tray, when enter STELLA, followed by EUSTACE. BAINES draws back to let them pass, and then goes out and closes the door.)

EUSTACE: Come in, Miss Faringford. Vi will know where your book is. You'd better wait till she comes in. Sit down. She'll be back directly.

(This hospitable invitation is prompted partly by EUSTACE's disinclination to search through those bookshelves, partly by his observing for the first time that STELLA is a very pretty girl, a fact which had escaped his notice in the relative darkness of the hall.)

STELLA: Are you sure?

EUSTACE: Quite!

STELLA: *(Takes one of the armchairs by the fireplace.)* I wonder you're down at all.

EUSTACE: Oh, I'm all right. *(Turns round one of the chairs at the breakfast table and sits near her.)*

STELLA: Are you sure you ought to talk? People who have been ill ought to be quiet, oughtn't they?

EUSTACE: There's really nothing the matter with me.

STELLA: That's not what Mrs. Pratt told me. I met her in the village as I was coming here.

EUSTACE: Ah yes. She was present, of course, when I made my dramatic entry. Did she tell you about it? I hope it went off well?

STELLA: You frightened everyone terribly, if that's what you mean. Mrs. Pratt says you looked *dreadful*. She thought you were going to die.

EUSTACE: Quite a thrilling experience for her. She ought to be very much obliged to me.

STELLA: How can you joke about it? You might really have died, you know! But when people have travelled all over the world as you have done, and endured hardship and danger, I suppose death doesn't seem so terrible to them as it does to us who stay at home?

EUSTACE: I suppose not. They get used to it.

STELLA: Have you often been in great danger? Really great, I mean?

EUSTACE: I was at Singapore when the plague was there.

STELLA: How awful!

EUSTACE: Yes. It wasn't pleasant.

STELLA: I can't think how anyone can stay at home when he might go out and see the world. *(Enthusiastic.)* If I were a man I would go abroad and visit strange countries, and have wonderful adventures as you've done, not waste my life in a dull little village like Chedleigh.

EUSTACE: My dear Miss Faringford, the whole world is a dull little village like Chedleigh, and I've wasted my life in it.

(Enter BAINES.)

BAINES: If you please, sir, the Rector has called to ask how you are.

EUSTACE: Oh, bother. Say I'm very much obliged and I'm all right. *(Turns to STELLA again.)*

BAINES: He said he would like to see you if you felt well enough, sir.

EUSTACE: Ah! Wait a minute. *(Thinks.)* Will you say I'm not well at all and quite unfit to see him this morning?

BAINES: Very well, sir. *(Goes out.)*

STELLA: *(Rising.)* And now I must go. I'm only tiring you, and I expect you oughtn't to talk.

EUSTACE: But I assure you—

STELLA: And as you're quite unfit to see visitors—

EUSTACE: I'm quite unfit to see the Rector. That's a very different thing. But I'm perfectly up to seeing you. Besides Violet should be here directly, now. *(Persuasively.)* Sit down again.

STELLA: *(Hesitating.)* I don't think I *ought* to stay.

EUSTACE: I'm sure you ought. One should visit the sick, you know.

STELLA: *(With a laugh.)* You don't seem quite able to make up your mind whether you're ill or well.

EUSTACE: No. I vary. I find it more convenient.

(Reenter BAINES.)

EUSTACE: Well, who is it *now*, Baines?

BAINES: Lady Faringford.

(BAINES's remark is not a reply to EUSTACE's question, nor yet a rebuke to his irritability, though it sounds not unlike the latter. He is merely announcing a visitor with his usual impassive dignity. The announcement almost startles STELLA out of her self-control, and she rises hastily. EUSTACE is less impressed, as he has not yet made the acquaintance of LADY FARINGFORD, and is merely bored at being interrupted, but he also rises.)

STELLA: Mamma!

LADY FARINGFORD: *(Ignoring her.)* Mr. Eustace Jackson, is it not? How do you do? *(Shakes hands frigidly.)* I heard in the village of your sudden return, and stopped to ask how you were.

EUSTACE: Very kind of you, Lady Faringford.

LADY FARINGFORD: *(Severely.)* You hardly appear as ill as I expected.

EUSTACE: *(Genially, quite refusing to be snubbed.)* I hope the disappointment is an agreeable one?

LADY FARINGFORD: *No* disappointments are agreeable, sir. *(Turning sternly to her daughter.)* And pray, what are *you* doing here, Stella?

EUSTACE: *(Still maddeningly genial.)* Miss Faringford called for a book my sister lent her last night. I persuaded her to come in and sit down till Violet returned.

LADY FARINGFORD: You are expecting her soon?

EUSTACE: Every moment.

LADY FARINGFORD: Ah! Then I don't think we can wait.

EUSTACE: But Miss Faringford's book… She mustn't go away without it. Sit down for a moment while I see if I can find it. *(To STELLA.)* What was it like?

STELLA: It was just an ordinary looking novel with a bright red cover—called "Hester's Escape."

EUSTACE: *(Wandering round the room, looking on the various tables, and then glancing hopelessly at the bookshelves.)* "Hester's Escape"? Excuse me for a moment. I'll go and look for it in the library.

LADY FARINGFORD: *(Icily.)* Pray don't trouble, Mr. Jackson.

(EUSTACE goes out in the quest of the book. The moment he has left the room, LADY FARINGFORD turns wrathfully on her daughter.)

LADY FARINGFORD: Really, Stella, I'm surprised at you!

STELLA: What is it, Mamma?

LADY FARINGFORD: You know perfectly well. How long have you been here?

STELLA: About ten minutes. A quarter of an hour, perhaps. I came to call for a book which Vi promised to lend me. She was

out, and Mr. Jackson very kindly asked me to come in and wait. What harm is there in that?

LADY FARINGFORD: There is every harm. Understand, please, that Mr. Eustace Jackson is not a suitable acquaintance for you.

STELLA: You have no objection to my knowing Henry.

LADY FARINGFORD: That is quite different. Henry has a large income and excellent prospects. He is a man whom any young girl may be allowed to know. Eustace is a ne'er-do-well.

STELLA: Am I never to speak to anyone who isn't rich? The Du Cranes aren't rich, or the Vere-Anstruthers. Yet we know them. We aren't rich ourselves, if it comes to that.

LADY FARINGFORD: That has nothing to do with it. The Du Cranes and poor George Anstruther are gentle people. The Jacksons are tradesmen.

STELLA: I think people make far too much fuss about being "gentlepeople."

LADY FARINGFORD: Then I hope you won't say so. I don't like this pernicious modern jargon about shopkeepers and gentlefolk being much the same. There's far too much truth in it to be agreeable.

STELLA: *(Obstinately.)* If it's true why shouldn't we say it?

LADY FARINGFORD: Because we have everything to lose by doing so. We were born into this world with what is called position. Owing to that position we are received everywhere, flattered, made much of. Though we are poor, rich people are eager to invite us to their houses and marry our daughters. So much the better for us. But if we began telling people that position was all moonshine, family an antiquated superstition, and many duchesses far less like ladies than their maids, the world would ultimately discover that what we were saying was perfectly true. Whereupon we should lose the very comfortable niche in the social system which we at present enjoy, and—who knows?—might actually be reduced in the end to doing something useful for our living like other people. No, no, my dear, rank and birth *may* be all nonsense, but it isn't *our* business to say so. Leave that to vulgar people who have something to gain by it. *Noblesse oblige!*

(This luminous exposition of the FARINGFORD social creed has just reached its allotted end when EUSTACE reenters with the missing book.)

EUSTACE: Here's the book, Miss Faringford. I hope you haven't had to wait too long?

STELLA: Thank you so much.

LADY FARINGFORD: *(Rising, icily.)* Goodbye, Mr. Jackson.

STELLA: *(Shaking hands with defiant cordiality.)* Goodbye. Give my love to Violet.

(EUSTACE opens the door for LADY FARINGFORD and her daughter, and follows them out politely to see them to their carriage. A moment later HENRY is seen crossing the lawn. He enters by the French window. He has some letters and other papers of a business character in his hand, which he puts down on writing tables. He takes off his hat, sits down, and begins to write a note. Presently EUSTACE reenters, but HENRY does not notice him as his back is turned to the door.)

EUSTACE: *(After contemplating his brother's back for a moment with a grim smile.)* Hullo, Henry. Where did you spring from?

HENRY: *(Turning in his chair at the sound of his voice.)* From the mill. I came across the lawn. We had a shortcut made three years ago. It's quicker.

EUSTACE: One of *your* improvements, eh?

HENRY: Yes.

(EUSTACE laughs genially.)

HENRY: You're amused?

EUSTACE: It's so like you having a path made to get to your work quicker.

HENRY: *(Briefly.)* Yes. I'm not an idler.

EUSTACE: Quite so. And *I* am, you mean?

HENRY: *(Shrugs.)* I didn't say so.

EUSTACE: *(Quite good-humoured.)* You wanted to spare my feelings, no doubt? Very thoughtful of you.

HENRY: *(After a pause.)* Is the mater in?

EUSTACE: I believe not.

(Another pause.)

EUSTACE: I've been entertaining visitors on behalf of the family.

HENRY: *(Frigidly.)* Indeed?

EUSTACE: Yes. One of them a very charming visitor.

HENRY: *(Not interested.)* Who was that?

EUSTACE: Miss Faringford.

HENRY: *(Startled.)* Stella?

EUSTACE: Yes. *(Easily.)* Very nice girl altogether. I told her my adventures—or as much of them as I thought suitable. Then unhappily her mother turned up. Rather an awful woman that!

HENRY: *(Annoyed.)* What did Stella come for?

EUSTACE: *(Chaffing him gently.)* Not to inquire after me, if that's what you mean. Miss Faringford came for a book Vi had lent her. She's certainly a very pretty girl. And a nice one.

HENRY: *(Stiffly.)* I may as well tell you I intend to marry Stella Faringford.

EUSTACE: Indeed?

(Pause.)

EUSTACE: Have you asked her yet?

HENRY: *(Snaps.)* No.

EUSTACE: Then I wouldn't be too sure if I were you. Perhaps she won't have you.

(This suggestion is too much for HENRY, who rises sharply from his chair, gathering up his papers with a view to finishing his writing in another room. When he has got halfway to the door he suddenly recollects himself, and turns sharp round to his brother.)

HENRY: Oh, by the way, how are you?

EUSTACE: *(Laughing.)* I'm all right, thanks.

HENRY: *(Irritably.)* How on earth did you come to be lying in the drive in that way last night?

EUSTACE: *(Airily.)* Exhaustion, my dear fellow. Cold and exposure! Hunger! You know the kind of thing.

HENRY: Cold? Why, it's the height of summer.

EUSTACE: *(Shrugging his shoulders.)* Heat, then.

HENRY: *(Exasperated.)* But how did you manage to *get* there? That's what *I* want to know. You are supposed to be in Australia.

EUSTACE: *(Beginning to laugh.)* I'll tell you. Only you must promise not to give me away.

HENRY: Give you away?

EUSTACE: Yes. *(Pause. He plunges into his story.)* I was awfully hard up and sick of finding jobs and losing them, and at last I began to long for a proper dinner, properly served. I thought of writing the governor, but that would have been no good. He'd have sent me some good advice and the mater would have sent a fiver, and in a fortnight things would have been as bad as ever. Then I thought of a dramatic *coup*. The Prodigal's Return! The Fatted Calf! A father softened, a mother in tears! The virtuous elder brother scowling in the background! So I came back to the Old Home, you know. At the front door I selected a convenient spot and lay down in an elaborate faint. Excuse the pun. The wandering sheep returned to the fold, the exile home again. Tableau! Most pathetic!

HENRY: *(Disgusted.)* And so you *walked* all the way to Chedleigh in order to play off a heartless practical joke.

EUSTACE: Walked? Nonsense. I came by train.

HENRY: But you told Vi you walked.

EUSTACE: I said I *started* to walk. I only got as far as the station.

HENRY: *(Angrily.)* It was unpardonable. The mater was awfully upset. So was the governor.

EUSTACE: That was the idea. There's nothing like a sudden shock to bring out one's real feelings. The governor had no idea how fond he was of me until he saw me apparently dead, and unlikely to give him further trouble. And by the time I came round he'd forgotten the cause of his sudden affection—or perhaps he's never realized it—and was genuinely glad to see me. Psychologically, it was most interesting.

HENRY: It was extremely undignified and quite unnecessary. If you had simply come up to the front door and rung the bell you would have been received just as readily.

EUSTACE: I doubt it. In fact, I doubt if I should have been received at all. I might possibly have been given a bed for the night, but only on the distinct understanding that I left early the next morning. Whereas now nobody talks of my going. A poor invalid! In the doctor's hands! Perfect quiet essential. No. My plan was best.

HENRY: Why didn't that fool Glaisher see through you?

EUSTACE: Doctors never see through their patients. It's not what they're paid for, and it's contrary to professional etiquette.

(HENRY snorts wrathfully.)

EUSTACE: Besides, Glaisher's an ass, I'm glad to say.

HENRY: *(Fuming.)* It would serve you right if I told the governor the whole story.

EUSTACE: I daresay. But you won't. It wouldn't be cricket. Besides, I only told you on condition you kept it to yourself.

HENRY: *(Indignant.)* And so *I'm* to be made a partner in *your* fraud. The thing's a swindle, and I've got to take a share in it.

EUSTACE: Swindle? Not a bit. You've lent a hand—without intending it—to reuniting a happy family circle. Smoothed the way for the Prodigal's return. A very beautiful trait in your character.

HENRY: *(Grumpy.)* What I don't understand is *why* you told me all this. Why in heaven's name didn't you keep the whole discreditable story to yourself?

EUSTACE: *(With flattering candour.)* The fact is I was pretty sure *you'd* find me out. The governor's a perfect owl, but you can see a thing when it's straight before your nose. So I thought I'd let you into the secret from the start, just to keep your mouth shut.

HENRY: Tck! *(Thinks for a moment.)* And what are you going to do now you *are* at home?

EUSTACE: *(Airily.) Do*, my dear fellow? Why, nothing.

(And on the spectacle of EUSTACE's smiling self-assurance and HENRY'S outraged moral sense, the curtain falls.)

ACT THREE

The lawn at Chedleigh Court. Ten days have passed since Act Two. It is a Saturday, and the time is after luncheon. On the left stands the house, its French windows open onto the lawn. The lawn is bounded by a shrubbery, through which runs the path which HENRY had made three years previously to enable him to get to the mill quicker. When the curtain rises, EUSTACE is lying in a hammock, swinging lazily. He wears a new grey flannel suit, and looks exceedingly comfortable. Hard by, under a tree, are three or four wicker chairs, in one of which HENRY is sitting, reading the Market Report in the Times. *EUSTACE has a cup of coffee in his hand. HENRY has one on the table beside him. Presently EUSTACE drinks some, looking with indolent amusement at his brother absorbed in his newspaper.*

EUSTACE: Not bad coffee, this. *(Finishes it, and begins to perform the acrobatic feat of putting his cup and saucer on the ground without falling out of the hammock.)*

HENRY: *(Looking up.)* You'll drop that cup.

EUSTACE: I think not. *(Puts cup on the ground, and resumes his recumbent posture indolently.)*

HENRY: If you leave it there someone's sure to put his foot in it.

EUSTACE: I'll risk it.

HENRY: Bah! *(Rises and puts EUSTACE's cup on table.)*

EUSTACE: Thanks. Perhaps it *is* safer there.

(HENRY grunts again and returns to his newspaper.)

EUSTACE: Anything exciting in the paper? Any convulsions in Wool?

HENRY: *(Snaps.)* No!

EUSTACE: Where's the governor? He generally comes to luncheon on Saturdays, doesn't he?

HENRY: He'll be back soon. There's a meeting of his Election Committee at four.

EUSTACE: Where?

HENRY: Here.

EUSTACE: Will he get in?

HENRY: Faringford thinks so. But it'll be a close thing. A very little might turn the scale either way.

EUSTACE: Cost him a good deal, I suppose?

HENRY: I daresay.

(Enter BAINES.)

BAINES: Dr. Glaisher to see you, sir.

(The DOCTOR comes out of the house and advances briskly to his patient. BAINES collects coffee cups and exits.)

EUSTACE: *(Stretching out hand from hammock.)* How do you do, Doctor? I'm

following your prescription, you see. Rest! Rest! There's nothing like it.

DR. GLAISHER: *(With a sagacious nod.)* Just so. I really came for your father's committee. I thought it was to be at three o'clock. But your man tells me it's not till four. So I thought I'd take a look at my patient. Well, and how are we today?

(During this scene HENRY almost chokes with indignation. EUSTACE enjoys himself immensely.)

EUSTACE: Going on all right, thanks. Still a little limp perhaps.

DR. GLAISHER: Just so. The temperature normal? No fever? That's right. *(Feels pulse.)* Pulse quite regular? Now the tongue. Just so. As I should have expected. *Just* as I should have expected. Appetite still good?

EUSTACE: Excellent, thanks.

DR. GLAISHER: You're still taking your glass of port at eleven? Just so. Oh, you'll soon be all right.

EUSTACE: Thanks to *you*, Doctor.

DR. GLAISHER: Not at all. *Not* at all. *(To HENRY.)* He'll soon be himself again now. System still wants *tone* a little, wants *tone.* I'll send him round some more of that mixture. Otherwise he's all right.

EUSTACE: And you'll look in again in a day or two to see how I am, won't you, Doctor?

DR. GLAISHER: Certainly, if you wish it. And now I must be off. I have a couple of patients near here whom I can see in the next half-hour and be back again by four. Goodbye. Goodbye. Don't disturb yourself, pray. *(To HENRY, who pays not the smallest attention to him. The DOCTOR fusses off into the house.)*

HENRY: *(Savagely.)* Ass!

EUSTACE: My dear fellow!

HENRY: Old Glaisher is a perfect noodle.

EUSTACE: Naturally. How much does a little country doctor make hereabouts? Four hundred a year? Say four hundred and fifty. You can't expect a first-rate intellect for that. 'Tisn't the market rate.

HENRY: I don't expect an absolute idiot.

EUSTACE: Glaisher doesn't *know* anything, of course, but his manner's magnificently impressive. After he's talked to me for five minutes, felt my pulse, and looked at my tongue, I almost begin to wonder whether I'm not really ill after all. That's a great gift for a doctor!

HENRY: You're perfectly well. Any fool can see that merely by looking at you. And old Glaisher goes on with his mixture and his glass of port at eleven. Bah!

(EUSTACE laughs.)

HENRY: And you encourage him. How many visits has he paid you?

EUSTACE: I don't know. Seven or eight.

HENRY: And every one of them completely unnecessary.

EUSTACE: Completely unnecessary for me, but very useful to old Glaisher, considering they mean half a guinea a piece to him.

HENRY: Which the governor pays.

EUSTACE: Which the governor pays, as you say. That's why I do it. Somebody must keep old Glaisher going, or what would become of all the little Glaishers? Here's the governor, with piles of money to throw away on Parliamentary elections and similar tomfoolery. Why shouldn't I divert some of it to old Glaisher. I like the little man.

been haranguing his son almost as though he were at a public meeting, stops short in the midst of his peroration, and hurriedly substitutes a glassy smile for the irascible sternness which marked his features a moment before. MRS. JACKSON and the others, who had listened in uncomfortable silence to MR. JACKSON's eloquence, hastily assume the conventional simper of politeness as they rise to receive their guests. The only person who remains quite self-possessed is EUSTACE, who smiles sardonically as he gets out of his hammock.)

EUSTACE: *(Aside to HENRY.)* Poor old governor! Stemmed in full tide!

MRS. JACKSON: Dear Lady Faringford. How nice of you to come! Stella, my dear.

(She shakes hands with them and with SIR JOHN.)

LADY FARINGFORD: As Sir John was due at your husband's Committee at four, Stella and I thought we would drive him down.

MRS. JACKSON: You'll stay and have some tea now you are here, of course?

LADY FARINGFORD: Thank you. Tea would be very pleasant.

(STELLA shakes hands with HENRY.)

STELLA: How do you do? And how is the invalid? *(Throwing a bright smile to EUSTACE.)* Getting on well?

HENRY: *(Grimly.)* Excellently.

(STELLA shakes hands with EUSTACE.)

STELLA: *(To HENRY.)* He really looks better, doesn't he? Dr. Glaisher says it's been a wonderful recovery.

HENRY: I suppose he does!

STELLA: *(To MR. JACKSON.)* How glad you must be to have him home again.

MR. JACKSON: *(With ghastly attempt at effusion.)* It's a great pleasure, of course.

STELLA: It must be so sad for parents when their children go away. But I suppose sons *will* go away sometimes, however hard their parents try to keep them. Won't they?

MR. JACKSON: That does happen sometimes—er—unquestionably. *(More briskly.)* And, anyhow, young men can't stay at home always. They have their own way to make in the world.

STELLA: And so the parents *have* to let them go. It seems hard. But when they come back it must be delightful.

EUSTACE: *It is.*

(During the following scene HENRY makes one or two unsuccessful efforts to approach STELLA, but EUSTACE blandly outmaneuvers him, and secures her for himself. They chat together in the friendliest fashion, while HENRY fumes inwardly.)

SIR JOHN: Ling's advertised to speak at Maytree, I see.

MR. JACKSON: Is he? At Maytree? That's rather out of his country.

SIR JOHN: Yes. He doesn't go down so well in the villages. They go to his meetings, though.

STELLA: *(Throwing a remark to MR. JACKSON.)* Mr. Ling is such a good speaker, they say.

EUSTACE: My father is a good speaker, too, when he's roused, Miss Faringford. You should have heard him ten minutes ago.

SIR JOHN: What was he speaking on?

EUSTACE: *(Airily.)* The Unemployed.

(MR. JACKSON nearly explodes at this, but, remembering that visitors are present, controls himself by a great effort.)

SIR JOHN: I congratulate you, Jackson. It isn't all sons who are so appreciative of their father's efforts. *My* son never listens to *me!* Now, hadn't we better be going in, Jackson? I shan't be able to stay very long.

MR. JACKSON: *(Looks at watch.)* Right. Glaisher will arrive directly, I'm sure. Come, Henry.

(MR. JACKSON, SIR JOHN, and HENRY go off into the house to their committee. MRS. JACKSON, LADY FARINGFORD, and VIOLET seat themselves by the table, to which tea is presently brought by BAINES. STELLA selects a chair rather further off, where she is soon joined by EUSTACE.)

LADY FARINGFORD: I do hope your husband will be elected, Mrs. Jackson. Mr. Ling has the most dreadful opinions about land—and, indeed, about everything else, I'm told.

MRS. JACKSON: Indeed?

LADY FARINGFORD: Oh yes. Only a year ago, at a meeting of the Parish Council, he made a speech attacking Sir John quite violently about one of his cottages. It was let to young Barrett, quite a respectable, hard-working man—who afterwards died of pneumonia. Mr. Ling declared the cottage was damp, and not fit for anyone to live in. So ridiculous of him! As if *all* cottages were not damp…

(She notices that EUSTACE has drawn up a chair and seated himself by her daughter.)

LADY FARINGFORD: Come over here, Stella. You have the sun on your face.

STELLA: *(Rising unwillingly.)* Very well, Mamma. *(Moves to a chair on the other side of the tea table less unfortunately situated.)*

LADY FARINGFORD: The absurd part of it was that afterwards…when Mrs. Barrett was left a widow and Sir John gave her notice because she couldn't pay her rent, and he wanted to convert the cottage into pigsties, Mr. Ling was equally indignant, and seemed to think we ought to find Mrs. Barrett another house! I don't think he can be quite right in his head.

(VIOLET gives her mother and LADY FARINGFORD their tea. EUSTACE takes a cup to STELLA.)

EUSTACE: What do *you* think about damp cottages, Miss Faringford? Do you think they ought to be left standing in order that the labourer may live in them—and have pneumonia. Or be pulled down in order that the labourer may have nowhere to live at all?

STELLA: I don't know. I think it's dreadful there should be damp cottages anywhere.

EUSTACE: That would never do. There must be good cottages and bad cottages, in order that the strong may get the good cottages and the weak the bad.

STELLA: You mean in order that the strong may have the bad cottages and the weak the good. They need them more.

EUSTACE: That would be quite unscientific. No, the strong must have the good cottages in order that they may grow stronger. And the weak must have the bad cottages in order that they may die off. Survival of the fittest, you know.

STELLA: How horrible!

EUSTACE: Yes, but how necessary!

LADY FARINGFORD: *(Swift glance towards EUSTACE and her daughter, who are obviously far too much interested in one another.)* Stella!

STELLA: Yes, Mamma.

LADY FARINGFORD: Say goodbye to Mrs. Jackson, my dear. We really must be going.

MRS. JACKSON: *(Rising also.)* Oh dear. Shall I let Sir John know you are ready?

LADY FARINGFORD: Pray don't trouble. We can pick him up as we go through the house. Goodbye, Mrs. Jackson. *(To* EUSTACE, *shaking hands.)* Goodbye. When do you go back to Australia? *Quite* soon, I hope. Come, Stella.

STELLA: *(Shaking hands.)* Goodbye, Mr. Jackson.

(LADY FARINGFORD and STELLA take their departure through the French windows, accompanied by VIOLET. Their tea has been sadly curtailed, and so has the meeting of SIR JOHN's Committee, but LADY FARINGFORD feels that no sacrifices are too great to nip an incipient flirtation between her daughter and EUSTACE. As soon as they have gone, EUSTACE goes and sits by his mother.)

EUSTACE: Clever woman, that.

MRS. JACKSON: Is she, dear? I hadn't noticed.

EUSTACE: Yes. We're all of us selfish. But most of us make an effort to conceal the fact. With the result that we're always being asked to do something for somebody and having to invent elaborate excuses for not doing it. That makes us very unpopular. But Lady Faringford proclaims her selfishness so openly that no one ever dreams of asking her to do anything. It would be tempting Providence. With the result that I expect she's quite a popular woman.

MRS. JACKSON: I'm glad you like Lady Faringford, dear. Your father has the highest opinion of her.

EUSTACE: Yes. The governor never could see an inch before his nose.

MRS. JACKSON: Can't he, dear? He has never said anything about it.

EUSTACE: *(Patting her hand affectionately.)* Dear Mother!

(VIOLET returns.)

EUSTACE: Seen the Gorgon safely off the premises?

VIOLET: *(Laughing.)* Yes—and Sir John.

MRS. JACKSON: The Committee was over, then?

VIOLET: It is now—as Lady Faringford insisted on carrying off the chairman.

(MR. JACKSON and HENRY come out of the house. BAINES follows hard after them, with letters on salver. He hands three of these to MR. JACKSON, two to MRS. JACKSON, and one to VIOLET.)

BAINES: Shall I take away, madam?

MRS. JACKSON: Wait a moment. *(To MR. JACKSON.)* Will you have any tea, Samuel?

MR. JACKSON: *(Opening long envelope and reading contents.)* No. We had some indoors.

MRS. JACKSON: *(To BAINES.)* Yes, you can take away. *(To MR. JACKSON.)* Did you have a successful meeting?

(BAINES takes away tea.)

MR. JACKSON: *(Standing by table, still reading.)* Eh? Oh yes.

MRS. JACKSON: *(To HENRY.)* What a pity Sir John had to go.

HENRY: It didn't matter. We'd pretty nearly got through our business.

(MRS. JACKSON opens her letter, and becomes absorbed in its contents.)

MR. JACKSON: *(Handing papers to HENRY.)* You'd better look through these. They're from Fisher and Thompson. It's about Wenhams' mill. The sale is next week.

HENRY: *(Nods.)* Very well.

MR. JACKSON: *(Taking a seat at the table, and clearing his throat with dignity.)* Now, Eustace, I want to have a serious talk with you.

EUSTACE: Not *again*, Father.

MR. JACKSON: *(Puzzled.)* What do you mean?

EUSTACE: Couldn't you put it off till tomorrow? I'm hardly well enough to talk seriously twice in one day.

MR. JACKSON: Nonsense, sir. You're perfectly well. Glaisher says there's no longer the slightest cause for anxiety.

EUSTACE: That traitor!

MR. JACKSON: What, sir?

EUSTACE: Nothing, Father.

MR. JACKSON: As I told you before, I'm not going to have you idling away your time here. The question is, what are we to do?

EUSTACE: Just so, Father.

MR. JACKSON: I mean, what are *you* to do?

(Pause. No remark from EUSTACE.)

MR. JACKSON: Lady Faringford said as she went away you ought to go back to Australia. She said it was a thousand pities for any young man *not* to go to Australia.

MRS. JACKSON: Eustace was just saying how clever Lady Faringford was when you came out.

MR. JACKSON: I'm glad to hear it. *(To EUSTACE.)* Well, what do you think?

EUSTACE: About Australia?

MR. JACKSON: Yes.

EUSTACE: I don't think anything about it.

MR. JACKSON: Would you like to go out there again?

EUSTACE: No, I shouldn't. I've been there once. It was an utter failure.

MR. JACKSON: *You* were a failure, you mean.

EUSTACE: As you please. Anyway, it was no good, and I had to work as a navvy on the railway. I don't propose to do that again.

HENRY: *(Looking up from Fisher and Thompson's papers.)* Other people do well in Australia.

EUSTACE: Other people do well here. Or rather, the same people do well in both.

MR. JACKSON: *(Peevishly.)* What *do* you mean?

EUSTACE: Simply that the kind of qualities which make for a success in one country make for a success in another. It's just as easy to fail in Sydney as in London. I've done it and I know.

MRS. JACKSON: *(Who has just opened her second letter.)* A letter from Janet. She's going to be at Gloucester next week, and would like to come over and see us on Friday. We aren't going out on that day, are we, Vi?

(MR. JACKSON, impatient at this interruption, opens the second of his letters and glances at it.)

VIOLET: No, Mother.

MRS. JACKSON: That will do, then. She'd better come to luncheon. *(Rises.)* I'll tell her at once before I forget.

VIOLET: Shall I do it, Mother?

MRS. JACKSON: No, dear. I can manage it. *(Goes into house.)*

MR. JACKSON: *(Who has opened his third letter, and contemplated its contents with indignant amazement, strikes the table with his open hand.)* Well!

VIOLET: What is it, Father?

MR. JACKSON: What's the meaning of this, I wonder! Barton must be out of his senses.

VIOLET: Barton?

MR. JACKSON: Yes, Barton. The tailor. Why does he send me in a bill like this? Twenty-five pounds! And I've had nothing from him since Easter. One lounge suit, one dress suit, one flannel suit, another lounge suit, one pair of trousers. Total, twenty-five pounds eleven.

EUSTACE: They're mine, Father.

MR. JACKSON: What, sir!

EUSTACE: *(Calmly.)* Some clothes I ordered. I told him to send the bill to you. That's all right, isn't it?

MR. JACKSON: *(Exploding.)* All right! Certainly not, sir. It's very far from right. It's a great liberty.

EUSTACE: My dear Father, the bill must be sent in to somebody.

MR. JACKSON: And why not to you, pray?

EUSTACE: What would be the good of that, Father. I've nothing to pay it with.

MR. JACKSON: Then you shouldn't have ordered the things.

EUSTACE: But I must wear something. I can't go on wearing Henry's things indefinitely. It's hard on *him!*

(HENRY snorts.)

EUSTACE: My dear Henry!

MR. JACKSON: *(Gobbling with indignation.)* But what's become of all the clothes you had? You must have had some clothes.

EUSTACE: *(Shrugs.)* They're in rags.

MR. JACKSON: Now look here, Eustace. I'm not going to have this. I'm not going to have a son of mine running up bills here.

EUSTACE: All right, Father. I'm quite willing to pay for the things—if you give me the money.

MR. JACKSON: I shall *not* give you the money, sir. If you want money you must earn it.

EUSTACE: That doesn't take us very far.

MR. JACKSON: *(At this, rises and invokes the heavens.)* You'll disgrace me. That's what will happen. I insist on your paying Barton, and giving me your word of honour never to get anything on credit here again.

EUSTACE: I've no objection. I don't run up tailors' bills for pleasure. I'd just as soon pay ready money as you would. Only I haven't got it. Give me twenty pounds—no, twenty-five pounds eleven—and I'll pay Barton tomorrow.

MR. JACKSON: I decline to give you money. I decline. Your request is impudent.

EUSTACE: *(Blandly.)* Let's keep our tempers, Father.

MR. JACKSON: *What*, sir?

EUSTACE: I merely suggested we should keep our tempers. That's all.

MR. JACKSON: This is intolerable. I disown you, sir. I disown you.

VIOLET: Father!

MR. JACKSON: Be silent, Violet. *(To EUSTACE.)* I'll have nothing more to do with you. I'll pay this debt to Barton—and any others you may have incurred since you came back. After that I've done with you. Leave my house at once.

EUSTACE: *(He has his temper admirably under control, but speaks with ominous distinctness.)* Very well, Father. I'll go if you wish it. But I warn you if I do go it will be to the nearest workhouse!

MR. JACKSON: *(Fuming.)* That's your affair. It has nothing to do with me. *(Turns away.)*

EUSTACE: I question that. It rather knocks your election prospects on the head, I fancy.

MR. JACKSON: *(Swinging round.)* Eh? What?

EUSTACE: You don't seriously suppose if I do this you'll be returned for Parliament? If you do you don't know the British Electorate. This is going to be a scandal, a scandal worth five hundred votes to the other side. And the last man's majority was only fifty. Oh no, my dear Father, if it comes out that the son of the rich Conservative candidate is in the local workhouse, goodbye to your chances in *this* constituency.

HENRY: You wouldn't dare!

EUSTACE: Dare? Nonsense. What have I to lose?

HENRY: But this is infamous. It's blackmail.

EUSTACE: *(Contemptuously.)* Call it what you like. It's what I propose to do if you force me to it.

VIOLET: Eustace! You couldn't be so wicked!

EUSTACE: *(More gently.)* My dear Vi. Have I any choice? Here I am absolutely penniless. The governor flies into a rage because I order some clothes from his tailor, and turns me into the street. What am I to do? I've no profession, no business I can turn my hand to. I might take to manual labour, I suppose, break stones on the road. But that would bring equal discredit on this highly respectable family. Sons of wealthy cloth manufacturers don't work with their hands. Besides, I don't like work. So there's nothing left but to beg. If I beg in the street the police will take me up. Therefore I must beg from my relations. If they refuse me I must go on the Parish.

HENRY: Father, this is monstrous. I wouldn't submit to it if I were you. If he wants to prevent your election let him. I advise you to refuse.

EUSTACE: All right. But it knocks *your* prospects on the head, too, my dear Henry—social advancement and love's young dream, you know. Miss Faringford won't marry you if this happens. Her mother won't let her. You're not so rich as all that. And if her mother would, Stella wouldn't. Stella rather likes me. If fact, I think she likes me better than she does you at present. I'm not absolutely certain she wouldn't marry me if I asked her.

HENRY: Lady Faringford would forbid her.

EUSTACE: Perhaps we shouldn't consult her. Anyhow, if you leave me to eat skilly in Chedleigh Workhouse, Stella won't accept you. I lay you ten to one on it.

(HENRY opens his mouth to speak, realises that he has nothing to say. All silent. Then a gong rings loudly inside the house. Another pause.)

EUSTACE: Well, Father, what do you say?

(Another silence.)

EUSTACE: Nothing? *You*, Henry. *You're* full of resource! What do *you* think?

(HENRY says nothing. Another pause.)

EUSTACE: Well, first gong's gone. *I* shall go and dress for dinner.

(Lounges off into the house as the curtain falls.)

ACT FOUR

The drawing room at Chedleigh as we saw it in the first act. Some three hours have elapsed since EUSTACE exploded his bombshell. When the curtain rises, MRS. JACKSON is sitting in an easy chair, nodding over a piece of work of some kind. VIOLET is at the piano, playing softly. Presently EUSTACE wanders in. VIOLET stops playing, closes piano, and comes down towards fireplace, later taking up handkerchief she is working for EUSTACE.

MRS. JACKSON: *(Waking up, drowsily.)* Is that you, Eustace? Where's your father?

EUSTACE: *(Going to her.)* In the library with Henry.

MRS. JACKSON: Talking business?

EUSTACE: *(Nods.)* Yes.

MRS. JACKSON: Can you see the time, Vi?

VIOLET: *(Sitting by fireplace.)* Nearly ten, Mother dear.

MRS. JACKSON: So late! They must be discussing something very important.

EUSTACE: *(Grimly.)* They are.

MRS. JACKSON: Have they been long in the library?

EUSTACE: They went directly you and Vi left the table.

MRS. JACKSON: And you've been alone in the dining room all that time? Why didn't you come in to us?

EUSTACE: I thought they might want to consult me.

MRS. JACKSON: *(Beaming.)* About business? I'm so glad. I'm sure you would be most useful in the business if you tried, though Henry doesn't think so.

EUSTACE: Are you, Mother?

MRS. JACKSON: Of course. Why not? Henry is. And you always learnt your lessons far quicker than Henry when you were a boy.

EUSTACE: *(Laying hand on her shoulder.)* Flatterer!

MRS. JACKSON: *(Putting work into workbasket.)* Well, I don't think I'll stay up any longer. *(Rises.)* And I do hope Henry won't keep your father up late. It can't be good for him. *(Kisses EUSTACE.)* Good night, dear. Sleep well. Are you coming, Vi? *(Kisses her.)*

VIOLET: Directly, Mother.

(EUSTACE holds open door for his mother to go out. Then comes slowly down and sits in chair by VIOLET.)

EUSTACE: Dear old mater. She's not clever, but for real goodness of heart I don't know her equal.

VIOLET: *(Impatiently.)* Clever! I'm sick of cleverness. What's the good of it? You're *clever*. What has it done for you?

EUSTACE: Kept me out of prison. That's always something.

(VIOLET makes gesture of protest.)

EUSTACE: Oh yes, it has. There have been times when I was so hard up I felt

I would do anything, *anything*, just for a square meal. If I had been a stupid man I should have robbed a till or forged a cheque, and that would have been the end of me. Fortunately, I'd brains enough to realise that that kind of thing always gets found out. So here I am, still a blameless member of society.

(VIOLET says nothing, but goes on working steadily. Pause.)

EUSTACE: The mater hasn't been told?

VIOLET: About what happened before dinner? No.

EUSTACE: I'm glad of that.

VIOLET: Why?

EUSTACE: *(Impatiently.)* My dear Vi, I'm not absolutely inhuman. Because I'm fond of her, of course, and don't like giving her pain.

VIOLET: She'll have to know sooner or later.

EUSTACE: Then I'd rather it was later; in fact, when I'm not here. If anybody has got to suffer on my account I'd rather not see it.

VIOLET: And you call Lady Faringford selfish!

EUSTACE: *(Carelessly.)* Yes. It's a quality I particularly dislike—in others.

VIOLET: *(Stopping her work for a moment and looking at him wonderingly.)* I can't understand you. As a boy you were so different. You were kind and affectionate and thoughtful.

EUSTACE: *(Shrugs.)* I daresay.

VIOLET: And now—! *(Earnestly.)* Think what you have made of your life! You might have done almost anything if you had only tried. You might have been a successful, honourable man, with an assured position and a record you could be proud of. You might—

EUSTACE: *(Putting his fingers in his ears.)* Stop, Vi; stop, I tell you. I won't listen to you.

VIOLET: *(Surprised.)* Why not?

EUSTACE: *(Doggedly.)* Because I won't. What's past is past. I have to live my life *now*. Do you suppose it would make it any easier for me to grizzle over wasted opportunities? No! As each year passes I turn over the page and forget it.

VIOLET: *(Wondering.)* And do you never look back?

EUSTACE: *(With a slight shiver.)* Never! If I did I should have drowned myself long ago.

VIOLET: *(With horror.)* Eustace!

EUSTACE: *(Exasperated.)* Oh, my dear Vi, it's all very well for you to preach, but you don't understand. It's easy enough for you living comfortably here at home. Your life slips away in a quiet round of small duties, paying calls with the mater, pouring out the governor's coffee. One day just like another. You've no anxieties, no temptations. The lines have fallen to you in pleasant places. And you think you can sit in judgment on me!

VIOLET: *(Quietly, resuming her work.)* You think my life happier than yours, then?

EUSTACE: Isn't it?

VIOLET: *(Shaking her head.)* No. *Your* life is your own. You can do as you please with it, use it or waste it as you think best. You're free. I'm not. You think because I stay quietly at home, doing my duty and not crying out against fate, I've nothing more to wish for. Would *you* be happy, do you suppose, if you were in my case? Mother never leaves home, so I cannot

either. I may sometimes get away for a few days, a week, perhaps, but very seldom. And as Mother grows older I shall go less. Soon people will give up asking me when they find I always refuse. I shall be left here alone with no friends, no real companionship, merely one of the family obliged to know the people they know, visit the people they visit, not a grown woman with interests of her own and a life to order as she pleases.

EUSTACE: But you'll marry?

VIOLET: Marry! What chance have I of marrying now? When we hadn't so much money, and Henry and Father weren't so set on taking a position in the county, there was some chance for me. Now there is none. It's all very well for Henry, he'll be a very rich man. He can marry Stella Faringford. Oh, we are to be great people! But you don't find Sir John Faringford's son proposing to *me!* No! He wants a girl of his own class or else an heiress, not a manufacturer's daughter with a few thousand pounds. So the great people won't marry me and I mustn't marry the little people. Father wouldn't like it. He hardly lets Mother ask them to the house nowadays. And so the years go by and my youth with them, and I know it will be like this always, always.

EUSTACE: Poor old Vi! And I thought you were quite contented with your bazaars and your old women. Why don't you speak to the mater?

VIOLET: *(With a shrug that is half a sigh.)* What's the use? Mother wouldn't understand. She married when she was twenty-one. She doesn't know what it is for a girl to go on living at home long after she's grown up and ought to have a house of her own. So I stay on here knitting socks for old Allen and working *your* handkerchiefs, and here I shall stay till Mother and Father are both dead…And then it will be too late.

EUSTACE: Poor old Vi!…

(A pause.)

EUSTACE: Do you know, you make me feel rather mean? Henry and the governor I can stand up to. They're very much like me. We belong to the predatory type. Only they're more successful than I am. They live on their workpeople. I propose to live on them. We're birds of a feather. But you're different. I suppose you get it from the mater.

VIOLET: Why are you so bitter against your father?

EUSTACE: Am I?

VIOLET: Yes. Just now. And this afternoon.

EUSTACE: *(Shrugs.)* Oh, that—! Well, the fact is, I wanted to bring things to a head. I feel I can't stay here. I must go away.

VIOLET: Why?

EUSTACE: For lots of reasons. I can't stand this place. I've outgrown it, I suppose.

(Pause.)

EUSTACE: And then there's Stella—

VIOLET: Stella?

EUSTACE: Yes. If I were here much longer I might be falling in love with Stella. And that wouldn't be fair to Henry. After all, he was first in the field. And it wouldn't be fair to her either. I'm not fit to marry a girl like that. No. I must get away.

VIOLET: *(Touched.)* Poor Eustace.

EUSTACE: Oh, you needn't *pity* me. *I* shall get along somehow. My life hasn't been successful. It hasn't even been

honourable. But it's been devilish interesting.

(The door opens, and MR. JACKSON and HENRY enter. MR. JACKSON passes EUSTACE in dignified silence, and turns to his daughter.)

MR. JACKSON: You here, Vi? I thought you'd have gone to bed. Your mother went long ago, I expect?

VIOLET: Only a few minutes.

MR. JACKSON: Well, run away now, dear. It's late.

VIOLET: Very well, Father. *(Gathers up her things and rises.)* Good night. *(Kisses him.)* Good night, Henry. Good night Eustace.

EUSTACE: *(Taking her hand.)* Good night, Vi. And goodbye.

(He goes to the door and opens it for her. She kisses him and goes out. He closes the door after her and slowly turns back to the others, to find MR. JACKSON in a commanding position on the hearth rug, and HENRY standing by the piano. EUSTACE selects a settee at the opposite side of the room from his father, makes himself comfortable on it, and waits for one of the others to speak. Neither does so, however, and after a minute or more has elapsed, EUSTACE, feeling the silence to be rather grotesque, breaks it.)

EUSTACE: *(Cheerfully.)* Well?

MR. JACKSON: *(Coughs nervously, then plunges into his subject.)* Ahem! We have been in consultation, your brother and I, as to the right course to adopt with regard to you.

EUSTACE: *(Nods.)* So I supposed.

(HENRY finds a chair about equidistant from his father and his brother, and sits down.)

MR. JACKSON: *(With great dignity.)* After the extraordinary and—er—undutiful attitude you took up this afternoon, I might naturally have declined all further relations with you. But—

EUSTACE: *(Matter of fact.)* But as that course might prove almost as disagreeable for yourself as it would for me, you naturally thought better of it. Let's get on.

MR. JACKSON: *(Rearing under this touch of the spur, but mastering himself.)* I might point out to you that we, your mother and I, have never failed in our duty by you. We have been indulgent parents. You were sent to a first-rate school. Nothing was spared that could make you a prosperous and successful man. But I won't speak of that.

EUSTACE: *(Drily.)* Thanks, Father.

MR. JACKSON: *(Running on.)* I might point out that we have given you a score of good chances for establishing yourself in a satisfactory position, and you have failed to profit by them. I might remind you that since you returned to this roof—

EUSTACE: *(Impatiently.)* I do wish you wouldn't begin talking about your *roof*. When people refer to their *roof* I always know they're going to suggest something quite unpractical. In ordinary times they don't soar above the ceiling. But in moments of fervour off goes the roof! Let's come to the point.

MR. JACKSON: *(Rearing again, but again controlling himself.)* Your brother and I feel that little as you have deserved this consideration at my hands, and wholly as you have forfeited all claim to further assistance both by your past failures and by your conduct this afternoon, you should yet be given one more chance.

EUSTACE: *(Insensibly begins to beat time to his father's impassioned antitheses.)* Come, that's satisfactory.

MR. JACKSON: Five years ago when, after repeated failures on your part, after paying your debts more than once and finding you openings again and again, I sent you to Australia. I gave you a thousand pounds to make a career for yourself. I told you that was the last sum of money you would have from me during your lifetime. What may—or may not—come to you after my death is another matter. And I gave it you on the express stipulation that if you lost or squandered it you were not to write for more.

EUSTACE: I kept that stipulation.

MR. JACKSON: That is so. I now propose to do again what I did five years ago. I propose to send you back to Australia with a thousand pounds.

HENRY: *(Looking up from book which he has been appearing to read.)* To be paid to you *after* your arrival there.

MR. JACKSON: Exactly. I will send the thousand pounds, less the cost of your passage, to an agent, to be paid to you on your landing. In return for this you are to promise not to come back to this country without my express permission.

(MR. JACKSON pauses for a suitable expression of gratitude from his son. None, however, is forthcoming, and he has to go on without it.)

MR. JACKSON: I think you will agree with me that the course I am taking is a kinder one than you deserve. Few fathers would do as much. I might have named a smaller sum. But I prefer to err on the generous side.

EUSTACE: *(Nodding.)* Quite so. *(With genuine curiosity.)* And what do you propose that I should do with a thousand pounds?

MR. JACKSON: That is for you to decide. You might start in business.

EUSTACE: I've tried that.

MR. JACKSON: Sheep farming.

EUSTACE: I've tried that.

MR. JACKSON: Gold mining.

EUSTACE: I've tried that.

MR. JACKSON: *(Annoyed.)* Well, well, any line which you think offers you a favourable opening.

EUSTACE: *(Insinuatingly.)* And which line is that?

MR. JACKSON: *(Irritably.)* I don't know.

EUSTACE: No more do I.

(Pause.)

EUSTACE: No, Father, it would be absurd for me to accept your offer, because it isn't practical. It would only be throwing your money away. It would do me no good, and cause you heartfelt distress.

MR. JACKSON: Nonsense. Other young fellows go out to Australia with less than a thousand pounds and make *fortunes!* Far less! Why shouldn't you?

EUSTACE: Why, indeed? However, we must keep to the point. They make fortunes. I don't.

MR. JACKSON: *(Exasperated.)* In fact, they're active and energetic, you're useless and worthless. Where other people by thrift and enterprise and steady application *make* money, you only *lose* it.

EUSTACE: Exactly, I lose it. And doubtless for the lack of the qualities you mention. What then? Granted I am all you say, how does that help us? Here I am, alive, and requiring food at the customary intervals. Who is going to give it to me?

(HENRY snorts.)

EUSTACE: Really, Henry!

MR. JACKSON: *(Hotly.)* That is to say you want to go through life sponging on your family instead of working for your living like an honest man!

EUSTACE: *(Very nearly losing his temper at what seems to him the amazing stupidity of this remark.)* Look here, Father, hadn't we better drop all that stuff about wanting to sponge on one's family and the rest of it? Nobody *wants* to sponge on other people. The idea's preposterous. We all *want* to be prosperous and highly respected members of Society like you and Henry, with more money than we know what to do with, with a seat in Parliament and a wife out of the Baronetage. That's what we *want*. And if we haven't the luck or the brains or the energy to get it, you needn't call us names. You don't suppose I *prefer* losing money to making it, do you? You don't suppose if I had my *choice* I should drift about the world adding up accounts in a filthy Hong Kong bank or playing steward on a filthier ocean liner? You can't be so ridiculous. I'm good for nothing, as you say. I've no push, no initiative, no staying power. I shall never be anything but a failure. But don't imagine I *like* it! You seem to think you've a terrible grievance because I'm a ne'er-do-well and come to you for money, but the real grievance is mine.

HENRY: If you don't like coming on your family for money, you needn't do it.

EUSTACE: *(Impatiently.)* It's not what I do but what I am that is the difficulty. What does it matter what one *does?* It's done, and then it's over and one can forget it. The real tragedy is what one *is*. Because one can't escape from that. It's always there, the bundle of passions, weaknesses, stupidities, that one calls character, waiting to trip one up. Look at the governor, that pillar of rectitude and business ability. Do you suppose *he* could be like me if he tried? Of course not. Nor could I be like him.

MR. JACKSON: Have you no will?

EUSTACE: No. Have you? Have we any of us? Aren't we just the creatures of our upbringing, of circumstance, of our physical constitution? We are launched on the stream at our birth. Some of us can't swim against the current. Those who can't it washes away.

(There is a pause. HENRY looks sullen, MR. JACKSON puzzled. EUSTACE, who has grown rather heated, regains his composure.)

MR. JACKSON: *(With a sigh.)* Well what's to be done with you?

EUSTACE: *(Shrugs.)* I'm afraid you'll have to keep me. You're my father, you know. You've brought into the world a worthless and useless human being. I think those were your adjectives? You're responsible.

MR. JACKSON: *(Angry again.)* Is that any reason why I should support you?

EUSTACE: *(Quite sincerely.)* No, Father. Frankly, I don't think it is. I think your sensible course would be to put me quietly out of this wicked world or hire someone else to do so. I'm a bad egg. I shall never hatch into anything that will do you the smallest credit. Your sensible course is to destroy me. But you daren't do that. Social conventions won't allow you. The law would make a fuss. Indeed, the law won't even allow me to put an end to myself and save you the trouble. I should be rescued, very wet and draggled, from the muddy waters of the Ched by the solitary policeman who seems to have nothing else to do but stand about rescuing people who had much better be left to drown. I should be haled before the magistrates—you're a magistrate yourself now, Father. You'd be there—I should be given a solemn lecture and then "handed over to my friends"—that's you again,

Father—who would undertake to look after me in future. And I only hope you would be able to conceal your annoyance at my rescue from the prying eyes of your brother justices!

MR. JACKSON: *(Stung.)* You've no right to say that. You've no right to suggest that I wish you were dead.

EUSTACE: *(Genially.)* Of course you do. You want me to go to Australia, where you'll never hear of me again, where, in fact, I shall be dead to you. What's the difference?

(A pause.)

MR. JACKSON: Well, I won't argue with you. The question is, what do you propose?

EUSTACE: *(As if it was the most natural suggestion in the world.)* In the circumstances, I think your wisest course will be to make me an allowance, say three hundred a year, paid quarterly. Then I'll go away and live quietly, and you'll be rid of me.

MR. JACKSON: *(Furious.)* I refuse, sir. I refuse absolutely. The suggestion is utterly shameless.

EUSTACE: *(Calmly.)* I daresay. But it's perfectly sensible. I appeal to Henry.

HENRY: *(After a moment's thought.)* Father, I think you'd better do as he says. If you gave him a thousand pounds, as we intended, he'd only lose it. Better make him an allowance. Then you can always stop it if he doesn't behave himself. It's a shameless proposal, as you say, but it's practical.

EUSTACE: Bravo, Henry! I always said you had brains. That's it exactly. Shameless, but eminently practical.

MR. JACKSON: *(Grumbling.)* What I can't see is, *why* I should allow you this money. Here's Henry who's perfectly satisfactory, and has never caused me a moment's anxiety. I don't give *him* money. Whereas you, who have never caused me anything else, expect me to keep you for the remainder of your life.

EUSTACE: *(With bitter contempt.)* It is unreasonable, isn't it? But we live in a humanitarian age. We coddle the sick and we shall soon come to pensioning the idle and the dissolute. You're only a little in advance of the times. This country is covered with hospitals for the incurably diseased and asylums for the incurably mad. If a tenth of the money were spent on putting such people out of the world, and the rest were used in preventing the healthy people from falling sick, and the sane people from starving, we should be a wholesomer nation.

MR. JACKSON: *(After a pause.)* Well, if Henry thinks so I suppose I must give you an allowance—but I won't go beyond two hundred.

EUSTACE: I can't keep out of debt on two hundred.

MR. JACKSON: Two hundred and fifty, then.

EUSTACE: *(Persuasively.)* Three hundred.

MR. JACKSON: Two hundred and fifty. Not a penny more. *(Breaking out again.)* Why, I'd starve before I consented to sponge on my family as you are doing!

EUSTACE: *(Quietly.)* You evidently don't know much about starving, Father!

(Silence. MR. JACKSON suddenly realises that his son has actually known what hunger means, and the thought makes him uncomfortable.)

EUSTACE: If you can write me a cheque for my first quarter now I can catch the 11:15 up.

(MR. JACKSON draws himself up and puts his hands behind his back with awful dignity.)

EUSTACE: You may as well. After all, I'm your son. And if I'm a sweep, it's your fault.

MR. JACKSON: *(Takes his hand after a moment's hesitation.)* Goodbye.

(EUSTACE goes slowly towards the door.)

MR. JACKSON: You may write occasionally, just to let us know how you are.

EUSTACE: *(Offering cheque, with a grim smile.)* Make it three hundred, Father—and I won't write.

(MR. JACKSON is about to protest angrily, then, recognizing the uselessness of that proceeding, says nothing, but waves cheque contemptuously away. EUSTACE, still smiling, pockets it.)

EUSTACE: No? Well have it your own way. Goodbye. Goodbye, Henry.

(EUSTACE nods to him without offering to shake hands, and goes out as the curtain falls.)

ST. JOHN HANKIN (1869–1909)

St. John Hankin began to contribute humorous essays and dramatic parodies including new "last-acts" for well-known plays to *Punch* magazine in 1898. In 1901, some of his contributions were anthologized as *Mr. Punch's Dramatic Sequels*. Hankin also contributed about seventy drama reviews to the *London Times* before beginning his career as a playwright in 1903 with *The Two Mr. Wetherby's*. Hankin was actively involved in running the Stage Society, a London theater group that supported plays of literary merit, founded in part to avoid the Lord Chamberlain's censorship.

Hankin was the only living dramatist other than Shaw to have more than one full-length play produced at the Royal Court during the important Vedrenne-Barker years from 1904 to 1907. Granville Barker produced the premieres of both *The Return of the Prodigal* and *The Charity that Began at Home*. Hankin's other plays were *The Cassilis Engagement* (1907) and *The Last of the De Mullins* (1908).

During Hankin's youth, his father suffered a nervous breakdown, which left him an invalid. Hankin himself began to suffer from increasing ill health in 1907, and he was plagued with the fear that he would suffer the same fate as his father. On a "dull, sultry, wet" day in June of 1909, St. John Hankin tied two seven-pound dumbbells around his neck and drowned himself in the river Ithon. He left his wife a letter expressing his fear that he would "slip into invalidism," which he could not bear, and ended by telling her, "I have found a lovely pool in a river and at the bottom I hope to find rest." George Bernard Shaw described his death as "a public calamity."

MINT THEATER COMPANY

Established in 1992, Mint Theater Company exists to bring new vitality to lost or neglected plays. Mint excavates buried theatrical treasures, reclaiming them for our time through research, dramaturgy, production, publication, and a variety of enrichment programs and advocates for their ongoing life in theaters everywhere. Mint's 2001 Obie Grant recognized its success in combining "the excitement of discovery with the richness of tradition. When it comes to the library," the citation reads, "there's no theater more adventurous." Mint's Drama Desk Award (2002) recognizes the importance of Mint's mission of "unearthing, presenting, and preserving forgotten plays of merit."

Worthy But Neglected: Plays of the Mint Theater Company, an anthology of seven rediscoveries, is a lasting embodiment of Mint's mission and an important tool in the effort to broaden its reach. Other publications include two additional volumes in the *Reclaimed* series featuring playwrights who have received more than one production at the Mint. *Arthur Schnitzler Reclaimed* features new English-language versions of two masterworks from Austrian writer Arthur Schnitzler—both received their New York premieres at the Mint: *The Lonely Way* (*Der einsame Weg*) and *Far and Wide* (*Das weite Land*). *Harley Granville Barker Reclaimed* includes three plays: *The Madras House*, *The Voysey Inheritance*, and the one-act *Farewell to the Theatre*.

Lost plays rediscovered by Mint include the world premiere of Dawn Powell's 1931 *Walking Down Broadway*, the New York Premiere of *Welcome to Our City* by novelist Thomas Wolfe; the first New York revivals of the Pulitzer Prize–winners *Alison's House* by Susan Glaspell and *Miss Lulu Bett* by Zona Gale as well as D. H. Lawrence's *The Daughter-in-Law,* John Galsworthy's *The Skin Game,* Rachel Crothers's *Susan and God*, St. John Ervine's *John Ferguson* and J. M. Barrie's *Echoes of the War*. Mint strives to expand the canon of plays considered worthy of production and study in theaters, schools, and libraries. In the last few years, Cecily Hamilton's *Diana of Dobson's*, Githa Sowerby's *Rutherford and Son,* and *The Voysey Inheritance*—all produced by Mint—have received productions at other theaters in the U.S. and Canada, bringing new vitality to plays that have lain fallow for years, some for nearly a century. Visit www.minttheater.org for more information.