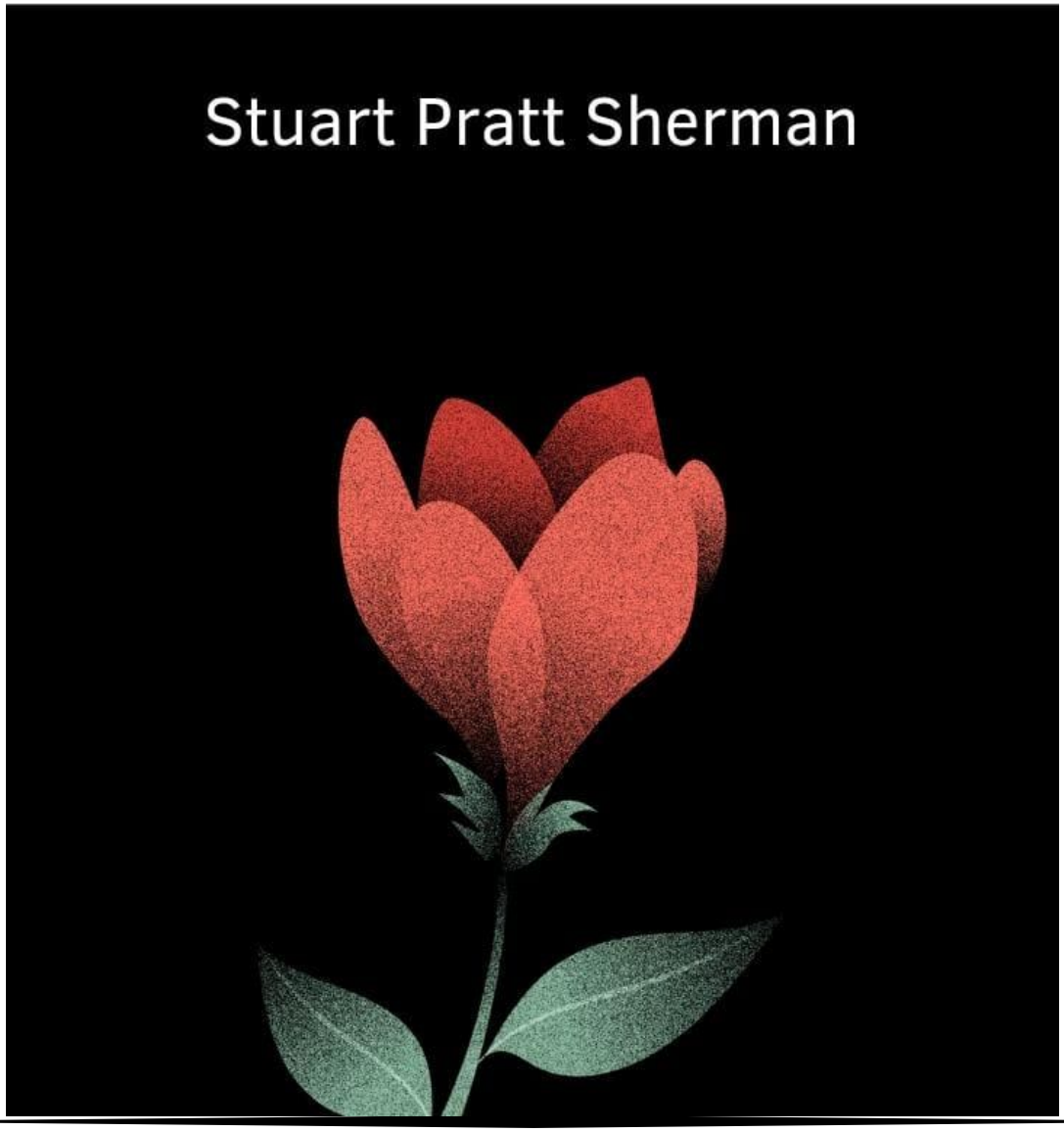
MY DEAR CORNELIA

Stuart Pratt Sherman



My dear Cornelia

BY

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CHALLENGING THE IDEA OF CHASTITY

I
WE DISCUSS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS AND CRITICS

When I am in doubt, I talk with Cornelia; and while I am with her, my uncertainties disappear. But this subject she herself broached, at her home in one of those paradises of wood and water where Americans of her class have learned to hide their lives—for the summer.

She is a young woman of forty-five, with what Hazlitt somewhere calls a "coronet face," finely cut and proudly borne, and it gives one a feeling of distinction merely to be in her presence. My memory holds like a piece of radiant sculpture the image that she left there at her wedding, twenty years ago, when she turned at the altar after the episcopal benediction and paced down the aisle, clear-eyed and fearless, to the thunder of organ music: it seemed to me then that the young chevalier of the diplomatic service on whose arm her hand had alighted was leading the Samothracian Victory into the holy state of matrimony. It was an excellent alliance, with high sanctions and distinguished witnesses, auspiciously begun and with a constantly felicitous continuation. She has walked ever since, so her friends declare, between purple ribbons: her ways have gone smoothly and well in delectable regions far above the level of the rank-scented multitude.

When one talks with her, her hands lie still in her lap. She does not think with her hands, nor does any other emphasis of her body intrude its comment upon the serene and assured movements of her intelligence. So remote she seems from the ignominious and infamous aspects of existence, that one wonders how she becomes aware of them. Yet such unpleasant things, verminous or reptilian, as creep within range of her vision she inspects sharply and with intrepidity; for she knows precisely how to deal with them.

As I sat there, blissfully receiving a sense of the security and perfection which emanate from her, it just flickered into my consciousness that, if a mouse could have entered that impeccably ordered room, she would not for a moment have been at a loss. She would quietly have summoned a maid. Then she would have said: "There is a mouse in the room. Take it out." She likes everything to be right; and she knows so absolutely what is right, that any shade of uncertainty in conversation with her seems a kind of baseness and disloyalty. Yet, as much as a superior being can be troubled, she was troubled about the state of current fiction. She was troubled in that high and spirited sense of responsibility which certain fine women feel for the tone of the Republic.

"You have shown," she said, "some understanding of the immense influence exerted by literature upon the minds of our young people. But your discussion of 'unprintable' books is up in the air. You must meet peril definitely, perilously, or your readers won't even believe that it exists. In a prairie fire, you must fight with fire; water, the flames snuff up like a perfume, and sweep on. You don't come to grips with the facts. You asperse them with rosewater."

"You mean," I replied, fencing feebly, "that I did not furnish a guide to those new books which no young person should read? I had thought that would rather please you. The suppressive societies will supply the information which I omitted. I am not specially interested in the circulation of any questionable books—except my own."

"Your innuendo is nasty and your tone is flippant," she said. I bowed in acknowledgment of my entire agreement. "But the subject," she continued, "is grave. It is very grave to those of us who have boys and girls of eighteen and twenty. We wish them in these formative years to be subject only to the finest influences. How can they be, when they read such books? How can any one who is interested in moulding the characters of the younger generation not desire to keep such books as you know they are reading out of their hands? When I think of my son or my daughter, with their clean sweet young minds, wading into the filth of our popular fiction, I repeat to myself those lines of Heine—you remember:—

'Mir ist, als ob ich die Hände
Aufs Haupt dir legen sollt,
Betend dass Gott dich erhalte
So rein und schön und hold.'"

"Try it," I suggested with studious brutality. "Call in the children. Lay your hands on their heads, and pray that God may keep them in their beauty and purity and sweetness. How will they take it? Demurely, I fancy—while they are in your presence. But when they meet in the garden afterward, they will exclaim, 'Isn't mother an old dear!' And then they will laugh softly, and think of—all sorts of things. Heine's prayer, you know, doesn't hit off the aspirations of contemporary youth. Beauty is still 'all right.' But the quality of 'sweetness,' though it is not yet wholly unmarketable, is held in greatly diminished esteem. And as for purity—'What is purity?' asks the jesting younger generation, and will not stay for an answer."

"Young people ask many foolish questions," said Cornelia dismissively. "What troubles me is rather the changing attitude of so many parents and teachers. Have they lost that beautiful desire to shield the years of innocence? Have they quite lost their sense of responsibility?"

"No," I conjectured, "they haven't altogether lost their sense of responsibility. But they haven't known quite what to do with it; and just now it seems temporarily to have slipped from their hands. They didn't know how to use it when they had it; or they were afraid to use it, and cast the responsibility for the innocence of their children upon God; and now the children, sick of that evasion, are acting for themselves. And I am afraid that we have rather lost contact with the younger

generation. It has experienced so much, it has read so much, it is so accustomed to the free discussion of all sorts of topics which we thought ominous even to mention—that I often suspect we have more to learn from it than it has to learn from us."

"That is a false and vicious humility."

"No, I assure you, very genuine, however vicious. It came over me in the spring several years ago in a vision. I happened one day to observe in my garden a large white cat stalking with soft experienced tread under the lilacs, on the lookout for young robins making their trial flight. Being of a somewhat analogical turn of mind, and having then a high conceit of the wisdom of our generation, I said to myself: 'The garden is a symbol of the world. The wise cat is the old professor. The fledgling robin is the young student.' As I murmured the last word, the white cat made a flying leap for the nestling. It proved to be, however, an adult wren, pert and elusive, which hopped just one spray higher and twittered derision. The cat walked off crestfallen, muttering: 'Such wise birds! I have never known a season when birds were wise so young.'"

"Well?"

"Well, I really trust these 'wise birds' nowadays much further than you do."

"Won't you explain why?" said Cornelia.

"Let me tell you another story. At a neighborhood party recently, where there was dancing, and the very youngest generation was present, I was greatly flattered by receiving from Adelaide, a young lady of five years, marked attentions which on previous occasions had been directed to Bertram, a far more plausible person than I in all respects, and, moreover, only thrice the age of Adelaide. I said, 'I thought you were devoted to Bertram.' Instantly she replied: 'I was. But I am not interested in Bertram any longer. I know all about him.' At the age of five, don't you see, she has already begun to 'sip the foam of many lives.' I happened to be, shall I say, the coca-cola of the evening. But I know that I shall be sipped and discarded. Already Adelaide has become critical, fastidious, wary; she will not for long be taken in."

"Well?" again from Cornelia, with a hint of irritation.

"I mean to insist," I explained cautiously, "that such sentimentalists as you and I seldom do justice to the hard, clear-eyed maturity—of a sort—which our young people have attained by pooh-poohing our sentimentality and subjectivity and adopting what Santayana calls a simple 'animal faith' in the material surfaces of things."

"Just what do you mean?" Cornelia inquired,—sharply and scornfully,—"by 'hard, clear-eyed maturity'? I have no such feeling about my own children. My own son and daughter are being brought up as I was brought up. Well-bred young people to-day differ in no essential respect from well-bred people twenty years ago. What some idiots try to make us believe is a change of standards is not a change of

standards. It is merely a horrid confusion, due to the fact that a great many ill-bred people are expressing themselves."

"That in itself," I said, "implies a change in conditions, if not in standards. There is, as you say, a 'horrid confusion.' The confusion is due to the fact that the well-bred young people are now applauding the ill-bred old people. That is really significant. When the well-bred young people begin to desert, it is all up with the Old Guard. That indicates either a revolt or a revolution. You must remember, Cornelia, that one half of history is an account of the struggle made by your class to keep the rest out; and the other half of history is an account of how the rest are getting in. If you are now in the presence of a revolt by a weak body of outsiders, you may still effectively oppose it. But if it is a revolution including your own household, you had better prepare to support the best elements in the *de facto* government—in the literary no less than in the political republic."

"There are no best elements," Cornelia retorted, "in what you call the *de facto* government. There are no good elements. There are no decent elements. It is an insurrection of hoodlum and bedlam. It is all vile. The situation," she continued, with the clear precision of a cookie-cutter, "demands drastic action. You, instead of strengthening the hands of those who attempt to act, amuse yourself with philosophical futilities, and virtually throw the weight of your levity against all action."

"Suppose I desire an antecedent action of the mind?"

"But you are so ambiguous that you have no force. One can't really tell on which side you are."

"I should like," I hurriedly replied, "to be on the side of the angels. You know that I should like to be on your side. If I am ever driven from your side, it will be by the fine high-bred incuriosity of angels. It will be by the applause of angels, accompanied by some fresh demonstration of their immitigable hostility to thought."

"You are rude."

"And you—just faintly provoking. I am not sure, Cornelia, that you quite understand the limits of a writer's power. I have a friend, long experienced in a public library, who assures me that critical articles have no real effect. Readers either agree with them from the outset and are pleased, or disagree with them from the outset and are displeased. This, she tells me, is especially true of lawyers, clergymen, professors, and all nice people. Perhaps that is so. Let us suppose that it is. Suppose also that I were returning to the discussion of 'unprintable' books. What treatment of the subject would please *you*? You are a 'conservative' of definite convictions, and you demand drastic action. Exactly what is the situation and what the appropriate action? Are you prepared to say?"

"Certainly," she replied. "And I will tell you also the stand which I believe should be taken by a critic who professes to have the public welfare at heart."

“Before you do that,” I interposed, “you must pardon me one more flippancy. Isn’t it true that people often ‘take a stand’ to watch something that is going on and that will continue to go on whether they remain in their ‘stand’ or not?”

“If you mean to ask whether I am a moral futilitarian, I am not. People of character take a stand in order to prevent obnoxious things from going on. If the obnoxious things continue to go on in spite of them, people of character are glad to be left behind, or even to be trampled underfoot, when that is the only way to make their protest effective.”

“You speak like yourself, Cornelia,” I said, “and no higher compliment is possible. Your image interests me. I seem to see an invading army with leveled spears, and you dauntlessly flinging yourself upon them. Opposition interests me as long as it is effective—as long as the opposing breast checks the leveled spears. Sniping from the housetop at the postman, after the revolution has actually taken place—in that, there is a kind of unpalatable futility. But how do you apply your figure to the duty of the critic in the face of current fiction?”

“I apply it in this way. You yourself have admitted that it would be very easy to make a list of popular writers who, however varied their art and method, have running through their work an insistent preoccupation with sex of quite a different character from its occasional romantic treatment in the novels that you and I were brought up on. The heart of the matter is this: the minds of young people are being gravely affected by a group of writers who, in their several ways, definitely challenge the idea of chastity. Now, what a really serious critic should do is to call a halt in the production and reading of that sort of literature.”

“My dear Cornelia,” I exclaimed,—I always exclaim “My dear” when I am about to express impatience; it introduces the note of suavity,—“My dear Cornelia, do you read the magazines? Do you attend church? Do you see the newspapers? Did you not observe that the form, ‘It is time to call a halt,’ was first employed on the tenth of August, 1914, by an editor in Oshkosh with reference to the German advance on Paris? In the following week it was applied by a clergyman of Tulsa, Oklahoma, with reference to the consumption of chewing-gum in the United States. Since that time, it has been in continuous employment by all serious critics, lay and clerical, with reference to the output of the leading English and American novelists.”

“Well,” she replied, “what if it has? So much the worse for the leading English and American novelists. If they are all running amuck, is that any reason why the rest of us should lose our heads? If the novelists are going definitely wrong at the point which I have indicated, a critic could not be better employed than in standing at that point and calling a halt.”

“You assign to criticism,” I said, “a task which appeals but faintly to the critic—a task like that of a traffic policeman without authority or power. If I had all the authority in the world, I would not cry ‘stop’ to the novelists, even to those that I have criticized most harshly.”

“And why not?”

“Because I learn too much from what they are doing to desire to dam the stream of information. The realistic novelists to-day are extraordinarily copious, candid, and illuminating confessors of private morals. I have, to be sure, been troubled by the fact that the lives of respectable people are so seldom revealed in these confessions. I have even allowed myself to wonder faintly at times whether unwillingness to confess may not be, as our direful Mid-Western school contends, the chief distinction between respectable people and the other sort. It is a horrid doubt, concerning which no one but the novelist betrays much curiosity or provides much light. And so, for novelists, I wish freedom to confess, and, for myself, freedom to comment on their confessions—though, since they have become so desperately confessive, it seems frequently indelicate to do so. If they are, as you assert, definitely challenging the idea of chastity, the matter is indeed of more than merely literary interest. I should like to know whether our standards are undergoing revolutionary change. Won’t you please go out and ‘call a halt,’ while I go home and inquire in my own fashion whether anything is going on; whether the idea of chastity has actually been challenged; if so, what idea of chastity, why, where, when, in what manner, and with what results?”

“You are hopeless,” said Cornelia, rising. “I shall ask the Bishop to make this the subject of one of his Lenten discourses.”

“That will be just the thing,” I rejoined, “to induce profound reflection in our novelists.”

II
I MEDITATE, IN FRONT OF A BOOKCASE, ON SCOTT, JANE AUSTEN, CHARLOTTE BRONTË, AND THE GOOD VICTORIANS

When I returned to my study, I dropped into a chair which frequently invites meditation, before a case containing current fiction. My eyes glanced swiftly along the rows of Wells, Galsworthy, Bennett, Beresford, and Walpole, lingering an extra moment on *Ann Veronica*, *The Dark Flower*, and *The Pretty Lady*; visited with slow interrogative scrutiny the "colorful" assemblage of Hergesheimer, D. H. Lawrence, Rebecca West, May Sinclair, W. L. George, James Joyce, Cabell, Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, Charles G. Norris, Ben Hecht, and Waldo Franck; then fluttered to rest upon a half-dozen miscellaneous recent arrivals—Meredith Nicholson's *Broken Barriers*, Mrs. Gerould's *Conquistador*, Maxwell's *Spinster of This Parish*, Willa Cather's *The Lost Lady*, G. F. Hummel's *After All*, and *West of the Water Tower*.

Here, I said to myself, is material enough to prove Cornelia's case, if she has a case. Among this company I shall find the challengers, if there is a challenge. What are they calling in question? The idea of chastity—whose idea of chastity? Cornelia's idea, the idea of all nice people—What is the idea of all nice people regarding chastity? Look in the Dictionary, the record of good usage—Here it is: "Innocence of unlawful sexual intercourse." As a history of usage, the Dictionary should add in parenthesis: "This is a virtue assumed to be present in all members of the female sex in good and regular standing."

Here we have a simple and definite idea to work upon: Chastity is a virtue assumed to be present in all members of the female sex in good and regular standing. Who first gave currency to that idea? Our friends the Victorians? Oh, no! It is astonishing how many so-called Victorian ideas, delicate and fragile, can be found thriving in manlier ages, in old robust books like *Don Juan* and *Tom Jones*, and in the drama of that "den of lions," the Renaissance. How they valued this virtue—those "lions" of the Renaissance! How they valued this virtue in their wives! What praise they had for its possessors—"chaste as the icicle that's curded by the frost from purest snow and hangs on Dian's temple"! Shakespeare valiantly assumed the presence of that virtue in all members of the female sex in good and regular standing—except Cleopatra.

But we must not be too historical. The idea of chastity exists full-blown in Goldsmith, in those two famous stanzas which inquire what happens when lovely woman stoops to "folly" and learns too late that men "betray," that is, fail to legalize the "folly." We remember what follows, for the lines were in every anthology employed in our formative period to give to our young minds a relish for virtue and a lively apprehension of the consequences of departing from it. Cornelia still thinks we

should prescribe Goldsmith rather than Mr. Galsworthy for the collateral reading of her daughter. Goldsmith declares very firmly that when lovely woman stoops to folly, no art can wash her guilt away.

> The only art her guilt to cover,
> To hide her shame from every eye,
> To give repentance to her lover,
> And wring his bosom—is to die.

Several distinct elements appear in our fully developed idea: first, chastity is the virtue of a legal status; second, women are naturally law-abiding; third, if they lose their status, it is by] the natural perfidy of predatory man; fourth, the disaster is irretrievable. There is no salvation for the woman but death, the cloister, exile, or, occasionally, a shamefaced return to "chastity" under the horsewhip or at point of the pistol.

This idea flourished in the "good old" novels of Sir Walter Scott; it is fairly well illustrated in the case of Effie Deans in *The Heart of Midlothian*. Scott was a romancer. His contemporary, Jane Austen, was a realist. She was far less chivalrously certain than he that lovely women who are neglectful of legal status are by nature virtuous. She looked at them hard; she inclined strongly to believe that such women are by nature vain, sentimental, and ignorant—like Lydia Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*. But Jane Austen is at one with Scott in treating unlawful passion austerely. In the fiction of both these worthies the erring woman is unmistakably a "victim"; the man, however plausible his manners, is a profligate and unprincipled, if not a designing, villain; the consequences of departure from legal status are depicted in strongly deterrent colors. Our idea of chastity is fortified by them.

Now let us advance a generation or so and question our friends the Victorians: do they accept] our idea and loyally enforce it? Yes—now and then. Familiar cases? There is the case of little Em'ly in *David Copperfield*. She is the typical victim of the typical seducer; and Dickens punishes them both in approved traditional fashion. He drowns the wicked lover—which is, of course, a logical consequence of departure from legal status. He sends the victim with her "soft sorrowful blue eyes" to Australia, where she attempts to expiate her guilt by a life of self-sacrifice. She has many a good offer of marriage; "'But, uncle,' she says to me, 'that's gone for ever.'" Here we have the doctrine of the irretrievable. That doctrine is sternly proclaimed by George Eliot in the graver case of Hetty Sorrel in *Adam Bede*. The repentant lover tries to do something for Hetty. His last words are that it is no use: "You told me the truth when you said to me once, 'There's a sort of wrong that can never be made up for.'" Neither Scott nor Jane Austen could have handled these elementary cases in a more strictly orthodox fashion. Our idea is again fortified.

But the great Victorian novelists pushed their speculations beyond the elementary problems raised by the victim-villain situation. They had,] several of them, personal reasons for reflecting thoughtfully upon the social utility of the stout bulwarks with which the English law attempted to fortify the idea of chastity and the

related doctrine of the irretrievable. Dickens is said to have fallen in love with all the Hogarth daughters and to have married the wrong one. Thackeray married at twenty-five a woman who half a dozen years later became insane and who outlived him. Bulwer-Lytton was legally separated at twenty-three from a woman who outlived him. Meredith's *Modern Love* discusses an incompatibility of temper from which a death divorced him. And George Eliot, high priestess of Victorian morality, was actually living in a kind of solemn and almost officious virtue with another woman's husband. These were circumstances arranged to liberate speculation and to set it playing a little skeptically about the one way out—the sole dark exit which Goldsmith had so glibly offered to lovely women who are unfortunate in love.

In a novel of the mid-nineteenth century, which used to be thought very dangerous reading,—*Jane Eyre*,—Charlotte Brontë considered one of these more difficult cases, and almost presented it. Jane, an eager, self-reliant, self-supporting, and fairly hard-headed young woman, first of our modern heroines, is loved with a grand passion by Rochester, who is enchained by marriage to a hopeless lunatic. Now the novelist permits Jane to fall deeply in love with Rochester, thus perilously illustrating the possibility that a truly great and two-sided passion may come into existence outside legal status. Charlotte Brontë, however, intervened twice to save the situation. She wasn't fastidious about the chastity of Rochester: chastity is a female virtue. But she was fastidious about the chastity of Jane. And so, of course, she makes Jane ignorant at first of the fact that Rochester is married; and she makes Jane tell him that it is all up, when she learns that he is married. That was the perfectly correct thing for Jane to do.

But it created a dilemma. Charlotte Brontë knew that it created a dilemma—a dilemma with unchastity for one horn and the frustration of a grand passion for the other. (It should perhaps be explained that a grand passion, in those illiberal days, was thought of as an experience that befell a girl but once in a lifetime.) Charlotte Brontë did not quite dare to treat this dilemma. She faced it for a moment. She let her readers face it for a moment. Then she intervened again: she destroyed the dilemma. She made it all come right. She restored both hero and heroine to chastity by pitching the lunatic wife headlong into the flames of the house of Rochester.

A happy thought—so it must have seemed to the author. Yet, as one reflects upon it, this solution appears a little dangerous. To pitch a superfluous wife into the flames—well, it would not quite serve as a Kantian basis for the solution of all such problems. Under the English law, the dilemma reasserted its actuality. *Jane Eyre* stands there early in the Victorian Age as a challenge, rather evasively presented, to the idea of chastity. In W. B. Maxwell's *Spinster of This Parish*, 1923, a modern heroine is placed in almost precisely Jane's situation, except that her lover does not think it necessary to lie to her about his lunatic wife. Without a moment's hesitation, she accepts the grand passion. Since she accepts it with all the fortitude and fidelity of

an old-fashioned wife, she seems to-day a quite safe, old-fashioned character; and it is hard to conceive of any one's thinking of her as "unchaste."

Other Victorians, usually with much circumspection, returned to the dilemma; and they returned to it in such numbers that to challenge the idea of chastity as a legal creation may be regarded as a rather distinctively Victorian contribution. From the question what to do when you are united to an undivorceable insane wife, the Victorians proceeded cautiously to consider the demands of virtue in analogous sets of circumstances. What is the point at which the maintenance of legal chastity involves the loss of ethical integrity? What is right conduct for a young girl whose parents or relatives have united her in a "suitable marriage" to a repellent brute of means and good family? That is a question which interested Thackeray in *The Newcomes*; and it will be remembered that the wife of Barnes Newcome answers the question in her own case by giving her husband occasion for divorce under the English law. It is not always observed that to Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* right conduct, to the last page of the book, consists in fidelity to her lover, not to her fanatical husband; and Hawthorne, perhaps indecently, places the lovers in adjacent graves of a Boston burying-ground. Isabel Archer, in Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady*, is begged by her lover to desert her husband and come to him, and to disregard the "bottomless idiocy" of what other people will think or say about them. Though, on the last page, Isabel is still clinging to legality, one is left in some doubt whether she will cling indefinitely. Meredith's Diana is a standing challenge to the doctrine of irretrievable marriage. Hardy's Tess is a defiance to the idea of chastity entertained by the Angel Clares; and the obscene relation in *Jude the Obscure* is obviously that between him and his wife, not that between him and Sue, except as it is smirched by his return to his wife and by her return to her husband.

But why multiply instances? Here are enough to show that the good Victorians repeatedly solicited our sympathy and our support for heroines whose ethical integrity was afflicted by their legal chastity. The idea of illicit love as an affair of victim and villain, has been largely jettisoned or given over to melodrama, as of an interest too primitive or too banal for extended consideration. To their successors, the Victorian realists bequeath, as matter of far higher artistic and general human concern, their rather cautious essays upon the evaded dilemma of *Jane Eyre*.

III
H. G. WELLS, GALSWORTHY, MAY SINCLAIR, J. D. BERESFORD

Let us now enter fearfully upon the burning ground of contemporary fiction. The territory is immense, and unexplorable here in detail. All that one can do is to stand upon the smoky borderland, and comment briefly upon some conspicuous spots in the conflagrant area and upon the general direction of the wind.

One cannot, on every occasion for mentioning him, reread the entire works of Mr. Wells. I retain a strong impression that most of his novels of contemporary life challenge the idea of indissoluble marriage. In this respect Mr. Wells is no innovator. I retain also the impression that one tends to derive from these novels a conviction that everyone's first marriage is a mistake. This indicates the direction of the wind. Now Mr. Wells is a long way from accepting Goldsmith's idea that death is the only way out of a bad situation. He has no patience with the doctrine of irretrievability. But as long as unlawful relations furnish the only available alternative way out, his] works naturally disquiet Cornelia, and challenge her idea of chastity.

His works disquiet me, because I think the defect which his heroes and heroines find in their first marriage they will find also in their second, and their third, and their fourth; they will find that neither the second nor the third nor the fourth marriage is capable of sustaining indefinitely the sense of ecstasy which the tired business man experiences the first time he notices how pretty his stenographer is. Tedium is three fourths of life. Sensible men settle quietly down to endure it, sustained by their fortitude and their twenty-five per cent of creature comforts and incidentals. The others imagine that by Babbittian adventures they can change the proportions and get something better than tedium. There is nothing that is even "just as good." Thackeray knew this and admitted it. Mr. Wells hasn't admitted it. That constitutes one distinction between the author of *The Newcomes* and the author of *The New Machiavelli*.

Mr. Galsworthy told us in *The Dark Flower* about the quest of ecstasy, and in *Saint's Progress* he confessed something of the extraordinary disregard of legality in sexual relations on the] part of well-bred young people, occasioned in part by the stresses of the war. Mr. Galsworthy, like Mr. Wells, inclines to make ecstasy rather than legality the test of right relations between men and women, though I think most of his heroes and heroines are somewhat less incorrigibly expectant than those of Mr. Wells. In *The Forsyte Saga*, his prime achievement and a rich and various and notable work, he makes his most significant study of that Victorian dilemma upon which *Jane Eyre* was so nearly impaled. In the case of Soames Forsyte and Irene and Jolyon, he brings, with great circumstantiality and seriousness, a fine woman face to face with the choice of illegal status or the substantial frustration of life; and Irene unequivocally accepts the illegal status. The entire treatment of the theme indicates, I think, Mr. Galsworthy's belief that she was ethically justified, as she was also justified

by the general consequences, in her union with Jolyon. The one high crime in the book, as Mr. Galsworthy conceives it, is Soames Forsyte's exaction of marital rights from a wife who is in love with another man.

I wonder whether Cornelia has read *The Forsyte Saga*. I wonder whether, if she should enter] imaginatively into the circumstances, she would not consider Soames's act a crime. If so, she would challenge the idea of chastity. Perhaps she would call the act "a heinous unchastity"; but that would be to abandon our definition.

I was a bit shocked last spring when someone remarked that May Sinclair had joined the ranks of those who are writing primarily to engage the attention of Mr. Sumner; and that *Ann Severn and the Fieldings* is an "immoral book." I recalled her *Divine Fire* as one of the keen delights of twenty years ago, and I remembered her recently published *Mr. Waddington of Wyck* as the most exhilarating and remorseless flaying alive of the philanderer that I had ever witnessed.

I read *Ann Severn and the Fieldings*, and I found it, especially in its last two or three chapters, a love story of poignant and thrilling beauty. Compared with many of the physiologically and pathologically introspective novels of the day it is, despite its exhibition of a neurosis resulting in false angina pectoris, almost an old-fashioned love story. It is almost old-fashioned in presenting, in the case of Ann, a passion as straight, as single, as unswerving, as unflinching as that of Shakespeare's Juliet. Ann, brought up with the threeFielding brothers, loves one of them, Jerrold, from childhood till the end, with the "divine fire." Jerrold, on leave from the front, intends to ask Ann to be his wife; but by the connivance of circumstances with the lying of interested persons, he is persuaded that Ann is living with his shell-shocked brother. Jerrold, thereupon, in the recklessness of the hour, expecting to be killed in the next attack, abruptly marries Maisie. When the conspiracy of lying and ambiguous circumstances is dispelled, Ann claims Jerrold as her own, and he gives himself to her "without a scruple."

Now the ethical points, as exhibited by the author, are these: first, Jerrold has shown male recklessness regarding his virtue, by marrying one woman when he loved another; second, he displays an awakened ethical sensitiveness when he rejoices at the termination of his intimate relations with his wife; third, Ann has never for an instant swerved from her virtue; Maisie proves her virtue in the beautiful, if impossible, scene in which she surrenders her husband to Ann, saying: "I can't think of anything more disgusting than to keep a man tied to you when he cares for somebody else. I should feel as if I were living in sin." Of course the major contention is, that Ann,though without legal status, was "chaste"; but that is a paradox and a challenge to our idea.

Let us take one more case in this group: Mr. J. D. Beresford with the Jacob Stahl trilogy. In this rather drab yet impressive work, one finds the "emancipative" ideas of Mr. Wells assimilated by a much less buoyant nature. Jacob muddles into a bad marriage with an unquestionably unsuitable person, from whom he separates, though he is not divorced. He falls in love with one of the keepers of his lodging-house and

asks her to live with him without legal sanction till his wife shall die. After months of consideration she freely and resolutely joins him. From that point, Mr. Beresford exerts himself to prove that their relation is just as grave and permanent and full of labor and anxiety and humdrum and gray days as marriage itself. I suspect there is a kind of grim truthfulness in the relation of this adventure. It reminds one, in the third volume, of George Eliot and of accounts given by sundry visitors of the slightly dreary decorum of her ménage. There is no expectation of ecstasy on the part of either of the adventurers. They merely look, outside marriage, for the alleviations of the ultimate human solitude afforded by a satisfactorymarriage. They are tolerably successful. But when the death of Stahl's wife clears the way, they return, for various reasons of expediency, to a legal status.

Mr. Wells, Mr. Galsworthy, May Sinclair, and Mr. Beresford are all, I think, seriously interested in morality. On the whole, their work does not contemptuously and explicitly challenge the idea of monogamous marriage. At least, it does not flout the possibility of arriving, by freedom of readjustment, at some reasonably satisfactory and permanent relationship between one man and one woman. And so, in a sense, their point of view begins to appear relatively conservative. If they could be questioned regarding their moral purposes or tendencies, they would profess sincere respect for virtue. But they would add that they are concerned, as novelists, with reflecting the revision which the idea of virtue is undergoing in our time. They are generally willing to admit that society and the state are related in necessary and vital ways to the customary form of sexual alliance. But they repudiate the notion that mere legality can set the seal of virtue upon any such alliance. Less firmly, yet pretty clearly, they repudiate the notion that mere illegality canremove the seal of virtue which individual adventurers may set upon their alliance. Because chastity has been traditionally identified with legality, they hold the word in some contempt; they incline to discard it as the name of any recognizable virtue. The important ideas which it has obscured are these: to maintain permanent relations with one who is thoroughly agreeable to you is virtue; to maintain permanent relations with one who is thoroughly disagreeable to you is vice.

There is quite a bit of ground between.

IV
SEVEN REASONS FOR MR. HERGESHEIMER, D. H. LAWRENCE, AND THE EMETIC SCHOOL

Among the novelists who have arrived within the last ten years, it is more difficult to discover any community in constructive ethical intention or tendency. One can no longer feel sure that marriage is regarded as the normal condition, for which fidelity in illegal relations is a substitute. One recalls numerous heroines who collect erotic adventures like female Don Juans, and others who stoutly and "conscientiously" refuse marriage to lovers to whom they refuse nothing else. And here is George F. Hummel's *After All*, advertised as follows: "Its analysis of the inherent self-destructiveness of marriage is carried to a conclusion which, however opposed to accepted standards of morality, has in it the logic and compelling force of a thinking man's profoundest conviction." Here are D. H. Lawrence's Lost Girl and Arnold Bennett's Pretty Lady, and W. L. George's Ursula Trent, and Willa Cather's Lost Lady, and Joseph Hergesheimer's Cytherea, and the heroine of Mr. Masters's *Domesday Book*—awhole troop of damsels who meander where they will in quest of rosebuds. Here is Robert Herrick's Lilla deliberately and successfully discarding marriage for an unsanctioned union. Here is Margaret Prescott Montague's Julie (in *Deep Channel*) finding in an illicit relationship the effective key to a larger and more spiritual life. Here is even Mrs. Gerould permitting a grave and thoughtful illegal relationship to the hero of *Conquistador*, whom she would apparently have us regard as the very pink of essential purity. No single explanation will account for the community in "destructive" tendency discernible in the latest phase of the movement; or for the fact that there is hardly one in a dozen recent novels which Cornelia would care to see in the hands of her daughter; or for the more alarming fact that, if there were one such novel in a dozen, Cornelia's daughter probably would not care to read it.

Since, in the United States, marriage has been by no means a legally irretrievable disaster, it would be absurd to point to the rigor of our law as a very important occasion of the widespread indifference or disrespect for chastity exhibited or reflected by many American writers. The occasions of our revolt lie deeper than that, and manycauses conspire to give to our current fiction its unwonted aspect of levity and license.

First, as a literary inheritance, the Wells-Galsworthy group of the elder novelists bequeathed to their successors a profound skepticism about the legal touchstone of chastity, together with a pleasant rule of virtue which tends, as a social regulation, to be unworkable, since it is incapable of objective and public application. Their "rule," developed a little, lands one in an anarchical moral individualism; and their successors developed it by omitting the word "permanent" from the definition of virtue.

Secondly, the appearance of a good many rather frothily wanton pictures of frothily wanton younger sets may still be attributed to reaction from the austerities of war; the writers of the futilitarian school take chastity lightly because they take everything lightly: for examples, Mr. Carl Van Vechten and Mr. F. Scott Fitzgerald—though it must be admitted that the latter, in *The Beautiful and Damned*, has written the most impressive temperance tract of our time. (I wonder whether Cornelia noticed that it is a temperance tract.)

Thirdly, women are discovering various meansof avoiding the inevitable penalties which the earlier novelists inflicted upon sorrowful blue-eyed girls who stooped to folly: they don't, in fiction at least, so often have to abandon a baby (*Adam Bede*), or to lose their job (*Esther Waters*), or to be barred from marriage (*Tess of the Durbervilles*), or to suffer ostracism or exile (*David Copperfield*).

Fourthly, as in the use of cocktails and tobacco, the double standard is manifestly giving ground before a single standard, and that a masculine standard: see any novel of the literary and artistic "villages" of New York or Chicago—for example, those of Mr. Floyd Dell. In Meredith Nicholson's *Broken Barriers*, an extraordinary disclosure from the Indiana school, unchastity is almost blandly presented as, for a considerable group of young business women, something like the accepted avenue to social advancement and as a preliminary to a good marriage.

Fifthly, chastity, legal and spiritual, has for a dozen years been under fire in this country as a distinctive aspect of that "Puritanism" which, as we know, must be destroyed, root and branch, before we shall have any art, letters, or society that are really worth mention.

Sixthly, the idea of sex as a sacred mystery, under protection of Church and State, has given ground before an interesting series of competing ideas: the idea of sex as a chapter in physiology; the idea of sex as a social asset and a contribution which every good mixer makes to the occasion; and the idea of sex as a horrible nuisance.

Seventhly, there is appearing here and there in current literature evidence of the growth among us of an æsthetic philosophy which rejects the moral valuations of life. Its doctrine is briefly this:—You can't be sure that any act will yield you happiness. You can't be sure that any act will be virtuous. You can be sure that every act will yield you experience. Let us go in for experience, and value our acts according to the quantity and intensity of the experience which they yield.

Mr. Hergesheimer at present, I think, best represents the æsthetic point of view. I am afraid that Mr. Hergesheimer is just a little bit of a *poseur*. He pretends to feel surprised that many people regard his books as of immoral tendency. I myself am not one of those who are much worried by the moral aspects of his work. If he were content to let the novels speak for themselves,few people would guess how unorthodox the author is. As a matter of fact Mr. Hergesheimer is a renegade Presbyterian. He is a Presbyterian turned artist. He is proud of his apostasy and he likes to talk about it. He has shaken off his patrimonial "Puritanism"; he finds life

more delectable since; and he delights to find a cool spot in a Havana hotel, and to stretch out his legs and discourse somewhat expansively, for the benefit of his fellow citizens north of the Gulf, upon his "emancipation," with frequent pointed references to his informal dinner-jacket of Chinese silk, the orange blossoms in his buttonhole, the flourished Larrañaga cigar in his fingers, and the frigid mixture of Ron Bacardi, sugar, and vivid green lime at his elbow.

As an artist, he is interested in two things: first in the luxurious, the colorful, the exotic; and second, in the poetry of passionate idealisms, martyr-hot. He himself exhibits a middle-aged prudence and coolness; he possesses a certain amount of taste of a certain kind, which preserves him from a certain kind of now popular grossness; he paints himself as a connoisseur of sensations: these qualities, together with his old-fashioned romantic attachment to "grand passions," givehim a salient distinction, indeed real isolation, among the "Jacksonian rabble" who imagine that Mr. Hergesheimer is one of them, and who still constitute the main body of the anti-Puritan movement. Yet, as an artist, he finds himself constrained to be essentially an anti-moralist. He welcomes all experience in proportion to its intensity and richness of color. He cannot help admitting his "preference for girls who have the courage of their emotions." He cannot help confessing his artistic pleasure in observing a crucifix as the background of a prostitute. He cannot deny himself the revenge upon his Presbyterian ancestors, which consists in referring to the prostitutes of a house in Havana as "informal girls," as if, forsooth, when one emerges from the ancestral hypocrisies of Presbyterianism, "formality" remains the only real distinction between these girls and any other sort of girls.

Oh Cornelia—I begin to understand what troubles you!

Mr. D. H. Lawrence seems to have set out with the notion that sex is the greatest thing in the world, and with the correlative notion that we can't very well have too much of it, or have it on too easy terms. He is still, if I understandhim, a great believer in experience for experience's sake, and he passes in many quarters for a dangerous immoralist. To the conventional sense, indeed, he may easily appear to write his novels as if the world of conventional morals had no existence. Even in *Sons and Lovers*, his heroes and heroines explore their sexual good where they find it with barbaric or *übermenschlich* indifference to legality—or, should one say, with the indifference to legality prevalent among a coal-mining population? In his more recently published *Women in Love*, his seekers of experience and self-realization are men and women who have exhausted the possibilities of gratification through any ordinary intimacy of relationship. The book has offended pudency by a few intelligible paragraphs of plain speech where we were formerly accustomed to silence. But its really shocking aspect is its studious, remorseless revelation of what a horrible, devouring mania sexual passion may be: how involved with mortal fear; and with cold, probing curiosity; and with murderous hatred. One of the characteristic high spots in the story is that in which Hermione expresses the kind of intimacy that she

desires with Birkin, and consummates her "voluptuous ecstasy" by seizinga beautiful ball of lapis lazuli and bringing it crashing down upon his head. Except for a lively incident of this sort here and there, *Women in Love* must impress the ordinary novel-reader as intolerably dull, dreary, difficult, and mad: and anyone who declares that it makes sex attractive should be punished by being required to read it through.

Mr. Lawrence's interest in it is predominantly the interest of an exploring moralist who has specialized in sexual relations and is coming to conclusions which are important, if true. He is coming to the conclusion that—for men, at any rate—passional surrender is not the greatest thing in the world. He is coming to the conclusion that the romantic poets and the romantic novelists—including, perhaps, Mr. Wells and Mr. Galsworthy—have all been on the wrong tack in representing as the height of human experience that ecstasy in which one individuality is merged and absorbed in another. This he regards as in its essential nature an ideal of decadence. This is an aspiration toward death and disintegration, from which the inevitable reaction is disgust. The virtue of a man is to preserve his own integrity and resist the dissolution of union. "Whenhe makes the sexual consummation the supreme consummation, even in his secret soul, he falls into the beginnings of despair." I quote this sentence from Mr. Lawrence's fantastic and curious *Fantasia of the Unconscious*. And from his *Studies in Classic American Literature* I quote these words, calculated to trouble both his enemies and his friends: "The essential function of art is moral. Not æsthetic, nor decorative, nor pastime and recreation, but moral. The essential function of art is moral." This will perhaps trouble Mr. Hergesheimer more than it troubles me.

Among the later novelists of the Middle West one might choose either Sherwood Anderson or Ben Hecht as a striking representative of the anti-Puritan movement. But there is so much cloudy symbolism in the author of *Many Marriages* that one may more expeditiously indicate the position of the author of *Gargoyles*—and of less widely circulated works. Mr. Hecht, generally speaking, appears to be the inheritor of Mr. Dreiser's moral outfit, during the latter's lifetime. He interests me more than Mr. Dreiser ever did, because his intellectual processes are much more rapid. Mr. Dreiser reaches his conclusion by a slow, vermiculousemotional approach, like the promenade of the *lumbricus terrestris*; Mr. Hecht darts at his like a wasp. He is a stylist, and he feels a kind of ecstasy in the stabbing use of words. He is a satirist exulting in the stripping of shams. In *Gargoyles*, he is a cynic with the point of mad King Lear crying:—

Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!
Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thy own back.
Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
For which thou whip'st her.

He is an angry and disenchanted moralist. But he is also—and this is the particularly interesting aspect of his case—an angry and disenchanted "immoralist." The emancipated heroes of *Gargoyles* and *Erik Dorn* hurl themselves over precipices of experience to wallow in abysses of spiritual inanity and despair. Yet before they are

emancipated, as Mr. Hecht sees them, they are in an equal agony of moral chains. Basine, in *Gargoyles*, loathes all women for his wife's sake. "His distaste for his wife kept him faithful to her because his imagination baulked at the idea of embracing another Henrietta." Again we are told—almost in the Dreiserian phraseology—that "cowardice" had made himan excited champion of domestic felicity, marital fidelity, and kindred ideas.

In his symbolical romance, Mr. Hecht represents man as an agonized animal, self-crucified on the cross of his moral ideals, martyrizing himself in behalf of laws and conventions to which his desires and appetites are in unvanquishable opposition. Hitherto, his satire of conventional sexual morality has not revealed to me any constructive element: its caustic and sulphurous bolts leap from an anarchical darkness of all-embracing disillusion and fathomless disgust.

The note of sexual disgust is, to the student of contemporary morals, a point of high interest in the recent realistic fiction. This note of disgust is clamorous in *Blackguard*, by Mr. Hecht's spiritual satellite, Mr. Maxwell Bodenheim. It is a steady undertone through the novels and short stories of Sherwood Anderson; in *The Narrow House* and *Narcissus* of Evelyn Scott; and in the *Rahab* of Waldo Franck. It is a cry of diabolic torture in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as Young Man*; and in *Ulysses* it is a rolling ordurous pandemonium.

In reading the novels of Ben Hecht, Maxwell Bodenheim, Sherwood Anderson, Evelyn Scott,Waldo Franck, and James Joyce, one's first impression is frequently of wonder as to what motive can prompt an author to perpetuate a record of experience so humiliatingly painful, and a vision of souls so atrociously ugly. Is the motive revenge upon life for having taken them in? Is the motive to cleanse the stuffed bosom of the perilous stuff that preys upon the reason? The mad King Lear perhaps felt relieved when he had completed his psychoanalysis of the "simp'ring dame"; but when he had reached his conclusion in "burning, scalding, stench, consumption," he cried perforce: "Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination!" In the Emetic School of fiction appears the *reductio ad nauseam* of the idea of sex as a social asset. No lust-bitten monk wrestling with hallucinations in a mediaæval cloister could have made the entire subject more bewilderingly detestable than this group of anti-Puritan and anti-Catholic emancipators, who apparently set out with a desire to make it pleasant.

V
WE DISCUSS MARRIAGE AND THE HOPE OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION

At this point, as it seemed to me, I had accumulated sufficient material to enable me to resume my conversation with Cornelia, without being immediately extinguished by the immense superiority of her intuitions regarding what is right. Meditating on the evolution of the idea of chastity from Goldsmith and Scott to James Joyce and Ben Hecht, I went to see her again.

It was a pleasant midsummer morning, enlivened by a cool breeze from the lake. I came up through the wood path into the garden, and found her sitting in the pergola, cool and fresh as the breeze. Her hands lay still in her lap, clasped upon an open book. Unaware of my presence, her gaze seemed to have gone dreamingly down the green slope, to rest in a kind of hovering question above the bright young animation of the tennis court. As I appeared, she looked up quickly and said instantly:—

"Sit here, and let me read you these lovely verses of Walter de la Mare's."

"Do," I replied; and she read with—oh, just a suspicion of a tremor in her clear smooth voice, these lines:—

Like an old battle, youth is wild
With bugle and spear, and counter-cry,
Fanfare and drummery, yet a child
Dreaming of that sweet chivalry.
The piercing terror cannot see.
He, with a mild and serious eye
Along the azure of the years,
Sees the sweet pomp sweep hurtling by;
But he sees not death's blood and tears,
Sees not the plunging of the spears.

O, if with such simplicity
Himself take arms and suffer war;
With beams his targe shall gilded be,
Though in the thickening gloom be far
The steadfast light of any star.
Though hoarse War's eagle on him perch,
Quickened with guilty lightnings—there
It shall in vain for terror search,
Where a child's eyes beneath bloody hair
Gaze purely through the dingy air.

She closed the book, and we were silent for a moment, in which I felt within myself curious little surges of sympathy breaking over rocks of difference. And then she said: "Well?"

"Cornelia," I answered, "you were right. The idea of chastity has been challenged, is being challenged, on all sides, in many ways, for many reasons."

I made a discreet summary of my discoveries, and concluded: “Current fiction reflects a condition bordering on anarchy.”

“Couldn’t one know that without making an investigation, without ploughing through these dreadful books?”

“Perhaps,” I responded; “but, Cornelia, I think you are wrong in an important respect. I think there has been a real change in standards, and that even very nice people no longer think just as they used to think. At least, they no longer say what they used to say, and they are immeasurably more tolerant of what other people think.”

“Do you imagine,” she persisted, “that this new tolerance indicates general moral progress? I think it indicates general moral laxity. Come, let us be definite. At what points precisely do you fancy there is any advantage to be gained by taking sexual relations away from the protection of Church and State and committing them to the whims of individuals?”

“My dear Cornelia,” I protested, “the prevailing theory is not that Church and State have ‘protected’ sexual relations. The popular theory is that Church and State have ignored them—or, at least, in attempting to regulate them, have ignored so many exceptional cases that the regulations are invalid. For all these cases, the novel has been a kind of court of last resort. On the whole, I believe that it has greatly enriched the ideal of virtue by giving a hearing to the innumerable cases in which legality is the mask of nearly intolerable conditions.”

“Intolerable conditions,” interrupted Cornelia, “are usually the result of imprudent marriages, marriages for advantage, marriages without love. Those who make such marriages should expect to pay the price. It is sentimentality to discard a good rule to save a few exceptional individuals. Incompatibility of temper is no harder to bear than smallpox or anything else that marriage may let one in for.”

“I am explaining how we differ,” I resumed. “I find myself in pretty full sympathy with the current tendency to revolt against the doctrine of the irretrievable as applied by Goldsmith and certain of the Victorians. The earlier Georgian principle that virtue, in this connection, means to maintain permanent relations with one who is thoroughly agreeable to you begins to sound to my ears like orthodoxy, as does also the companion principle, that to maintain permanent relations with one who is thoroughly disagreeable to you is vice. And though I am not ready to subscribe to all the possible corollaries of these two positions, I seem to see, gradually emerging from them, a new and better idea of chastity—of clean relationships—which will make “nice” people not less but more fastidious in their intimacies, not less but more austere in yielding the citadel of body and spirit.”

“Nothing will emerge from these principles,” said Cornelia decisively, “without a rule—without a rule which Church and State can enforce upon people who are not nice. You have admitted that the Wells-Galsworthy test of successful marriage tends to be ‘unworkable.’ You admit that the word ‘permanent’ tends to drop out of the

principle, and that then you have, instead of a substitute for law, a permission for anarchy. You even admit that the novelists already reflect a condition approaching anarchy. Don't you think, after all, it is about time to call a halt?"

"No," I insisted stubbornly; "the movement of indefinite anarchical expansion halts itself. And I stand by the novelists, even by the Emetic School, as showing where the movement halts: in blind alleys, against iron necessities, in miasmic swamps, in ennui, in despair, in disgust unfathomable. You cannot guess, Cornelia; without years of such reading as I am happily certain you will never undertake, you cannot understand what comfort and reassurance I find in the fathomless disgust exhibited in our most advanced novelists—disgust for the life that is dedicated to sex. The disgust of the novelists upholds the splendor of the Church and the majesty of the Law. Upborne by the disgust of the novelists, like a ship by the briny behemoth-haunted deep, marriage may yet spread again her proud full sail for fresh voyages. These novelists reveal obscene things in their deep-sea caves, but they administer whatever antidote is required to the obscenity of their speech. They drive home their moral with an appalling effectiveness beyond the rivalry of critical comment. They deliver the shattering challenge to unchastity. They have shown the emancipated moderns capable of dodging all but one of the consequences which their elders appointed for unchastity; but they have not shown the moderns capable of dodging the stench of a disintegrated personality, which fumes in their books like a last irreducible hell. To safeguard the innocency of your son and daughter, I incline to believe that one whiff from these caverns might be as potent as Heine's prayer. Consciously or not, these novelists are preparing a counter-revolution."

"What direction, pray, will that take?" inquired Cornelia, to whom God has beautifully denied ability to follow such an argument.

"I shall not prophesy in detail," I said, looking down the slope towards the tennis court. "Is your contribution to the Younger Generation in that match?"

"Yes," she replied, "and isn't it delightful to see how keen they are about it?"

"It is. It indicates to me one of the directions of the counter-revolution. Historians in the future, surveying the monuments of our children's time, are going to refer to this as the beginning of the great age of stadium-building in America. They will see in this movement a religious significance, not yet visible to us; and they will expatiate in glowing terms on the period when, with extravagant and sacrificial adoration of an ideal, our youth exalted the cleanness and hardness of athletic games, and religiously subjected themselves to the rules and rigor of the game—to that arbitrary, elaborate, inflexible, yet self-imposed system of ethics which alone makes any good game possible. I am hoping that our children's generation will contain more real sportsmen than ours did—fewer quitters, fewer squealers, fewer players crying out to have the rules changed after the game is on; and no one so silly as to suppose there can be a game without rules."

"That hope is rather remote, isn't it?"

“Rather. I have another, more immediate. I hope that in the early stages of the counter-revolution our sophisticated sons and daughters will scrutinize ‘the idea of sex,’ coolly extract from it the part that belongs to physiology and pathology; and then disuse the word as synonym for every other element in the complex human relationship which sometimes makes human beings paradisiacally happy in their blossoming season and content enough with each other even into wintry old age. I have some hope that the Emetic School may help our children to understand that sex and sexual self-realization are not, in the long view, the main substance of what youth hungers for.”

“Go on!” cried Cornelia, encouragingly.

“I hope that they will make real progress in psychoanalysis. I hope that, when they feel the ache of the soul’s ultimate solitude and are restless and full of vague desires they may be capable of lucid introspection; that they may be frank and plain with themselves, and call things by their right names, and say to themselves something like this: ‘I am filled with tedium and passionate craving. I shall be hard to satisfy, for I am thirsty for a deep draught of human felicity. What I crave is not described or named in the physiologies. I crave beauty, sympathy, sweetness, incentive, perfume, difference, vivacity, wit, cleanness, grace, devotion, caprice, pride, kindness, blitheness, fortitude. I will not look for these things where I know they cannot be found, nor under conditions in which I know they cannot be maintained. But if I find them, and where they thrive, I shall wish to express my joy by some great act of faith and the hazard of all I hope to be. And I shall not like the town clerk to be the sole recorder of my discovery and my faith. I shall wish witnesses, high witnesses, whatever is august and splendid in the order of the world, to enwheel me round and bid me welcome to that order.’ That is the sort of self-realization to which I hope our sons and daughters are coming.”

Cornelia smiled with a kind of malicious sweetness that she has. She was satisfied. She rather yearned, I perceived well enough, to remark that now at last I was taking the “stand” that she had taken from the first. But Cornelia is one of the few women now living who do not say everything that they yearn to say. She merely released one arrowy smile. Then she rose, as I had done already,—standing, she reminds one of Artemis,—and extending her hand, detained mine with another deep question. She asked me whether I knew any “living reason” to believe that my emancipated young people would return to that ideal.

The opportunity was irresistible.

“Yes,” I said, “I have known you, Cornelia.”

BOOK TWO

AN ELIGIBLE YOUNG MAN

I
CORNELIA'S CHILDREN REACT TO A SUITABLE MATCH

There was a wedding at noon in the village church, a couple of miles from our summer community by the lake, and as most of our colony were somewhat interested in the girl, we turned out in force. It was an outwardly festive and—to my sense—agreeably solemn little affair. There was a bank of lady's-slippers and maidenhair ferns before the altar, and the air was heavy with the sweetly mortal scent of lilies. The clergyman in white vestments had a full consciousness of the finality of his function. He joined in permanent wedlock a white, smiling, tearful bride of twenty to a well-dressed groom of thirty-five, who looked very experienced, very serious, and slightly bald. Cornelia, who is a connoisseur, whispered to me that it was in every respect a "most suitable match." I made a mental note to ask her at the next opportunity what the essentials of a suitable match were. I happened, however, to ride away from the ceremony in the rear seat of her car, sandwiched between her two children, Dorothy and Oliver Junior; and their comment was less flattering.

"Bah!" exclaimed Oliver. "Let's go and have a swim. It made me sick."

"Me too," said Dorothy. "It made me cold all over to hear her promising to forsake all others and keep herself only for that wizened—stick. Why should she forsake all others, just because she is married? It sounds as if she were going as missionary to the Indians."

"Or as trained nurse to an isolation hospital," Oliver suggested.

"When I am married," said Dorothy, "I shall not forsake all others—at least, unless I get a better one than that."

"You are severe critics," I murmured, secretly delighted to observe that the children were using the dialect of their feelings, rather than that polite language which well-bred youth, like Japanese ladies, employ in presence of their elders. "At what age do you expect to be married, Dorothy?"

"I shall never marry!" she replied with a deep blush. She is of course at exactly the correct age for saying that. But if you haven't seen her, you can have no adequate notion how dire and how delicious that threat is on her lips. She inherits "eligibility" from both her parents. Her mother has a clear, expressive, sunlit loveliness; but Dorothy's beauty has in it an element of subtlety—from her father—and a suggestion of sorcery and peril. She has her mother's complexion but her father's eyes. It is the unexpected combination and contrast that fascinates one: the filleted blond hair and the fluent roses of the fair skin, with the brown eyes, dark yet full of lambent lights—

eyes of which the centres seem gleaming paths, leading into shadows where a man might easily wander and be lost.

"And why won't you marry?" I pursued; for as we were driving at a good speed over a rough road, I was sure the watchful maternal ears could not overhear us. And so was Dorothy.

"Oh, I don't like the choice," she said, "that marriage presents—nowadays."

"A choice!" I repeated with irreverent levity. "You haven't come to that yet, I trust. But what do you think the choice is going to be?"

"You may laugh," said Dorothy, "but we all know well enough. We don't have to wait till we have made it, to know what the choice is. It is either a 'good American husband,' ten or twenty years older than you, who has a fine position and a character and nice middle-aged friends, and can give you a home and a social circle and clothes and things—but hasn't anything to say to you. He simply hasn't anything to say to you."

"Why do you keep hollering, 'He hasn't anything to say to you'?" mocked her brother. "Who hasn't anything to say? Who? Who? Who?"

"Shut up!" said Dorothy, with more sweetness than the words can carry. "You heard. I said, 'The good American husband has nothing to say to you.'"

"That is rather a defect," I assented wickedly, "if you've got to be alone with him for the rest of your life. Yes, it's a rather serious defect in a man with whom, forsaking all others, a girl of twenty expects to spend the next fifty years. But Dorothy, if you don't take a good American husband, what is the alternative?"

"Oh, a boy of your own age, of course," she answered promptly. "A boy that you like—like in all ways, I mean: like his voice, like his eyes, like the temperature of his hands—not like fins. He talks with you about the things that interest you—they are just the same as the things that interest him; and you like to do things with him; and if there is anything perfectly splendid, you wish he were there; and whenever you see him coming, your heart begins to dance."

"Well," I said, "that seems an attractive sketch. Why not choose a boy like that?"

"Because," she explained, "it seems as if nowadays none of the boys that one really likes is ever going to amount to much. At any rate, you must wait till your doddering old age before you can hope to be married—and what's the use then? He won't be interesting to me, and I won't be nice for him—then. But we'll just sit around in padded chairs, with ear-trumpets in our ears, and yell, 'Whadye say?' at each other; and wish it were bedtime."

"I don't quite understand the reason for this postponement."

"If," she said, "they are boys of your own age, and enjoy the books and music that you do, and are nice to dance with, why, then they think they are going to be poets or composers, and so they don't work, and they flunk out of school—and your

mother asks you why you persist in playing around with 'that worthless fellow'—doesn't she, Oliver?"

"Yep!" said her brother, and grinned.

Dorothy, leaning across my knees, first pinched, then patted him, and said: "Poor old Ollie! He's nicer than almost any boy I know, and yet Dad says he's a 'worthless fellow,' too."

When I suggested that the only hope was to take one of these nice worthless fellows and put some "starch" into him, the rear seat burst into a peal of conspirant laughter. Possibly that hope had been tried. Cornelia whirled around upon us, and demanded:—

"What are you children talking about?"

I answered sedately that we were discussing education for life, and that there were certain points on which I should like her opinion. But we were now at the clump of Rural Free Delivery boxes, where the path comes down from my cottage. Intimating that I might "drop around" toward the end of the afternoon, I got out, and having handed up Cornelia's mail, walked home with my own. It proved rather piquantly amusing.

II
"LET'S WALK"

There was a light rain at lunch-time, but it blew over, leaving the out-of-doors extraordinarily inviting. After I had written for two or three hours, I found myself walking—and chuckling—up the path through the birches to Cornelia's place. Under the hemlocks near the house, I passed Dorothy, in white tennis-attire with a sketchy sweater the color of California poppies, curled up in a hammock with a book. A young girl alone fills me with awe, like a cardinal building a nest; and I always try to slip past without disturbance—I feel that her mind must be occupied with something beautiful.

"What are you reading?" I called by way of greeting.

"I'm not reading," she replied, "I'm waiting for the young man that mother likes to have me play tennis with."

With an additional chuckle, I proceeded to the front of the house. My original merriment had been occasioned by two letters, in the morning mail, from correspondents at large who desired me to inform them whether Cornelia was "real." I was also wondering how much of these letters I could discreetly disclose to her.

She met me on the threshold of the wide verandah, standing for an instant tiptoe in a practicable yet perfect sylvan costume, and framed between two tall Chinese vases of wild tiger-lilies, which made a little pattern with the glints in her hair and the knot of soft flame at her breast.

"Let's walk!" she said.

"Let's," I replied; and we struck briskly into the abandoned road which runs, carpeted with bindweed and bittersweet, for miles and miles skirting the forest, with only a thin curtain of young silver poplars and birches between it and the lake. Cornelia is a light, crisp-footed walker,—at her gayest walking, and good for long distances,—my only complaint being that she has forgotten how to loiter. She seems rather bent upon reaching the *terminus ad quem* than careful to let me fall a step to the rear, where I may consider with more detachment how, like a dryad, she expresses and completes the woodland vista.

"I had a letter this morning," I began, "from an unknown lady. It would amuse you."

"Would it indeed?" said Cornelia, moving swiftly forward and at the same time calling my attention to the twittering brown flutter of a tree full of cedar-wings.

"Yes," I insisted, "I'm sure it's as interesting as bird study. This lady doubts your existence. Listen to this." I pulled forth a delicately tinted letter with a faint scent which died among the pungent fresh odors of the rain-washed air. "'Tell me,' she writes, 'whether Cornelia is real. If she is, I hope you are not in love with her. She is the feminine of Sir Austin Feverel. She has no heart. She is just unfaltering correctness. As a girl, I fancy, she folded her still hands in her lap and calmly waited

till her family had consulted the bankers and the genealogists before she decided to care for the man she married. As a woman, she wishes to inspect and authorize every passion before she allows it to peep. I pity her children. She has never done a thing in her life merely because for one rapturous hour it seemed the most desirable thing in the wide world to do. I should hate her.'"

Cornelia brushed me sidelong with the sweep of her gray eyes, of which the effect, when one catches it so, is like that of the cool rays of a May sun bent to a focus under a burning-glass. But she only said, "What queer correspondents you have! And what a charming impression of me you have given them! Am I as hateful as that?"

It isn't difficult to say complimentary things to Cornelia. The difficulty is not to say them. But I make it a practice not to answer rhetorical questions. They divert one from one's point. "Please remember," I said, carving my accents on the air with my crabtree stick and looking straight ahead, "please remember that this is not my portrait of you, but only the comment of one woman upon the image of another woman reflected in the eyes of a man who has worn spectacles for many years. But I have another letter—from a novelist; he has a quite different theory of you."

"Is it nice?" asked Cornelia, with a demipirouette and the instinctive capricious smile of a very pretty woman about to step before a mirror. "You should tell me something very nice to offset the spitefulness of that horrid person. But what a silly question! Your letter is from a novelist; so of course it isn't nice. Is it?"

"No," I replied, "I'm afraid it isn't nice—in your sense of the word; but it is interesting—in my sense of the word. I call a thing interesting, you see, when it seems to be earnestly pointing in the direction where truth, like a rabbit, has just disappeared in the bushes. Now, this novelist belongs to the large and productive group of hunters who are leaving the highroad to pursue truth into the underbrush. His theory of you is not a personal reflection upon you; it is only part of his general theory of society and human nature."

"Bah! bah! bah!" Cornelia exclaimed. "I'm sick of human nature—their theories of it, I mean. I love people, but I hate what our current writers say about them. Life is so much more decent, when one knows how to live and whom to live with, than any of our novelists will admit. I have the same feeling in the theatre. I go to a play and see nothing in it that can compare with the quality of real experience—if one has any taste and discrimination. But tell me, now, what does this dreadful creature say about me?"

"Well, I'll take the risk," I said, "since you have the courage or the curiosity to insist on it." I pulled out the second letter. "What he says is this: 'I am afraid your Cornelia is not real. For me, at any rate, she doesn't exist. She isn't elemental. She isn't spontaneous. She strikes me as a theoretical construction to please a Victorian grandmother. Or perhaps I had better call her an old bachelor's pipe dream of a lady. One can't write modern fiction from that point of view. It's insubstantial. We realists have been demonstrating now for years that Judith O'Grady and the Colonel's lady

are very much alike beneath the skin. We have destroyed the legend of the lady, and we have destroyed the legend of the gentleman. We have put them out of their misery: they don't exist any more. We're just men and women together. If you don't know Cornelia as a wife, you don't know her—you don't know her as a realist. Women are not like her—not inside. Go beneath the surface, and you'll find the Judith O'Grady in Cornelia.'"

"What nonsense!" cried Cornelia. "What perfect nonsense! Give it to me." And almost snatching the letter from my hand, she tore it into fine shreds, and tossed it showering into a wild currant bush.

III
PREREQUISITES OF A DECENT MARRIAGE

"Don't you see," she continued, as we came over the brow of a little hill, "why I can't have Dorothy reading these current novels? I don't wish her to be what this creature calls 'elemental' and 'spontaneous.' I wish her to be civilized and rational—and not a well-dressed little savage, ready to act at once on whatever passion or fancy or circumstances put into her head. I wish her to associate with people who are rational and civilized, and, when she marries, I wish her to marry a man who is civilized and rational. Do you know, that in the course of the last year I have met just one man in fiction who seems to have retained elements of the ideas of a gentleman,—or rather, one man and his father,—I mean the hero of Struthers Burt's *The Interpreter's House*. As for Mr. Burt's women, they are almost as uncivilized as anybody's."

"Isn't there a season of life," I suggested, "in which almost everyone has some uncivilized promptings?"

"Is there a season in life," countered Cornelia, "when a properly trained person cannot present at least the appearance of discretion?"

"My dear Cornelia," I said, "do you ever glance through those columns in our great national fireside magazines, in which wise old editors converse with their contributors and advise young girls how to catch a man?"

Cornelia smiled, and then abruptly became very firm and grave. "That is it," she said. "That is exactly it—'how to catch a man'! And the dreadful thing is that the tone of our entire popular discussion and our popular literature is just about at that level—as if the mere possession of anything in the shape of a man were so unquestionably desirable that no scruple must be raised regarding his family and social position, his religion and principles of personal conduct, his property and prospects and professional standing. We are becoming absurd in our carelessness about such matters."

"But that," I protested, "is just what makes the beauty of life in America."

"That," said Cornelia, "is what makes American life so ugly—no respect for any of the things that make people respectable, no sense for the substantial basis of social distinctions, no regard for the hedges and barriers behind which one tries to cultivate the flowers of a finer garden."

"That," I said, "is the really decisive evidence of our freedom from snobbishness."

"It is the decisive evidence," said Cornelia, "of our deficiency in taste."

"You lack patience," I persisted. "It is the new social wisdom of democracy."

"It is the new social idiocy of democracy," she replied; "and let me assure you there is none of it in my house. If I lack patience, I possess some experience. I was taught by my mother to be kind and considerate to servants—my old nurse loved me

like a daughter. And I was taught at home and in church to be charitable to poor people and ignorant people and people without advantages and without manners. But I was also brought up to believe that a nice girl had better be dead than form a sentimental relationship with one who was not in her class—not a gentleman."

"Don't you think that is—a rather silly and outworn prejudice?" I ventured.

"I certainly do not," she replied. "I think the salvation of a girl is her pride—legitimate pride in her family, her position, her connections. I have conscientiously striven to train my daughter to feel that, so far as her personal fortunes are concerned, common people—that is, vulgar ordinary people—simply are not in the world. Call it snobbishness, if you like; I am proud of it."

"But Cornelia," I said, "can't you concede that in the relation we are discussing, there is something more elemental and imperative than can be governed by such considerations as you put foremost?"

"Yes—to the sense of animals and savages. Yes—to the sense of vulgar and ignorant people. To the sense of what my mother used to call gentlefolk—emphatically, No. To them, there can be nothing more elemental and imperative than just those considerations which distinguish them from the ignorant and the vulgar."

"You yourself have half apologized for the old word, 'gentlefolk,'" I nagged. "Please tell me what gentlefolk were, or rather, what a gentleman is. Must he belong to the Church and be a member of the militia? For how many generations must he be able to trace his family? How much money must he have in the bank? How much of the Decalogue and how many rules for perfect behavior may he break in a day, without losing caste? Are you quite clear about all this?"

"You have a very irritating way," said Cornelia, "of trying to make the most sensible and obvious positions absurd to maintain. But you know I am right. You know that there is nothing absurd in being conscious of the claims of the Church and the State and the established system of morals and manners. You know there is nothing absurd in being conscious of the significance of money in enabling one to take and maintain a position of dignity and influence. A man has no dignity nor influence until he enters relations with the instituted and continuing forms of society. And though silly little girls may think they could spend a happy lifetime 'traipsing' after a gipsy minstrel, a wife knows better. Every married woman knows that a husband without dignity or influence is a perpetual humiliation."

"Very possibly," I said; "but you were going to define a gentleman."

"Why, a gentleman," said Cornelia, "is a man so well bred and so intelligent that he knows what I have just been saying, without being told; consequently he doesn't ask a nice girl to marry him if he is aware that he can offer her nothing but perpetual humiliation. A gentleman is a man whose character has been formed by the standards of civilized and rational people. To him these considerations are so elementary and so familiar that he acts upon them spontaneously."

"Then you would admit," I suggested, a little petulantly, "that what a man is, *after* he is a vestryman, an officer in the militia, and a property-holder, may have a certain remote bearing on—on the felicity of a marriage, if you think that of any importance?"

"Of course I think that of importance," responded Cornelia. "Don't be foolish. I am discussing the conditions in which felicity begins to be possible. You recall what Henry James says so beautifully: 'The object of money is to enable one to forget it.' In the whole course of my life, I believe I was never before hectored into saying so flatly what the prerequisites of a decent marriage are. But you and your novelist friends—you realists, as you call yourselves—have filled the world with the glorification of merely instinctive and utterly irrational 'matings,' or with childish sentimentality about them; so that now, when I talk with Dorothy about suitable and unsuitable marriages, I find myself obliged to reconstruct for her the very rudiments of common-sense."

I do not consider Cornelia subtle, but sometimes she says the same things that she would say if she were subtle. However, if I was being instructed over the head of her daughter, I did not propose to acknowledge it. "My dear Cornelia," I remonstrated, "do you forget that I am not Dorothy?"

"No," she said, "but I often think you are just as sentimental."

IV
CORNELIA APPRECIATES HER HUSBAND

The old road dips here into a hollow, where an extensive thicket of wild roses encroaches upon it and diminishes it to a narrow and thorny footpath. We picked our way through it single-file and in silence. Cornelia, emerging some steps ahead, turned and waited, waist-high behind the briars, smiling—with a rose in her hand and its hue in her face. Suddenly she seemed a long way off—twenty years off. The breeze had brought youth into her eyes if not into her mind. She was very lovely, and I wished the wind might have loosened a wisp—why couldn't it?—of her sunlit hair; but that was too much for the wind. Her own arrangements had been complete.

She fixed the rose in my coat.

"Cornelia," I said, as we footed it again together over the vivid green gloss of dewberry leaves, "You remind me of an old sweetheart of the seventeenth century—who also married a diplomat. I mean Dorothy Osborne. When Temple was courting her, she wrote to him, oh quite delicious letters—one in particular, in which she says she has been crying over the story of Baucis and Philemon. 'Methinks,' she says, 'they were the perfectest characters of a contented marriage, where piety and love were all their wealth, and in their poverty feasted the gods when rich men shut them out.' But in that identical letter she warns her lover that '*this is the world*; would you and I were out on't!' And in the next letter she derides the foolish young people who marry for love, and pointedly reminds poor Temple that all the world must be informed 'what fortune you have, and upon what terms I marry you—that both may not be made to appear ten times worse than they are.'"

"Yes—yes; I remember," Cornelia said, with—I thought—a faint note of reverie. "Love and wit met in that encounter, and both came away much improved. I must give that book to my Dorothy. She was a sensible girl—Dorothy Osborne was a very sensible girl. It is a book that will help a young girl to understand that she needn't be an idiot."

"At heart," I said, "even the sweetest of women are as hard as nails, aren't they?"

"Someone has to be," said Cornelia.

"You mean," I interpreted, "if the young lovers aren't to make fools of themselves."

"Yes," she said, "or old ones, either."

"H'm," I resumed; "what I was getting at was this: when I was a young fellow, with even less experience than I have now, I used rather to revel in reading tragedies and tales of dismally bitter and disillusioned men. All young fellows do. I suppose it intensifies the sense of their own existence. In the presence of dark and disastrous things—sin, crime, murder for love, and so on—they persuade themselves that they are drawing close to the 'throbbing heart of reality.'"

"Yes," said Cornelia, "you used to like tragedy."

"But now," I said, "I am following an entirely different clue. I have a theory that the only matter that is really worth investigating is happiness. And so I haunt the trails of people who are reputed to be happy, or who act as if they were happy; and I pester them for their secrets."

"An odious habit," she said. "Besides, you won't learn anything."

"Cornelia," I continued,—not solemnly, you understand, but with my lightest touch,—"are you as entirely happy as we all think you are?"

"You don't imagine that I should tell you if I were not, do you?" she said—this also with the light touch. "Of course I am!"

"Then I suppose that if I asked you to outline the personal characteristics of, let us say, the sort of man one's daughter should choose in order to have a high prospect of a happy marriage—why, then you would just hand me back a quick sketch of His Excellency, your husband, wouldn't you?"

"Of course I should," she replied without hesitation. "I am proud of Oliver. He has made a place for himself in public life. Men like him—he has hosts of men friends; and his relatives are all suitable people. He has been able to provide amply and even lavishly for the comfort of his family, and has given us the advantage of years of foreign travel and residence. He cares a good deal for appearances; but so do I. He likes to live expensively; but he knows how to live. And he is never, like so many men with careers, too busy to live or to let other people live unless they can be swept into the stream of the monster's ambition. He is never too busy to enjoy what he is doing."

"Astonishing virtue, in the circumstances!" groaned my envy.

"And then he is generous to us all—and reasonably tolerant, and really kind-hearted and sympathetic with people that he likes; and he and the children positively adore one another. I like that in him. His temper has its stormy seasons, but for the most part it is gay; and even when he is very angry, he is rather entertaining. He has so much humor that he seldom bores himself, and so much intelligence that he seldom bores anyone else. Everything in the world and at home seems to interest him vividly. He thinks of something new to do or to say every morning of his life. Whatever man or woman he meets, seems to be the one person in the world that he was hoping to meet at that moment; but I think he actually doesn't care very much for women, except in their purely decorative aspects. Sometimes he is a little exacting, but he is generally appreciative; and he has very, very nice ways of remembering birthdays and anniversaries. And then, in tight places he always does the right thing; in a crisis, one can rely on him."

"Cornelia," I said, clipping a row of flame-weed with my stick, as we quickened our pace, "I have just passed through a terrible minute. You know that Oliver is the only man in the world that I envy. I have been checking off each trait of

his against my own, and the only trait that I have in common with this happiness-producing paragon is that my temper, too, has 'stormy seasons.'"

"That's too bad," Cornelia said maliciously, "for I don't consider Oliver's temper his best trait."

"No, nor do I; you omitted the finest virtue of the perfect American husband. What I admire most of all in Oliver is his sending you into the country for the summer—and his sublime confidence that he will get you back again in the fall."

"The quiet is nice here, isn't it?" she said; "but hadn't we better turn about? The sun is slipping into that indigo cloud-bank."

V
WE DISCUSS THE INNER LIFE

We plunged over the ridge by a steep path to the lake, in order to make the short return by the shore. The wind was now blowing hard and the waves running high. I began to feel like taking it easy, but Cornelia is indefatigable. She drew up her shoulders, threw back her head, drew a deep breath, and went cutting into the wind like a gallant yacht.

"Oh let's slow down a bit," I called. "I've only just begun to understand something. Something very important about happiness. It flashed into my mind—literally flashed—as you struck that Samothracian pace northward."

"If it's as important as that—" she said, relenting a little in her stride. "But don't you like to walk fast? Nothing makes me so happy."

"I have a theory," I said. "One can't walk fast when one has a theory. It's a theory for which you are partly, perhaps mainly, responsible."

"Then it isn't horrid, is it?"

"Oh no! It is very nice indeed. But even now, while we delay, it has grown into three theories. In the first place, there are no perfect husbands, and there is probably only one perfect wife. In the second place, happiness is in neither wives nor husbands, but only in the relation between. In the third place, people who are unhappy in marriage are so, usually, because they don't know how to give themselves to each other. In the fourth place,—it's four now,—that unhappy ignorance is chiefly due to erroneous conceptions of the self."

"Just what do you mean by the self?" she said. "My metaphysical brains are weak."

"Well, the traditional, romantic, and generally popular conception is, that the self is a very deep and precious mystery of 'the buried life,' an elusive being hidden away inside,—always inside,—in a secret garden of the personality, where it murmurs to itself the most delightful and ineffable secrets, which can be communicated to any other self only in a mystical physical fusion of selves—or confusion of selves."

"Yes," said Cornelia, "I understand that. It is something like the religious or sacramental theory of marriage, isn't it?"

"Something like some people's notion of it," I replied. "But please follow this argument. Under the illusion that the self is such a being, and only so to be come at, romantic lovers fret themselves to a fever, and decadent heroes and heroines tear each other to bits, and ignorant contemporary husbands and wives separate with bitter recriminations, each charging that the mysteriously rewarding self sought in the other was not to be found."

"Well?"

“Well, the reason it was not found is that it was not there. There is no such secret garden; there is no such mysterious self to reward the mystics of the romantic quest.”

“Don’t you think so?”

“No,” I said, “I think, up to a certain point, our brutal modern naturalists have followed truth much more faithfully than the poets. And I believe that in educating our young people we had better follow them to the same point. My novelist friend is right in holding to his theory that Judith O’Grady and the Colonel’s lady are much the same beneath the skin.”

“Bah!” cried Cornelia. “If you say that again, I shall hate you.”

“And I shall ask to be forgiven,” I said, “and you will forgive me so graciously that I shall sin again. But I’m very serious about this. Judith and the lady are very much the same—beneath the skin.”

“I hate you!” Cornelia cried. “I could stick you full of pins.”

“Beneath the skin,” I continued, “Judith and the lady consist of closely similar metabolic apparatus and so forth, and a certain amount of vacant space—and nothing else. And since the apparatus is the same, there is every reason to believe that it functions in essentially the same way in performing the duties assigned to it by biological destiny.”

“You are disgusting,” said Cornelia.

“If I dwelt too long on the point, I should be,” I agreed. “Viscera and vacancy: that is what Judith and the lady have beneath the skin. And that is why I think the naturalistic novelists are foolish if they dwell too long there.”

“Is this your nice theory?”

“No,” I said, “it isn’t; but it is a sort of basis for my theory. First, we establish the fact that the interesting and precious and desirable self isn’t ‘inside.’ Then, don’t you see, it must be outside. Well, it is outside. It doesn’t exist till it gets outside. All the differentiation, the distinction, the qualities, which you and I value, are outside and are created by means analogous to the means of art. In so far as people—any people, married or otherwise—really give themselves adequately to each other in love or in friendship, and impart happiness with the gift, they give a self that is externalized, objectified, and tangible—so to speak—in some form of useful or beautiful activity, which occasions no insatiable and consuming fever, but the real joy of benefits given and received and the delight of a loveliness that descends on the contemplative eye like the free grace of God.”

“Your theory improves,” said Cornelia; “I don’t wholly understand it; but it improves.”

VI
A THEORY OF HAPPINESS

The foam was now running high up the beach. I splashed straight through it, in spite of my shoes. But Cornelia, lighter footed, danced with it like a partner in some fantastic minuet, returning to my side and my argument only when the creamy gliding meander ebbed.

"A man's power to impart his best self," I said, "depends on the woman's power to receive it."

"Of course," said Cornelia, "all that any man, even a genius, asks of his wife is intelligence enough to appreciate him."

"No," I said, "that isn't true. That is going by. There was a time when a husband thought of himself as the pianist, and of his wife as standing behind him to turn the pages of his music. But nowadays we begin to think that the ideal concert is by two performers on perfectly synchronized independent instruments—not soloist and accompanist but, say, organist and pianist, each as important as the other."

"Nonsense!" said Cornelia, "We shall never expect that. But we do like our accompaniment to be applauded when we play well—and especially when we don't."

"If there is one subject in the world," I said, veering a point, "about which I am more densely ignorant than another, it is women, and what they really like."

"That's quite true," she lilted.

"But I knew a lady once—"

"Still another lady?"

"A most exquisite lady. And I often wondered why, whenever 'the idea of her life' came into my 'study of imagination', I invariably saw her in a setting, as if the setting were an organic part of herself."

"Well it is, isn't it—if one puts a little effort into it to make it right? It is in the setting—isn't it—that one has one's opportunity to express what you call the self. It is in one's husband, children, friends, and one's home and habits and things and so on."

"Yes, but in the case of this lady there was a curious point about the setting. Wherever she was, seemed to be the centre of the picture. She always seemed to frame."

"What an attitudinizer she must have been!"

"She was not. It was only, I think, that she seemed to bring out and accentuate everything near her that harmonized with her own vibrant and articulate life. When I saw her in her drawing-room, it framed her; and she appeared as fine and finished as if she had stepped from a canvas of Watteau's. Her books and pictures and tapestries became as intimately hers as her garments, so that I have felt her almost visibly present in that room, even when she was not there. Sometimes, in a perverse mood, I have said, 'This is all a pose'; and, trying to go behind the elaborate expressiveness of her artificial surroundings and to tease her out of perfection, I have gone on rough

walks with her in woods and in the open, half hoping that she might revert to the inarticulate pathos of Nature. But the instant she stepped from the frame of art she stepped into the frame of the landscape; the greensward spread itself before her like Raleigh's cloak; groves offered themselves for a background; and I finally concluded that if she came up out of the sea, like Botticelli's Cytherea, the sea would clothe her and her pearly radiance appear but an extension of the lustrous nacre of some deep-sea shell."

"You are fanciful," said Cornelia.

"I am not fanciful," I replied. "I express just as simply as I can with words my sense of the quite blessed outwardness and availability of this lady's self. I don't think she knew it, but—"

"But that shows how ignorant you are of women," she said, and swept me again sidelong with her gray eyes.

"But whether she knew it or not," I reasoned, "she possesses a secret of communicating happiness—a kind of happiness which I can only describe as pure serenity at concert pitch. Perhaps she was merely born in tune with some fine instrument which the rest of us rarely hear. Perhaps she is right, after all, in thinking of the art and discipline of the traditional lady and the traditional gentleman as the technique by which the true and precious selves of our fellow creatures are most likely to get themselves expressed."

"I believe," said Cornelia, "that your theory is coming out rather well, and in time for tea."

"My only reason for elaborating my theory is, that it is based upon the practice of a lady whose theory is infinitely surpassed by her art."

"Is it, indeed?" she said.

"When I got the theory built, I was planning to say that I should wish a daughter to choose for her husband neither one of the sheik-monsters who of late have been devouring our damsels, nor yet the inexpressive and unmodified vestryman whom you commended to our admiration this morning, but rather a youth who should have a bit of the old bachelor's conception of what might be in the relation—an old bachelor, I mean, who had known in his own youth, an exquisite lady."

"Why lug in the old bachelor?" Cornelia asked—a little cruelly; for we were already at her door.

"Because," I said, as she waited on the step for my leave-taking, "because time and meditation and the naturalistic novelists have convinced him that, almost without a pang, he may resign to Mr. O'Grady and the Colonel the similarities of Judith and the lady, provided only that, from time to time, he may refresh his memory and his senses with the lady's differences."

"Meaning—"

"Why, meaning that the kind of man whom a girl like Dorothy should choose should know that the passion hymned by the naturalists is naught, sheer naught—"

“You really mean that?”

“—in comparison with the quality of love to be had in its high moments of general joyous awareness of the entire radiant life of a fellow being—meeting his perceptions and recorded in his imagination, clothed in color and motion and talk and laughter and fresh air, the head turning with frank gay light in the eyes, the lips parted in speech, while the springing step goes rhythmically over the wide-stretching earth under sunlight and blue heavens.”

“It will be a long time,” said Cornelia, “before Dorothy needs to trouble her head with that. Meanwhile, we shall occupy ourselves with the rudiments. Shall we see you at mail-time to-morrow?”

“Yes,” I said, “and we’ll take up Oliver’s case, perhaps. There’s going to be a fine sunset. *’Voir!*”

VII
THE REAL THING

As I entered the wood path through the birches that run down to my own cottage, I thought I saw a boyish youngish figure slipping among the trees to the eastward. A moment later, I met Dorothy walking demurely up the path, with a book in her hand, closed upon one finger.

"Watching the sun set?" I asked, diplomatically.

"No," she said, "watching him disappear."

"Watching whom disappear?" I inquired, being invited.

"Oh, a boy that I like. We've been reading one of mother's new books. It's about a girl, Deirdre, who didn't want to marry a king, because there was a boy that she liked very much better—in all ways. And so they ran away and lived in the woods—and died happily."

"Oho!" I exclaimed. "I suspect the happiness of their death has been greatly exaggerated. It seemed to me rather dreadful. It's James Stephens's version, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Dorothy, and turning the golden dusk of her eyes with a sweet young gravity full upon mine, she added: "How old was my mother when you first knew her?"

"About your age, Dorothy. Why do you ask?"

"Was she very different then—from the way she is now?"

"She was quite a bit like you, then," I said, "if I remember. But why do you ask?"

"Because," she said, "she has marked the loveliest passage in this book. And I can't understand why, because she isn't like that now—not at all like that now."

"Isn't like what?"

"I mean," said Dorothy with perfect lucidity, "that this passage expresses just the way this boy and I feel. Shall I read it to you?"

"That wouldn't be quite nice," I suggested, "would it, Dorothy? Good-bye!"

"Perhaps not," she agreed; but as she moved toward the house, she turned and called after me: "But if you want to read it, you can find it on page one-hundred-and-forty."

In my own copy of James Stephens's *Deirdre*, I have marked, on page one-hundred-and-forty, this passage:—

"Lacking him, what could be returned to her? Her hands went cold and her mouth dry as she faced such a prospect.

"The youth who was hers. Who had no terrors for her! Who was her equal in years and frolic! She could laugh with him and at him. She could chide him and love him. She could give to him and withhold. She could be his mother as well as his wife. She could annoy him and forgive him. For between them there was such an equality of time and rights that neither could dream of mastery or feel a grief against the other. He was her beloved, her comrade, the very red of her heart, and her choice choice."

BOOK THREE

TREATING OF MODERN GIRLS

I
THE EDUCATION OF DAUGHTERS

I have always looked with admiring astonishment on parents who have daughters on their minds, and yet are not broken by the responsibility; and next to the weight of immediate responsibility for a daughter I should place the burden, which some mothers still take upon themselves, of choosing a daughter-in-law. In my callous moods, I say that the ordinary run of children make as good matches for themselves as they deserve, and that they had better be left to their own devices. But if I were a parent and had successfully brought up to the "magnetic age" two such delightful children as Cornelia's, I suspect that I myself shouldn't be able to resist attempting to be a Providence to them. Over a daughter, especially, I suppose I should make a particular fool of myself. I should probably try to keep her for the most part like a bird-of-paradise in a cage, and when I let her out, should endeavor to control her flight by "a thread of my own heart's weaving." And I am positive that any youth who presented himself as a candidate for her hand would, unless he were the possessor of incredible perfections, have desperate difficulty in winning mine.

I did feel reasonably competent, nevertheless, to discuss eligible sons-in-law with Cornelia. The young men of to-day are not notably better or worse than the young men of twenty years ago, nor is the problem of choice among them essentially altered. I know a good man when I see him, as well as Cornelia does. But what is a good daughter or a good daughter-in-law nowadays? It is a horrid question. It leads one into the hot air of clashing ideals.

With respect to girls, I admit at once that I am in a state of confusion and uncertainty, and that I may appear to be in a place where the light is dim, not merely because girls, between the period of George Sand and the period of Miss Amy Lowell, are said to have changed rapidly and essentially, but also because in the vast and engrossing literature of this subject I have remained *homo unius libri*, a man of one book—of strictly limited experience. As I remarked to Cornelia in all humility, only a day or two ago, if there is one thing of which I am more densely ignorant than another, it is women, including girls. If I were suddenly called upon to indicate to a son my notion of the ideal woman for a lifelong companion, I fear that I should not get beyond faltering forth a vague and most likely quite unpersuasive description of the virtues of Cornelia; and he, if he were as acute as I should like a son of my own to be, would doubtless inform me that it isn't the virtues of Cornelia that take me, but her

charm, which I don't understand. At any rate, my personal curiosity was so happily and completely arrested by my first discovery of perfection that, in the twenty years which have elapsed since that time, I have never felt impelled to explore any further.

I recall, for example, that when a few years ago I visited England in order to look up the baptismal record of an Elizabethan lawyer, I met on shipboard a vivacious young Frenchwoman who had compassion on my obviously lonely state and proposed one day that we make a couple of constitutional turns around the deck. At the end of the first turn, during which I had dallied a bit with the weather in my ingenious American fashion, she shrugged her shoulders—that is, I suppose she did, for she was very French—and exclaimed, "*Allons donc, causons de la femme* (Well, now, let's talk about women)!" I had read somewhere or other that Frenchwomen excel in the light discussion of serious themes and general ideas; and if she had proposed that we discuss palæography or epigraphy, I should have been delighted to observe how French feminine wit handles such subjects. But in the face of the topic proposed, I was aghast. I had no intention of talking Cornelia over with a perfect stranger; and feigning dizziness from the motion of the ship, I rather abruptly "saved myself," as the French say, and went below.

It is, curiously enough, Cornelia herself who in these later years is driving me to reopen the subject, investigate it, and "take a stand." I haven't, till lately, felt myself to be in an uncertain position or in a dim light, but rather in a very certain position and at the radiant centre of light. I don't wish to change my stand. Neither, of course, does she wish me to change it. Yet, if I alter, her own inflexibility will have been the prime mover.

It comes about in this way: she goes into the country as religious people go into a retreat—to escape from dusty contacts with the bustling democratic world, to collect her soul, to fortify her principles, and to renew her vows of allegiance to the conceptions of the good and the beautiful which she inherits from several generations of ancestors accustomed to giving the tone to the society in which they lived. It is utterly impossible to think of Cornelia at present as a *grande dame*—she is too young, there is too much of the morning clinging to her; and I cannot bear to dwell on the possibility of its ever deserting her; yet in the treasonable hours of the imagination I do occasionally steal forward on the straight highway of time, and I can see that, thirty years hence, if she holds her course, if she fulfills her destiny, she will be a beautiful and proud old lady, still giving the law to her children and to her grandchildren—what people call a *grande dame*.

But the tide of democratic vulgarity is running into the country havens and stealing insidiously into the securest retreats. One's own friends and neighbors are tainted with it. One's own husband brings a whiff of it up from the city at the week-end. One's own children, in spite of all segregation and antiseptic precautions, show a mild infection with it in their speech, in their manners, and even in their tastes. One

doesn't compromise with it. One "stands firm"; but one stands ever more and more alone.

I admire Cornelia's ability to stand alone against the world, against her own times, and against the practice of the city and the tyrannies of fashion; and, when she is wholly right, as I think she often is, it is the pleasantest thing imaginable for me to stand with her. But I am beginning, at an advanced age, to develop skepticism, and to look with an uneasy skeptical eye upon a rectitude of taste which isolates one too sharply from one's own flesh and blood—such "pure and eloquent blood" as speaks in the faces of Cornelia's children. When she expects me to side instantaneously with her against the budding ferment of her own son and daughter, I hesitate. I reluct, like a man called from the roadside to leave the sweet intoxication of an orchard in May. I become curious and loath to close the windows of apprehension to the rumors and fragrance of another springtime.

On the morning—Friday it was—after our windy walk by the lake, Cornelia, contrary to my expectation, did not appear at mail time under the big elm which shades our little grove of R.F.D. boxes. This was a surprise, because she had virtually agreed to be there and she habitually performs with precision whatever she has agreed to do. Later in the day, however, I learned that her husband had unexpectedly arrived in a hydroplane, with an officer in the naval flying corps, and that he would stay over Sunday, which was Dorothy's birthday. We seldom make calls in our summer community, except, as we say, "on intimation." Accordingly I waited for an intimation. All day Saturday, to my increasing wonder, there was nothing but silence from His Excellency's household, and, in the phrase which high usage has now made classic, "damned little of that." But I quite anticipated a birthday party on Sunday—for Oliver Senior makes much of these occasions—and probably a fire on the beach in the evening, with the latest gossip and best stories of the city. There was no party, and there was no fire.

On Monday I went down my path to the mail boxes with acute curiosity. The carrier's Ford had apparently broken down on the mountain, for he was nowhere in sight. I found Cornelia sitting alone on the bench under the elm; the other pilgrims, weary of waiting, had scattered along the marshy lakeside in search of lady's-slippers, which were abundant this year. She was all in white, and she sat with her bronze-gold head leaning against the gray trunk, and with one hand, lying listlessly across her knee, holding her soft white hat. If I were not afraid of being called bookish and pedantic, I should admit that as I approached she reminded me of Ariadne in Naxos; as it is, I content myself with remarking that she seemed a little languid. She did not rise.

I observed the point, because listlessness is not her "note."

"I hoped you would come," she said.

"It's a lovely morning, isn't it," I exclaimed, in a sudden awareness of the truth of what I was saying.

“No, it isn’t a lovely morning,” she replied. “It’s a horrid morning. Come and sit down. I want to be comforted.” Looking into her cool gray eyes, I saw that I had been mistaken. It wasn’t a lovely morning; there was a cloud in the sky.

“You, comforted?” I said incredulously, and seated myself at the other end of the bench, for I felt my hopeless inexperience with Ariadnes. “I thought you were always happy. Where is Oliver? I heard he came Friday night, but I haven’t seen hoof or horn of him.”

Cornelia looked out for a moment silently over the deep, still, intense blueness of our lake, mirroring the blueness of the morning sky. I suppose in that rapt moment—I haven’t seen her look more purely poetic in years—she was deciding whether it was her duty to tell me a loyal lie or whether she might relax and tell the simple truth. As she was in one of her rare moments of languor, she decided for the truth.

“I am vexed with Oliver. I sent him back to town on Saturday. I told him that I didn’t wish to see him again this summer.”

“Why, Cornelia!” I cried, “What in the world has Oliver done? Is it proper for me to hear? Has he been flirting with his secretary? Or has he been beating you? Or what?”

“He has been beating me.” Cornelia dabbed at the corner of one eye with her handkerchief; and I imagine there may have been some occasion for it, though I did not see it. She held her lower lip for an instant compressed under her perfect teeth. I noticed these things because in twenty years’ acquaintance I had never witnessed them before—but once, and that was in the dark backward and abysm of time. Then she smiled faintly and repeated:—

“Yes, he has beaten me. Dreadfully.”

“The monster! What have you done to merit blows? You don’t look bruised, Cornelia. Now that you have wept, you look like a calla lily after rain.”

“What have I done? I have done nothing but try to bring up my children as children should be brought up. And I am bruised and beaten. Oliver has betrayed me. I am fond of Oliver. I am his best friend. Oliver is—Oliver is a good deal of a dear—in his way. But it does seem as if, when it comes to the children, he acted like an irresponsible boy. Oliver is fifty-two. He acts as if he were fifteen, or as if he wished that he were.”

“I don’t doubt that he does,” I said, “and I have always thought that his boyish gusto was a positive element in his charm, and the quality especially which makes his children so fond of him. But tell me, now, what he has done, and I’ll try to judge him as he deserves.”

Cornelia began doubtfully and far away from the main point, in accordance with the manual of tactics for women.

"Well, first of all," she said, "he came up here in an aeroplane. I have forbidden him to fly. At his age and with his family, he has no right to take such hazards merely to amuse himself."

"Perhaps not," I said, "but you know that you like Oliver because he is the sort of person who does take hazards. If he weren't, you would despise him."

"Of course," she replied. "If there were real occasion for it, I should despise him if he were not the first to risk his life. But he does it now—and these other things, I am convinced—mainly because he knows how much I dislike them. I don't see what possesses him."

"What other things does he do, Cornelia? Oliver is at one of the 'dangerous ages.' And perhaps his children are beginning to influence him. You mustn't forget that Dorothy and Oliver Junior have reached an age at which offspring frequently have a very unsettling effect upon their parents."

"Well, listen. You know how much I dislike what people call 'the modern girl' and all her works and ways?"

"Yes."

"And you know how hard I have tried to keep Dorothy in her old-fashioned sweetness and innocence?"

"I don't see what there is old-fashioned in Dorothy," I said. "But she is sweet. I supposed God had made her so, and that the work couldn't easily be changed, and that all you had to do was to stand aside and watch her blossoming. But since you say that has been a trial, I must believe that you have been tried by it."

"Yes, and so does Oliver—I mean, he knows perfectly that it isn't easy for me to keep the right influences here and the wrong ones away. But what do you suppose occurred to him as the most appropriate birthday present that he could send up here by express to his daughter, the day before he came last week? An expensive knicker-outfit, a handsome cigarette-case, and a big package of his own cigarettes."

"Oliver has to have his little jest."

"Little jest, indeed!" retorted Cornelia almost grimly. "When Dorothy opened the bundle, of course I supposed that Oliver had enclosed the cigarettes for his own use. But Dorothy said, 'No, mother, they are for me. Father promised them to me on my birthday.' She opened the box, and there was a poem from Oliver, addressed, 'To my daughter Dorothy with her first box of cigarettes,' with a lot of rigmarole warning her against the excess of smoking more than one at a time! I thought he had gone crazy, and I was so angry that I snatched the cigarettes and the case from her and threw them into the fireplace."

"If you take the jest seriously," I said, "I don't blame you for being perturbed. I haven't any clear moral principle on this point. Many girls do smoke; and I think we shall ultimately have to concede that smoking isn't a 'sex function.' But smoking and Dorothy don't go together, in my feeling for the fitness of things. It seems like offering snuff to Viola or a Manila cigar to Rosalind. (You ought not to forget, by the

way, that those two girls did wear knickers.) But smoking—why, I should as soon think of offering a plug of tobacco to you, Cornelia."

"Ugh! Don't be disgusting," she pleaded.

"I'm not disgusting. I am only expressing my sense of the immeasurable gulf that lies between you and anything of questionable taste. But go on with your story."

"Well, Oliver arrived that night. When I asked him what he meant by the performance, he laughed in that infectious, irresistibly disarming way he has, and said, 'Oh, I have been reading Heywood Broun on the care and nurture of children. The young man has ideas. He thinks the way to equip youth for the battle of life is to gird upon them the sword of early experience, the buckler of knowingness, and the whole armor of sophistication. And I've decided to turn over a new leaf and meet my children halfway. Treat them like equals, instead of like superior beings. Dorothy will learn to smoke next fall, when she goes to college. It may be the only useful thing she will ever learn there. *Qui sait?* But if she waits till then, she will learn with a parcel of silly goslings who will think it is devilish. Let's try the effect of having her begin now at the domestic fireside with her own father and mother, who don't think it devilish."

I could seem to see a certain reckless experimental method in Oliver's madness—as in the serious proposal of some other reformers for "communal bathing" in the household, as an antidote to precocious sexual curiosity. It was an experiment which I should be willing to have tried on a dog. It had something in common, indeed, with an undeveloped notion of my own on the use of moral antitoxins. But I could also see that Cornelia saw nothing of the sort. So I merely asked, "And what did you say?"

"I said," she replied, "that Dorothy's mother did think it devilish—that Dorothy had never seen her mother smoking and never would. He laughed again and said, 'Then she will never learn to do it like a lady.' I inquired whether he were incapable of distinguishing between what is permissible in a man, perhaps pardonable in his typist, and what is undesirable in his seventeen-year-old daughter. He reminded me that three fourths of the ladies he knows smoke, and that Russian women, French women, and English women can't understand why we make a moral issue of it. I said, 'So much the worse for them. I am sick of having something obviously bad in America excused merely because something obviously worse exists elsewhere.' He said, 'Cornelia, you are a Little American. You are out of step.' And I lost my temper, and exclaimed, 'Oliver, you are a great idiot! Dorothy hasn't smoked yet, and she wouldn't think of smoking now, if she hadn't a fool for a father.'"

II
FLAGS OF REVOLT

As this was the first and remains the only occasion in my life on which any married woman has ever revealed to me any serious altercation between herself and her husband,—though I have been informed by others that such revelations are not uncommon,—I was astounded.

"Why, my dear Cornelia!" I exclaimed, "that was a fighting word. Was it then that Oliver beat you?"

"No," she answered with a partially reassuring smile, "I wish he had. Oliver sulks when he is angry. I flash out what I feel, and have it over with. Oliver sulks and plots some revenge—some ingenious, horrid little revenge that he knows will make me furious."

I gasped inwardly—if one can do that; but I tried to play the part of the unruffled confessor. I was learning so much that was new to me about happy family life. "Well, what did he do next?" I asked.

"He took a box of cigars and a novel and went up to his room, to bed. At six o'clock in the morning he got up and roused the household, apparently in the jolliest humor, ringing all through the house the big dinner-bell that we use to call the children from the woods. He made Dorothy put on her new knickers, and got the car out, and drove off to town with the children, 'for a lark,' he said. They came back about noon, and drove up to the door, and honked. I went out; and there was Dorothy in her knickers on the front seat with her father, both of them smoking, and Dorothy with her hair—her lovely soft hair—bobbed above her ears, and her neck shaved like a convict's. I could have cried—either with grief or with rage. And Oliver, simply bubbling with joy, called out, 'I've met them halfway, Cornelia darling!' Wasn't he horrid? Wasn't he perfectly horrid? I didn't cry. But Oliver went back to New York by the afternoon train. And now you know why there was no birthday party last night."

III
BLOOM

"Cornelia," I said after a moment of intense meditation, "I think—I am not sure, but I think you are making a mistake."

"I am sure!" she retorted. "I am not making a mistake. I know perfectly well what I am doing. I have never been more certain about anything in my life than that Oliver is wrong—utterly wrong. What mistake am I making?"

"You are making the mistake which nine tenths of the good people of our generation are making in dealing with their own children. You are making the mistake of trying to suppress the symptoms instead of diagnosing the disease. Knickers and the rest are symptoms. Of what? You ought to be thinking about that, but you are not. Cigarettes and bobbed hair are flags of revolt. You are interested only in capturing the flags and burning them. But what is the revolt about? That is what you ought to be thinking about; and you aren't thinking about it at all."

"I am thinking about it," she protested. "I am thinking about nothing else. I am not a simpleton. Personally I do abominate bobbed hair and cigarettes, but I am not afraid of them. What I am afraid of is the disease, or the revolt, of which they are the signals. It is the state of mind which goes along with them. It is the precious and irrecoverable things that disappear when these things appear."

"I don't quite follow you."

"I mean the sweetness and freshness of young girls—their bloom. Don't you care, don't you really care, even you—Oh, how shall I make you understand what I feel about the preciousness of the bloom on things, and on boys and girls who have been brought up happily and wisely in the right surroundings! Ever since I can remember I have had the strangest ecstatic sense about everything that has just come new into the world—dewy things, roses and morning glories early in the morning, little bits of babies, a pear tree all a soft mist of white blossoms, the slender little new moon in a green sky low in the west over treetops at nightfall, robin's eggs, just peeped at, in a lilac bush, the rosy-white tips of old grapevines, the silvery mist of plums before they are picked—anything, everything lovely before dust or heat has touched it and before anyone, anyone, has pawed it over. When I was a young girl my heart fairly ached with tenderness for this quality in things—and with a passionate desire to preserve it. When one grows older, the desire doesn't die out; it becomes only intenser, sharper, with years, till it goes through one like pain. And as I was walking over here this morning, I kept thinking of all these things that have it—have the bloom; and of my little Dorothy—who had it, till her own father brushed it off."

Cornelia uttered this speech swiftly and with a kind of soft, eager, glowing sincerity which terribly disquieted my judgment. But I somehow felt that I had slipped into the position of advocate for the rest of Cornelia's family, which stood at the

moment in dire need of advocacy. I smothered my instinctive emotional response, and exclaimed:

"Nonsense! What you value in Dorothy can't be brushed off. Bloom is only the transient breath of qualities that extend in her from rind to core, like the red in a blood orange. You are reveling in a mood, or you yourself would recognize that bloom—intactness—is preserved only by unsuccessful, undiscovered, sterile things. If it remains, it becomes a badge of uselessness. It is meant only for a brief seasonal show, which we may enjoy while it lasts; but it is silly to grieve over it. Other beauties follow—the full moon, and birds that break the lovely blue shells to bits and sing. Dorothy is breaking through her shell. That is all."

Cornelia sighed: "If it only were! But you don't know anything about the revolution that takes place in a girl's mind, and in her character, the moment she puts on the badge of those who have ceased to care for 'intactness!'"

"I'm not sure that I do."

"Well, the next time that you see three girls with bobbed hair and knickers—abominable word!—and with cigarettes in their mouths, edge up to them and overhear if you can what they are talking about: some unmentionable novel, some unprintable verse, some unspeakable ideas of some outrageous 'reformer,' something revolting that is sanctioned in Europe but, alas, has not yet been sanctioned here, some silly 'martyr' who has got into jail for some offence against decency, some crazy girl who has ruined herself as completely as the heroine of the latest novel. Perhaps you will hear them discussing what I overheard a group of our modern maidens debating not long ago—whether if a man and a woman registered at a hotel as husband and wife, the laws of this state would not recognize them as such."

"These are 'strong' topics," I said. "I don't think they are the only topics that girls with bobbed hair discuss, though they doubtless are discussed by girls with bobbed hair—and also by some girls whose hair reaches to their knees. But what you are always forgetting, Cornelia, is that life is full of strong topics. We can't get away from them or keep them from the knowledge of our children, unless we are ready to abolish eyes and ears. At the most, we can only cover them over a little and keep still about them. I think you fall into the same fallacy regarding the conversational discussion of them which you fell into regarding the discussion of them in current fiction. You conceive it an error of the first magnitude to admit the existence of evils which every one knows exist. What I should try to ascertain, if I edged up to a group of 'modern' girls in conclave on these themes, is the point of view from which they were speaking—the amount of common sense which they were bringing to bear upon the vices and follies of their contemporaries."

Cornelia likes the *ad hominem* form of argument. "If you had a daughter of seventeen," she said, "should you enjoy seeing her blow the smoke through her lips and hearing her wisely consider the legal consequences of registering at a hotel under the names of 'John Doe and Wife'?"

"If I had a daughter," I replied cautiously, "I have a sentimental notion that I should like to have one who at the age of seventeen would feel the æsthetic impropriety of smoking, and who at any rate would not feel her nerves on edge without tobacco. But suppose Heaven visited the sins of the father upon the child by giving me a—well, a 'modern' daughter. If my daughter, after emitting the smoke, ejaculated the word 'Geese!' with a good accent, and a clear cool sound of conviction, and a kind of contemptuous remoteness from Greenwich Village problems, why I think I should feel mightily reassured. I should be positively glad to have heard her express her mind on this strong topic. And if tobacco helped her to express her mind, as it helps me to express mine, I might even feel mildly grateful to the tobacco."

"You know you would not," said Cornelia.

"Perhaps you are right. But at any rate, I can conceive of no person more properly subject for satire than a man with the fifth cigar of the morning in his mouth taking up the battle axe to make war against the first cigarette of his wife or daughter."

"You are merely talking for argument. I hate you when you do that. You get so far away from me that I can't talk with you."

"No," I insisted, "I am not talking for argument. I am pleading in behalf of your sex, for equality of access to the good things of life, whatever we may finally decide are the good things. I am pleading for a little moral justice toward your sex, and for the necessity, if there is to be justice, of a little discrimination. You don't seem to discriminate at all among your 'modern' girls. It simply isn't true that they are all discussing suppressed novels and illicit love affairs. Many of them are far more interested in horseback riding, duck-shooting, hockey, golf, or hiking to Yellowstone Park. I am not sure what our girls are going to get out of their political activities; but I know what they are going to get out of their athletic activities. I am an uncompromising and enthusiastic adherent of athletic life for women—not Country Club women alone, but all women."

"I approve of women exercising," assented Cornelia, "if it can be done in a nice way. I don't care for Marathon runners and champion swimmers and that vulgar display of limbs in the newspapers."

"Cornelia," I said, "you use the word 'nice' too much; you overwork it. Your son told me the other day that, whenever he mentions a new girl acquaintance in your presence, you have only one question about her: 'Is she nice?' 'It gets on my nerves,' he says, 'to hear that everlasting: Is she nice?—Is she nice?—Is she nice?—till I don't care whether she is nice or not; and I feel like saying, No, she is horrid; but she sings like an angel, and she dances like a wave, and she makes a sparkling quip, and she has brains of her own, and she is attractive, and she is reasonable, and she is a good sport, and she doesn't squall when we get caught in the rain. I don't go around asking girls whether they are nice. How should I know? Mother means well and is perfectly fine herself, and all that. But somehow, you know, it strikes me as kind of nasty for a

fellow to be always thinking whether a girl is nice.' And there, my dear Cornelia, you get a bit of the spirit of the younger generation, which is, I think, essentially sounder and healthier than the perpetual incensing of 'purity' by some earlier generations."

"In what way is it sounder and healthier?"

"Why, I mean that it isn't the presence of sexual characteristics and impulses in an adolescent or in an adult that renders him or her 'not nice.' That is a part of nature and of humanity. What is not nice is perpetual preoccupation with these impulses. And perpetual preoccupation with them results from isolation with them, and exclusion from anything else of equal or superior interest. I am convinced that many of your 'modern' girls are discovering that fact for themselves. And it is because they dread the bondage and guess the degradation of confinement to a single instinct—it is because of this that they are groping so eagerly for other interests. For many of them, bobbed hair and cigarettes are signs that they are filling and freeing their minds with advertising, real estate, journalism, medicine, law, field geology, geographical exploration, and political organization."

IV
CAREERS FOR WOMEN

"Is that the sort of woman that you would have married," said Cornelia, "if you had married?"

"Let us not discuss the woman I would have married. Or rather let me remind you of this about her: the reason why the woman I would have married decided not to marry me was her clear-eyed perception, after some tears and emotional stress, that love was not enough to live on: that what I could offer her was not enough to make up a life for the many-sided being that she knew herself to be."

I paused a moment for a response. But Cornelia kept silence, looking out over the blue water. I continued:—

"If a girl is so placed in the world that she can find expression for the versatility of human nature in a really satisfactory domestic life and really satisfactory society and luxurious travel and beautiful surroundings and the fine things in literature and art and the rearing of really superior children—why, then she may not be tempted at all by advertising and real estate. But can't you see, Cornelia, that for the immense majority of girls the only way of getting anything but their conjugal and maternal capacities valued or expressed, and the only way of getting even their feminine charms to a suitable market lies through some such avenues as I have mentioned?"

"Yes," said Cornelia, "I know girls are going in for these things more and more; that is why I am so much worried about my son. I don't want him to become interested in that sort of girl. She wouldn't make him happy. She wouldn't be a good wife for him. Yet, just now, he seems to have a mania for 'girls that do things.' I know it's the fashion for girls to 'do things' nowadays; but don't you hate to see them doing them?"

"I truly do not. I admit that 'careers' for women are still in a more or less experimental stage. But the results from the ancient experiment in keeping women out of careers are all in. I am curious to see the results of the more recent experiment. Professional men, as life wears on, come to look upon a career, with all its burdens, as literally the one indispensable element, without which existence would be intolerable. For ages, men have lied to their sweethearts; have deceived them into thinking sweethearts and wives are the indispensable elements in the happiness of men. But it really is not so."

"Oh, isn't it?"

"No. And the girls themselves are finding it out, and are very sensibly claiming a share in the substantial satisfactions of life."

"You have no imagination. You don't understand. It's so simple, so perfectly simple. Substantial satisfactions for men are not substantial satisfactions for women. That is all there is to it. The things that please you and fill your lives are sawdust to us—after the first novelty wears off; and they leave our hearts aching and burning. I

am certain there isn't a mature woman in business who wouldn't admit, if she were honest, that if the choice were open, she would choose even a moderately successful marriage in preference to a brilliant success in business. They are making a mistake—such a mistake. I am sure that, in their hearts, they know from the outset that it isn't what their hearts desire."

"About the hearts of young girls," I admitted, "I know next to nothing. I am still curious about them because I have heard so much about them. But the only occasion on which I ever asked a girl for her heart, she gave me a stone. And I believe that, far oftener than most men suspect, the place in the pectoral cavity of women assigned to the heart is occupied by some far harder substance. You remember that lovely creature in Balzac whose lover overheard her in solitude exclaiming, 'My God! O my God!'; and the words seemed to him to come from the uttermost depths of her heart and made him love her more passionately than ever, till he learned that she had merely been anxious about her stock speculations—and that the deep suspiration really came from the woman's purse."

Cornelia was not impressed by this reference to Balzac. She has a capable business head herself, and manages her property, which is considerable, with more judgment than her husband displays. She ignored the malice in my speech and merely remarked:—

"A nice woman need not be a fool in money matters."

"No," I continued, "and many of them aren't. That is why I believe many of them are not making a mistake but following a real vocation when they turn to business. I don't know much about their hearts, but I have had extensive opportunity to observe their brains, and, in some respects, I am tremendously impressed by them."

"Oh, we have some common-sense among us," she agreed.

"It isn't common-sense so much," I corrected, "in which girls excel. It is a special faculty of their sex, a kind of darting velocity of mind, which men of other races, the Jews and the Chinese, for example, display more abundantly than Anglo-Saxon men. In manual deftness, in celerity of apprehension, in executive readiness, in a kind of swift practical insight, in flying straight to the point, girls and young women are proving dangerous competitors. They remind me of turtle doves, which, you know, have two very different notes. They coo and coo in the woods, till you think that a mournful amorousness is all they are good for; but if you start them up, they go 'piet, piet, piet' at ninety miles an hour to their next destination."

"Oliver is quicker than I am," said Cornelia, whose generalizations on the virtues rest largely on observation of her own family, "but Dorothy is quicker than her brother; and I am quicker than you are. Yes, I think you are right. Girls are quicker. But quickness isn't very important in itself. The important thing is to know where one is going."

“Girls show,” I proceeded, “very many of them, what the advocates of mental tests recognize as officer quality. I suspect that, if the draft were made universal, and if the army tests were applied to all the women in the country, not only would the disgrace of our moron percentage be greatly abated, but ninety-nine per cent of the men would be obliged to serve in the ranks. Among women, there is an immediacy of reaction to stimuli, a freedom from dubitation, subordinate considerations, and inhibiting afterthoughts, which make them invaluable members of a General Staff, when the General Staff is infested with doubting Thomases, Hamlets, and authorities on red tape.”

“If you think that,” inquired Cornelia, “why don’t you, and why doesn’t Oliver, give more attention to what I tell him is right?”

“Because,” I replied, “we are harassed by subordinate considerations and afterthoughts. But that is just what makes women want to get their hands on things and manage them. I am astounded every day to discover in how many big businesses and even political organizations there is some woman, who has perhaps risen from a stenographic position, sitting in with the chiefs of the concern at the centre of the web and actually telling the ‘big wigs’ what to do—actually ruling the whirlwind and directing the storm.”

After this speech, I glanced at Cornelia to see whether she would admit to herself her own master passion, her suppressed desire. I could see that she was doing something which she ordinarily would no more think of doing in my presence than of doing up her hair: she was reflecting.

“Possibly,” she conceded.

“Not possibly,” I pursued, “but certainly. All women crave mastery, beginning with the government of their own husbands; and their happiness, after the first feigning delight of amorous surrender, is to extend their jurisdiction, to enlarge the limits of their empire. It is the quality that makes queens. It is the quality that made Elizabeth and not Burleigh the ruler of England, and Catherine, not her minister,—whoever he was,—ruler of all the Russias. It is a quality which you yourself possess, my dear Cornelia, in abundance, only you haven’t an adequate throne to display it on; and so, instead of sending Raleigh to South America for galleons of treasure or telling the president of your company which railroad to buy next, you have to take it out in sending Oliver back to the city in disgrace because he has had Dorothy’s hair bobbed.”

“How I hate him!” cried Cornelia, as if still nursing the bitterness of defeat.

“Really?” I asked, in a momentary flutter of hope.

“But if queens feel as miserable as I do,” she added, “since I have had to discipline him, I don’t wish to be a queen.”

“You have no choice,” I murmured.

“But here comes the mail,” she exclaimed, rising suddenly and putting on her hat. “Come! Let’s go and meet it.”

My secret hope sank like a stone into cold depths of resignation.

"All right," I assented sadly; "but why such eagerness for the mail this morning?"

"Why, I am hoping," she lilted, "I am hoping, of course, for a letter from Oliver, you idiot!"

BOOK FOUR

CORNELIA AND DIONYSUS

I
ENNUI IN THE PROVINCES

The smooth order of Cornelia's life was interrupted on New Year's Eve by a distressing occurrence which I—which all of us who possess a rudimentary sense of tact—insist on calling an accident. It was not the sort of thing that I had ever thought of as likely to intrude upon the felicity of that household. My own convulsive unuttered response to the shock was: "That it should have happened to them!" But as it, or something very like it, actually happens every day,—once, twice, three times a day all through the year in every big city,—there was really no reason for assuming that they would remain indefinitely immune. The circumstance which seemed at the moment to point the accident with a piercing significance, a chilling personal meaning for us, was, I suppose, the mere coincidence that we were arguing in the abstract about just such occurrences when the brutal reality of the thing burst in among us with the effrontery of a bandit in a Pullman car. Of course it admits of the natural explanation which I shall give, leading up to the mishap in the order of my own approach.

Cornelia spends the winter months in the city, in a desirable apartment near the lower end of the Park—an apartment so spacious and so desirable that an old New Yorker once amused himself at my small-town ideas by asking me to guess the annual rental. As her children, Dorothy and Oliver Junior,—the centre of her summer solicitude,—are at their preparatory schools except during the holidays, she devotes this season to her women friends, to her husband, and to her husband's friends. I group in this way the people whom she entertains, first, because she has no men friends who are not her husband's friends, and, second, because her husband has an endless string of interesting official and unofficial personages whom he gets up—or brings up—from Washington for conferences or for exhibitionary or other mysterious diplomatic purposes.

As an ancient admirer—to put it discreetly—who has sunk through the incalculable accidents of life to the level of an educational counselor or referee, I confess that I find Cornelia just a shade more perfectly herself in the country, where she is comparatively alone with the children and nature and her books, than in the city, where, on my occasional expeditions, I see her but seldom and then usually so beset with husband, friends, and personages that there is little opportunity for the long educational tête-à-têtes of the summer. Of these conversations, be it admitted once for all, the secret excitement is in listening for the occasional lilt of Cornelia's lyric youth amid the finished certainty and assurance of her later manner. Her own mature

authoritativeness I can deal with in a fashion and even relish; but in the winter, in the daily proximity of her husband, she has an intolerable habit of throwing out flying buttresses, of quoting Oliver—"Oliver says," and so forth—as if she were referring a country lawyer to a decision of the Supreme Court. It is a little painful.

Still, in the winter holidays I like to call on the two of them in their own characteristic setting, for a variety of reasons which will be obvious enough to all those provincials who spend the gray season quietly sitting in silent, snowbound prairie towns and villages, dreaming, like waifs in a Scandinavian fairy tale, of the bright commotion of crowded streets and thronged foyers and Duse and Pavlowa and grand opera and Conrad and Lloyd George and Swinnerton and windows full of new books and golden gowns and cut flowers. I remember once remarking to them, after they had taken me into one of their theatre parties in the grand style: "Art for the upper classes; morality for men of moderate incomes; religion for the poor." "No"; retorted Oliver, with his instantaneous eye for the weak spot in my armor: "Art for the cities; morality for the towns; religion for the villages."

We provincials are, it is true, fairly well disciplined to the stoic "apathy"—a kind of cultivated hardening of the heart towards everything beyond the reach of our hands and the range of our eyes. Through month after month the rosy knuckles of temptation may knock on our hardened hearts in vain. But recent investigation proves that under constant percussion and strain the hardest substances yield: steel girders buckle, flywheels burst, and bridges wear out and give way to a malady known to science as "the fatigue of metals." An analogous malady, attacking even the most firmly tempered of hearts, accounts for the popularity of Charles Lamb's "moral holiday," that excursion from the moral macadam which nowadays we call a detour. It explains, too, in my own case, the sharp nostalgia for the city which afflicts me annually on the depressing morning after Christmas. On that spiritless day-after, I feel like a camel that has ruminated on its last cud and can no longer batten on the desert and the west wind. I feel like a wretched silkworm in a glass jar, which will swiftly perish of inanition if not supplied with fresh mulberry leaves. That explains why I pack my bag and, by the first Limited train, creep to the city, under the pretext of reading a paper before one of the learned associations.

What I am coming to is the rather curious fact that the attraction of Cornelia's winter establishment is perhaps due less directly to her than to her husband, and to the refreshing and—for me—delightfully relaxing air of worldliness which circulates around him. Cornelia wonderfully incarnates the Eternal Feminine, which is supposed to draw us upward. But in the interim between Christmas and the New Year's Resolutions one doesn't desire to be drawn upward. All one wants is to escape from ennui and suffocation. In the colloquial idiom of our section, one "wants out." And Oliver, in the negligee of old acquaintance, is a most agreeable, realistic, and sometimes rather witty Mephistopheles, letting one out of conventional and cloistral habits of thought, and leading one by sharp detours into the heart of things as they are.

Clearly, I don't dislike Oliver: I envy him, and, like his other familiars, call him "Excellency," a title which I believe few persons except the Governor of Massachusetts have any right to use officially. Nor do I think that Oliver really dislikes me: he pities me, and calls me "Professor," a title which he has also conferred, in my presence, upon the learned Greek who polishes his shoes. I tell him that both the Greek and I have a better right to our titles than he, for Oliver is now writing his reminiscences of the war, and has at present no official Washington connection whatever, busy as he seems to be there.

I envy him the variety of his life, the interest and importance of his personal relations, his position inside the façade of public affairs, his understanding of the huge subterranean dynamos which operate the puppet-show of politics, his familiarity with the little hairsprings which govern the dynamos, his chatter of Wall Street and the Departments and the Legations, and his inexhaustible stock of unpublished anecdote. In public he has had the reputation of a strong team-worker, a sound administrative man; and in the newspapers he passes as a champion of the common people, friend of the farmer and the laboring man, and the rest.

But twenty-five years of more or less public life have not stereotyped his mind. In private, indiscretions bubble from him like water from a spring. He utters the most profane and contemptuous condemnation of major enterprises of his party. In a friendly circle he will even repudiate, with perfect recklessness, the "asininities" to which he has been constrained by various public considerations to subscribe. I twit him on the essential duplicity of the official character. I call him what he seems to my academic sense to be—"a tough little Yankee crab apple, coated with the wax of European diplomacy"; "a hard-shelled individualist steeped in Nietzschean philosophy and merely dipped in democratic shellac." I insist that there is no more milk in him than there is in a billiard ball; and that he values the plain people as a professional golf-player values his caddies.

In revenge, Oliver blandly replies: "The only trouble with you professors is that you know absolutely nothing about life"—a charge which I always admit; and then pump him for information. He responds with the—I think—sincere conviction, shared by many Eastern statesmen, that we Mid-Westerners are of an unsubjugated alien race, ominously multiplying within the borders of the otherwise United States, and mainly occupied with the propagation of miscellaneous fanaticisms. He has not yet forgiven me "the pacifism of the Mississippi Valley when the seaboard was aflame." He ascribes to me the "bolshevism" of North Dakota, and is always inquiring solicitously: "By the way, how did you come out with your investments in the Dakota bonds?" Sometimes he pretends that, as I am from "Puritan Kansas," I may have scruples against breakfasting with them "on the Sabbath"; if I accept, he turns to Cornelia and gravely warns her not to forget "the Nebraskan's grape-juice." Or he will ask my permission to light a cigarette, remarking, "As you are from Utah, I feared it might be offensive to you." His mocking compassion is often excited by my

provincial residence and by my profession. I don't mind his designating me as "Pascal," nor his reference to my correspondence with Cornelia as *Les lettres provinciales*. But, in one of his sharper moods, I remember his saluting me as "Calpurnia." I asked him to enlarge a little on the idea. "Oh, it's nothing," he replied, "only I hear that nowadays they are dismissing all the men from university faculties and manning them with Cæsar's wives—with persons 'above suspicion.' I always think of you professors as Cæsar's wives."

Cæsar's wives? Oliver's immediate implication, I suppose, was merely that the public expects on the part of instructors of youth a quasi-priestly character, a many-sided and inhuman exemplariness of opinion and conduct such as neither the youth in our charge nor their parents require of themselves. But Oliver meant more than that. He meant to suggest the absurdity to the realistic mind—the practical invalidity—of the entire professional and schoolmasterly point of view, and the Utopian insubstantiality of our ethical and social vision. Cæsar's wives! The sting of that quip, which he planted in me last summer, was still rankling a bit on a gray hungry morning a few days after Christmas, the poison of it being its truth; and a doubt was stealing insidiously into my mind, like the snake into the Garden of Eden, whether perhaps the influence of the secular priesthood over the democracy might not be greater if the priesthood abandoned its attempts to appear so supremely untouched by the gross human infirmities of the democracy, when I received a note from Cornelia, and, half an hour later, a telegram from Oliver. Like all government officials and even private citizens who have much breathed the air of official Washington, Oliver scorns the post office, even for personal correspondence. For brevity's sake, I give the telegram:—

CORNELIA NOTICES YOU SPEAK HERE SATURDAY STOP DINE WITH US MONDAY AT EIGHT THIRTY STOP NOBODY ELSE BUT YOUR NOVELIST FRIEND VERNON WILLYS STOP WATCH THE YEAR OUT DISCUSS FUNDAMENTALISM AND BURY BACCHUS STOP SEMIOFFICIAL STOP WE WANT MIDWESTERN POINT OF VIEW STOP REGARD AS IMPERATIVE

I packed my old suit into my old suit-case, slipped into my inside pocket the old club-paper which was to pay my expenses, snatched a book of Gilbert Murray's to read on the train, and crept slowly eastward on the Limited. My diary shows that my occupations during my first forty-eight hours in the city were about as follows:—

Read my paper, "A Much Higher Education," before the Saturday Afternoon Club. Cornelia was present and I spoke with her for two minutes afterward. Saw *Cyrano* Saturday night and college friends in the stockbroking business for three hours following. Slept Sunday morning till cathedral service. Lunched with a poet in the baking-powder business who read me his free verse on an affair between a Jewess and a Chinese laundryman. Spent the afternoon looking at the pseudo-Rembrandts in the Metropolitan, and the evening at a concert. Saw journalistic friends downtown Monday morning. Afternoon; at rehearsal of a Little Theatre play called "Self-Realization"—lively. Publishing friend at his club till six: showed me manuscript of "Petronius Enamored" and put his collection of suppressed novels at my disposal.

Walked in Riverside Park till seven, then went to hotel and dressed for dinner. As I was leaving for the West on the 2.37 in the morning, I packed my bag, and checked out. Oliver and Willys might want to talk till daybreak.

II
NEW YEAR'S EVE IN NEW YORK

Mulberry leaves! These details I include in order to indicate briefly how I reduced the unmannerliness of my provincial appetite before I put in my appearance at Oliver's, and, leaving my bag at the office, went up one flight to their apartment. I don't like to seem too eager.

As I stepped into the clear soft blueness of the candlelit apartment, Cornelia rose, a silvery shimmer, from the settee where she had been chatting with Oliver Junior, and, approaching with Artemisian stride, greeted me with her finished graciousness. The artistic perfection of it might subtly pain a sensitive heart, were it not for the intimate reassurance imparted by the rippling overtones of her voice, which resolves art into intoxication and curiously persuades a man in evening dress, in the heart of the city, that he is standing in the midst of a garden full of flowers. I muse.

Cornelia swiftly explained that Oliver Junior, though festively attired, would not dine with us. That spirited and well-groomed youth would, in a few minutes, drive his sister and two of their friends to a young people's party in Scarborough. After I had asked him a few banal questions about his school, a topic which did not appear greatly to "intrigue" him, he edged into the adjoining room and diddled with the piano till his sister Dorothy skipped in, looking like an adolescent Bacchante,—she is a little over seventeen,—and they disappeared together.

Cornelia in the meantime had also explained that Oliver Senior was in the library with Vernon Willys. "I don't like him much," she added, "in fact, I think him rather horrid. He is very happy to-night over his separation from his wife. He could hardly wait to get inside the door to tell us about it. But I believe you have discovered something precious in his books, and Oliver seems infatuated with him. They have been running around together all the fall. He is doing a political novel now, and I accuse Oliver of sitting for the portrait of the hero. But here they are."

The two men came in from the library with red buds in their buttonholes. Oliver as usual saluted me with a volley of questions, which he gave me no time to answer, and with an animating smile, in which I always feel a slightly satirical edge. Willys, whom I had met once or twice before, nipped my arm, smacked his lips, and murmured with a communicative flicker in his eyes that I must be sure to see His Excellency's library before I left. As we moved toward the dining-room, Oliver's quick fire continued: "Did you get my telegram? Get the point about Bacchus? I'm feeling the pulse of the country on this prohibition business. Willys here has convictions, I find—just as many convictions as you have, but different. I got you two together in the hope of hearing you beat each other's brains out. I hope you'll do it in good style. Give him the Mid-Western gospel. I'll hold the coats. I've arranged the proper setting. But be human, Professor! Be human—just for to-night!"

It is not my intention to describe the dinner in detail. The excellence of a dinner *à quatre*, for any but a quartet of gourmands, is merely to provide a soft-footed ministration of successive felicities to the appetitive nature while the higher faculties, stimulated by the æsthetic accessories of the feast, nimbly engage in the discourse of reason. Of the material details, my memory is as indistinct as an impressionist poet's. I recall only the tall silver of candlesticks on an immaculate whiteness which was doubtless linen; and a soothing greenness which may have been holly; and a dark rich redness which was certainly roses; and a fragrance, mingled, various, which was partly roses and partly, well, I sat at Cornelia's right hand, and in that dazzling proximity—she carries her head so proudly that Time has hardly ventured to touch a wisp of her bronze-gold hair or to breathe near her shoulder—in that proximity I did not notice, honestly did not notice till some seconds after we were seated, that in front of each plate was a half-moon formed of three delicate glasses, glowing with candlelight reflected from the varicolored souls of old vineyards.

Vernon Willys quite audibly drew in his breath, which after the visit to His Excellency's library was a discreet enough thing to do with it. Oliver, glancing at me, repeated: "Remember, Professor—be human." Then he raised his ruby-colored glass toward the novelist and said: "Let us drink to the death of Bacchus." The two men clinked and instantly drained their glasses. Cornelia lifted hers in my direction, just touched it with her lips, and then replaced it in the semicircle. I was thinking of Ben Jonson's old song, that Anacreontic thing about the thirst that rises from the soul. But what I did with my glass, since whatever I did would grievously offend many persons' notion of the right thing to have done, I absolutely refuse to disclose. That point is of quite subsidiary relevance.

The thing which engaged my attention as a Mid-Western ethicist and one of "Cæsar's wives" was not the content of the glasses nor the number of times they were filled by the chocolate-colored Caribbean cupbearer. A person of my long practice in the ascetic philosophy actually doesn't much attend to these matters. I merely—let us say—became aware of Oliver's Machiavellian plot to seduce me. Then what leaped to my sense as worthy of exploration was just the personal feeling, the intimate private attitude of my friends, of precisely this sort of people, toward the ethical question, or complex group of questions, which the alleged death of Dionysus and his active posthumous life have forced into the foreground of our consciousness. In my own circle at home no one ever says anything of the faintest interest on the subject. When it is mentioned, there may be some talk of law-enforcement; but the heart of the matter is regarded as perfectly dead. Here, there was willingness and desire to discuss the original question.

His Excellency, I knew, had publicly advocated the passage of the obnoxious measure, and had recently given to the press a "strong" statement on the necessity of enforcing the law. In the intimacy of friendship, however, and in the circumstances

which he himself had arranged, that was only a provocation to my remarking, as he set down his glass:—

"It is obvious that you support the Eighteenth Amendment with reservations."

"With a diplomatic reserve," he corrected, chuckling. Willys, who had penetrated the "reserve," laughed. And Cornelia, crushing a smile between her lips, entered into a rather needless explanation, of which the intention, I perceived, was to dissipate any uneasiness which a Mid-Western Puritan might be conceived to feel on his abrupt introduction to a wet New Year's Eve.

"Monsieur"—meaning Oliver—"is a little naughty," she said, "and he likes to make himself appear worse than he is. You must remember that he is practically a European."

"Oh, nonsense!" I exclaimed. "Oliver a European! Then so was Andy Jackson."

"Yes," Cornelia insisted, "his tastes and habits were formed in the earlier part of his life, when he was almost constantly abroad. His best friends in Washington are men in the legations who aren't obliged to adopt our reforms. Naturally, when he entertains them here, he doesn't wish to seem inhospitable or absurd, like poor dear Mr. Bryan. We don't ordinarily have wine on the table for our own guests—I mean outside the semiofficial connection. But just for to-night, as it's a holiday, and one of you is a pilgrim from the Mid-West, Oliver thought—we thought—that you would appreciate it if ambassadorial privileges were extended to you."

"I get the point perfectly," I said; "that's Oliver's point of view—or one of his points of view. But please let Janus defend himself. He will need practice before we Puritans are done with him. But now that the theme is before us, Cornelia, won't you give us the benefit of your own point of view?"

"My point of view?" Cornelia smiled her Mona Lisa smile. "I—oh, I am Oliver's wife!"

"I have often regretted that," I replied with a consciously provincial affectation of urban daring; "but knowing your strict old-fashioned convictions about marriage, I stifle my regrets. I can't quite reconcile your indulgent humor this evening with your rigorously prohibitive principles regarding—well, the moral fluidity of such novels as Willys writes. I had hoped that your conservatism, your Puritanism, as they call it, on the marriage question would bring you around to our position on prohibition, and so, in that respect at least, detach you from Oliver."

"You are dead wrong, Professor," Willys interjected, "you are muddled. Prohibition isn't conservatism. It is radical innovation. It isn't Puritanism. As you yourself have admirably demonstrated, the Puritans drank like fishes. I am a Puritan. So is His Excellency. We are Conservatives. So is our hostess."

"Your don't read my articles, Willys," I said, "as carefully as I read your novels. What I demonstrated was, that the Puritan is a radical innovator. The Puritan of our day says, 'Let the dry land appear.' You are not a Puritan; you are a Fundamentalist. You wish to return to the Flood. You are a Diluvian."

“Now you are at it!” cried Oliver gleefully. “Go to it!”

“Excuse me,” I objected; “we haven’t heard Cornelia’s point of view yet. I was about to say, when Willys broke in, that we educators don’t attach any great importance to the opinions of disillusioned politicians and satirical novelists—cynics like you and Willys. The national culture is in process of fundamental change and regeneration; and you belong to an order that will soon be obsolete, with none to mourn its extinction. The future of the country is in the hands of the young people and such of the rest of us as keep up with them. I am totally indifferent, Cornelia, to what you think of prohibition as His Excellency’s wife. In that capacity I doubt if you think at all; you merely accept the situation. I am curious only about your attitude as a parent of the new order, as Oliver Junior’s mother. Won’t you, for example, psychologize—analyze your feelings and tell us just why you kissed the glass and set it down untasted?”

A hint of rose—pride or some deeper emotion—appeared in Cornelia’s face when I mentioned her son. He is her religion—the substance of it. Her husband is the church which she attends from old habit, repeating her belief in him with her lips, like the phrases of an ancient creed. But what she really believes in, with a fervor of prayer and faith, is her son. I suspected that Willys and Oliver would think me guilty of bad taste for bringing into the conversation a subject, as a Restoration hero remarks of his wife, “so foreign and yet so domestic.” Somehow children seem out of place when one is celebrating a moral holiday! But if one wishes to break down the guard of a woman who says, “My point of view? I—oh, I am Oliver’s wife!” one must risk bad taste. Cornelia’s voice glided softly from gay to grave as she answered:—

“I kissed the glass for auld lang syne. I set it down untasted for the sake of the new times and the children. I used to enjoy it, as I used to enjoy being twenty years old. It isn’t much to relinquish, is it?—compared with what one has to relinquish.”

When Cornelia talks in this vein about age, she seems to me—well, just ravishingly young; and I murmured, for our angle of the table only, “You’ve relinquished nothing!” But she completely ignored me and continued:—

“As my son’s mother, I am very happy, under present conditions, to know that he doesn’t drink or even feel any temptation to drink. We refrain, my son and I, more as a matter of taste than as a matter of conscience. Besides, he is too young. In my own home the boys had a glass of wine on their twenty-first birthday as a part of the family celebration. And the girls—I can’t remember that I tasted wine, except in Italy, till after I was married. Oliver is only nineteen. If, when he is of age, he is at Oxford, as I hope he may be, or if he were able at home to have his wine in a natural atmosphere, simply and innocently, with gentlemen, I should not wish to deprive him of what I was brought up to regard as a proper element of social festivity.”

“Bravo!” cried Willys.

“But, alas,” she concluded, “all that is gone now. And it’s all so furtive and mean that I have a horrid feeling. And one hears so many hateful stories about the secret

drinking of mere boys and girls, at school and at their parties, treating one another in their cars by the roadside,—and the consequences of it,—that it's odious, just odious. And I—I just sigh a bit for the age of innocence, and bid it all adieu."

"Admirable speech!" cried the novelist, as the Caribbean attendant refilled his glasses. "Beautiful speech: full of sweet reasonableness—all but the conclusion. But why adieu? Why turn down the empty glass? You fill me with lyrical melancholy. 'Too quick despairer, wherefore wilt thou go?' You look too steadily on the small dark side of the question. There is a soul of goodness in things evil. Watch and wait! I maintain that the prohibitionists builded better than they knew: they have driven drinking out of the barroom and are bringing it back to the home, where it belongs, and where as Burke says—doesn't he?—it loses all its evil by losing all its grossness, or something like that. You and His Excellency are performing a service to posterity by preserving through this destructive period the purity of a fine old tradition."

III
HIS EXCELLENCY ON ECONOMIC NECESSITY

I turned to Oliver. "Oliver," I said, "you have been shielded by your wife. Now Willys is apologizing for you. Really, you know, this won't do. You will have to come into the open and speak for yourself. When I go home, my friends will expect me to give them some intelligent account of what is going on here beneath the surface of things. We sit out there among the cornfields with our radio sets and listen to Washington uttering austere words about enforcing the law, and the next morning we read in the papers that there has been a party under the shadow of the Capitol, and that there is no one to see that the law is enforced, because all the responsible people are busy putting away their private stocks. Slanderous, no doubt. But in the ethical sense, how—actually—do you get away with it? Janus, explain yourself."

"Oh, very well, Calpurnia," said Oliver, "yours to command, remembering only that, as Judge Black informs me, what a man entrusts to the wife of his bosom 'in the sweet confidences of the midnight hour' she is not permitted to bring into court against him. But shall I explain myself as a friend of the government, or as the master of my private life? As an ornamental pillar of the administration, or as the captain of my own soul? Which shall it be?"

"Both, by all means!" Willys exclaimed. "First one and then the other. First the marble bust and then the man. First the friend of the aspiring people and then the friend of the downtrodden artist. Discuss your public betrayal of your own class and then your private loyalty to the good old cause. But tell us first why you passed the Eighteenth Amendment. I can't write my next chapter of *Senator Jones* till I have an authentic hunch, the *vraie vérité*, about the fashion in which you and the Professor and the Puritans and the Mid-West and the Anti-Saloon League—in short the Anglo-Saxon minority—downed the great hearty Teutonic, Celtic, Italic, Slavic, Hebraic majority, the glad, gay, sinful, eating-and-drinking majority, and put it over on us."

"My dear man," said His Excellency in his quietly impressive diplomatic manner, "don't tell me that you accept that fable. You call yourself a realist! Neither the Anti-Saloon League nor the Puritans nor the Professor nor I had any more to do with passing the Eighteenth Amendment than a butterfly on a steam-roller has to do with building the Lincoln highway, or than a catfish in the Mississippi has to do with irrigating the rice-fields of Louisiana."

His Excellency held the point by pausing to light a cigarette.

"Well, we are waiting," someone prompted, after duly respecting his technique.

"*Mes enfants*," he continued, and then blew a ring of white smoke spinning towards the tip of one of the candles, where it hung for a moment like a nimbus and then dissolved upward. "My children, let me disclose to you the fundamental axiom of political philosophy—not the orthodox but the esoteric philosophy. Distrust the press and ignore the palaver of the man in the street. The press tells you what it thinks will

be popular. The last man in the street tells you what he has heard said by the next to the last man in the street. I tell you this: You may scold yourself red in the face; you may bleed yourself white; you may shout yourself blue with pietistic, reformatory, and patriotic fervor; nothing of any importance, of any public consequence, is ever accomplished in this world except by Necessity—by a succession of linked necessities."

"The theory isn't entirely novel, Excellency," I said. "And now the application."

"The necessity which put through the Volstead Act was the war; the necessity behind that was the sky-vaulting of wages; the necessity behind that was maximum production; the necessity behind that was a workman sober seven days in the week; the necessity behind that I could make concrete to you by naming the hundred leading corporations of the country that were in the belly of the wooden horse, making his feet track, when the Anti-Saloon League rode on his back into Jerusalem—or, if the figure offends you, into Washington."

"The figure seems a little mixed at the best," said Willys, "but call it Jerusalem—whither the tribesmen go up to liquidate the burden of laying taxes on us. As for your chain of necessities, now that the war is over, that chain is falling apart. The workingman sees the Big Brother in the wooden horse, who bullied him into working six days in the week and into doing, according to Union standards, two days' work in one. He doesn't like that. Besides, he knows that his Big Brother's own throat isn't dry, hasn't been dry. The injustice rasps him. He wants his beer again. He wants the 'poor man's club' again. And he has a jolly good right to have them. What do you say to that?"

"Oh, he has rights enough," Oliver assented; "but the poor man's club has passed into the hands of a receiver—a mighty capable one. The poor man's club is now in the hands of his wife. She is in charge now of the Saturday afternoons and evenings. Do you think, when her vote is as good as his, she will let him pour his wages into the sink? Rather not. She has spent them, spent them in advance, for a generation to come."

"Yes," said Cornelia. "Isn't it a pity! Workwomen are the most wasteful creatures. Why, when Margaret—"

"You don't quite get the idea, my dear," Oliver resumed. "As I was saying—in war time, while her old man was sober, with money bulging his pockets and nowhere to go, she made him buy her a house and a Ford and a Victrola and savings stamps and baby bonds. Now she's buying a municipal playground along the line of the old grog-shops and a new schoolhouse and a hospital and a couple of movie theatres and a municipal stadium and a municipal swimming-pool and God Himself alone knows how many hundred thousand miles of the finest and most expensive roads in the world."

"Why, Oliver dear," cried Cornelia, "what do you mean?" I don't know anything more painful than to report the occasional fatuity of a woman whom one almost unreservedly admires. But dear Cornelia has not meditated very deeply on the problems of the working classes. And returning to her point, she insisted: "I'm sure Margaret hasn't bought any swimming pools or hospitals."

"No, my dear," said Oliver calmly, "I doubt if she has. But as I was saying, she has her own ideas of a club—that woman. She is a Progressive. As a big employer in Pittsburgh said to me yesterday, 'She has tasted blood.' She has dug in, and is going to extend her works. Wages won't go down; they'll be higher to-morrow morning. Why? Do you suppose that new outfit of hers is paid for? Rather not. Do you suppose that the business men are going to continue in business and collect their bills? Do you suppose they know what kind of plain people pay their bills and have money to spend? I fancy they do. Well! The Big Brother is still in the wooden horse. Maximum production and high wages till the Judgment Day. And Prohibition! The only ticket on which any party will hold office. That's my forecast—as a servant of the government and a friend of the workingman."

"Heaven help the poor workingman," cried Willys, "and spare us a few noble specimens of the idle rich. But now, Excellency, you must cheer our fainting spirits by explaining your point of view as the master of your private life."

"As the master of my private life," said Oliver promptly, "I deny that I am any such Janus as the Professor here tries to make me out. As a private citizen, I still believe that prohibition cannot be repealed. Within this belief I merely include, as a private citizen, my philosophic certainty that it will never be enforced, except where it is economically necessary. In my case it is not necessary; therefore, it will not be enforced. Its enforcement helps the business of the plain people; it would hinder mine. It adds, on the whole, very greatly to the comfort of their lives. It would detract from mine. The whole case against liquor grew out of the plain people's abuse of it. The whole case of liquor will be improved by my right use of it. There is no 'rasping injustice,' but a beautiful poetic justice in their losing theirs and in my keeping mine. That doesn't express adequately my generosity in lending my hand to riveting the workingman's benefits firmly upon him. Many of the most decorative and not the least substantial pillars of prohibition are men of excellent and experienced palate. The most sincere and the most competent advocates of the cause are the nonconforming prohibitionists. I simply cannot understand the Senator who refers to the Volstead Act as an idiotic measure and a failure. It was absolutely necessary: nothing which is necessary is idiotic. And every economist will tell you that it has been a marvelous economic success. It wonderfully accomplishes what had to be done, and it leaves undone what it ought not to do. And there you are."

"And there *you* are!" retorted Willys, "you and your economic argument. But where are the rest of us? I'm sorry to say that, for economic reasons, I can't follow

you. My bootlegger is devouring my royalties. Therefore, as you would say, I have strong conscientious objections to illicit liquor."

"I had rather overlooked that possibility," said Oliver. "But lean on me—at least till you have finished *Senator Jones*."

"Thank you," said Willys, "I'll do so. But seriously speaking—"

"Forgive me!" Cornelia interposed, with a delightful wave of her hand flagging the onrush of the novelist's volubility. "Before Mr. Willys begins to speak seriously, suppose we adjourn to the library. You remember that Oliver is likely to lose his temper if I keep him too long at the table fiddling with cigarettes."

IV
VERNON WILLYS ON BACCHIC ECSTASY

I have never had leisure to examine the books in the library which range from floor to ceiling. Sargent's portrait of Cornelia at twenty-five hangs above the fireplace. When we had relaxed in Oliver's wonderful library chairs before a real log fire, and had been equipped with an ambassadorial type of cigar, which the elder Carib lighted for us, and had been fortified by the highest potency of a private stock of real Java coffee, we men, at least, were in a position to contemplate the approaching midnight with equanimity. As soon as this change of base had been fully effected, Cornelia, who seldom loses the connection of things, irradiated the novelist with her most hospitable smile. (I sometimes think my feeling for her is pure intellectual respect for her skill in keeping a good topic alive and not letting conversation die out in small talk.) She smiled and said:—

"Mr. Willys, you were just about to speak seriously, when I interrupted. Please speak seriously, Mr. Willys. We are all most anxious to have you."

"Oh, my point of view, you mean?" said Willys. I admired his ability to find it again so quickly. "Speaking seriously, I can't—for more or less obvious reasons—take as calmly as His Excellency does the poor man's loss of pleasures. I appeal from the tyranny of our recent moral legislation to my constitutional guaranties of liberty and the right to pursue my happiness where I can find it. I agree with the Senator that the whole business is idiotic. It is idiotic impertinence to dictate what I shall eat and drink at my own table, or what I shall brew in my own cellar."

"If you had a cellar?" suggested Cornelia, rather spitefully reminding us of Willys's arrangements to leave his house in New Jersey to his wife, and his wife to his house. But, as I have said, she is firm on such points.

"Spare the wormwood, Cornelia darling," Oliver blandly interceded. "But, Willys, if you have a better remedy for our present discontents than mine, don't conceal it from the country. Everyone is clamoring for it. Only be sure it is a remedy. Be sure it rests firmly on the necessities of the situation. There is no use in talking of anything else."

"I'll tell you my remedy," said Willys, "when I get done telling you my troubles. I object to governmental regulation of my diet. But I object even more to governmental corruption of my conscience. God knows I need what little I've got left, and I'd like to keep it pure. I protest against the creation of crime by Act of Congress. My conscience tells me that moderate drinking is not a crime, but one of the few certain solaces in this chaotic world."

"I had always fancied," said Cornelia, "that those who find drink a 'certain solace' are seldom very moderate."

But the cork, so to speak, was out of Willys's bottle. He flowed on unchecked.

"I protest against the legislative destruction of old customs which every civilized nation under heaven but ours respects. Your Excellency has seen the vintage in Greece, Italy, France, Germany—Persia, too, haven't you, not to speak of our Gulf Islands? Consider merely the picturesqueness of it! The romance of it! Blood of the grape! Bottled sunshine! We had a bit of it ourselves, here and there—in the green vineyards of northern California, wild grapes on the Sangamon, moonshine in the Kentucky mountains, mint-julep on the old Southern plantations. Even the cocktail, you know, our own national contribution, had begun to be humanized and to have its tender local associations, as every club of distinction modified its ingredients and christened it with some lovely name: The Chrysanthemum, The Chrysostom, The Golden Girl, and so forth. Doesn't it really stir your imagination a little?"

"Yes, yes," said Oliver, first smacking his lips and then pursing them with mock severity. "Yes, we grant you all that. But what is the necessity of it? We are talking of necessities, not of sentiments. We, we Midlanders—the Professor and myself—want to know what necessity requires the tolerance of a mere beverage which is so liable to become a beastly nuisance."

"Exactly so," I said.

"I'll tell you the necessity," replied Willys. "And I'll tell you, too, that it goes far deeper than your economic theory. I return to the Saturday nights of the workingman. You know, I know, everyone with two grains of sense knows, that there is something desirous in the inside of a man which even hard roads and baby bonds don't satisfy. That something is a primitive and profound need of our elemental nature for excitement and every now and then for something like intoxication. Why, my wife says,—excuse me, a lady with whom I was formerly acquainted used to say,—'No woman can get along on less than a thrill a day,' of one sort or another. It's rooted in the human organism—this hunger for occasional escape from humdrum. 'Tedium'—what was it you said the other day, Professor? Rather good, you know—'tedium is three fourths of life.' I agree with you there, Professor; only I figure the tedious fraction is larger than that, even for moderately contented and comfortable people. And for the multitude, for the masses, the fraction that is not tedium is almost negligible, when it is not positive pain. But—*but*, in that microscopic fraction there must be a few moments or hours of heightened consciousness, a burst of hilarity, a breath of freedom, a little dream, a little edge of ecstasy—or a man will cut his throat in order to feel that he is alive."

"It is not done among the sort of people we associate with," said Cornelia, whom the argument impressed as rather silly.

"Perhaps not," said Willys, "perhaps not. Perhaps you 'escape' in some other fashion. But I say His Excellency is wrong in making light of the poor man's club. It's his safety valve. Take the poor devil to whom Saturday night has been the only bright spot in a black week. Deny him beer, he drinks whiskey; deny him whiskey, he drinks

vanilla extract; if he can't get vanilla extract, he takes to methyl alcohol; or he falls back on drugs, and takes to theft and burglary, and crimes of violence."

"Aren't you leaning rather heavily, Willys," I said, "on what you allege prohibition has done to the criminal classes? You can't expect repeal of prohibition in behalf of thieves and thugs."

"As for the upper classes," said Willys, "I won't offend our hostess by knowing anything that simply 'isn't done.' But just consider what every one knows: the Capuan character of the New York roof-garden; the Corinthian style of current dancing; nice young girls at petting-parties indistinguishable, actually indistinguishable in costume and paint and manner from courtesans; the high spots that can't be kept out of movies; the chief interest in the novels we're reading and writing; and then the general domestic smash-up that is following prohibition. There are worse things than a liquor license, Professor, and we've got the whole pack of them on our backs by putting in prohibition."

I quoted my favorite passage from King Lear: "We make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars, as if we were villains of necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence, and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on."

"Quite pat, Professor," exclaimed Willys, whose wits are quick enough. "And there is, by George, a divinity in it. I maintain it's the vengeance of Dionysus! We've tried to bind a god, and, by George, he's getting back at us. See what I mean? Have you read Euripides, Excellency?"

"Once on a time," Oliver said, "not lately. Tell us about it."

"A great work—his *Bacchae*. Everybody ought to read it. You see, there's a reformer in Athens, called Pentheus, a straitlaced, stiff-necked Puritan, an out-and-out prohibitionist, a—a regular Mid-Western professor. Well, the young god—Dionysus, you know—comes over into Greece from Asia with his choruses, singing and dancing and swinging the ivy-wreathed thyrsus—and all that beautiful joyous stuff, you know. But this Pentheus makes up his mind that Dionysus is a bad lot, and he locks the god up in the stable—passes a sort of Volstead Act on him, you understand. But he gets out—the god gets out. Of course, he gets out; on the q.t. He escapes into the hills—classical moonshine, classical bootlegging, you see. The women get hold of the stuff and, up there in the hills, begin celebrating 'mysteries'—all on the q.t. Attorney-General Pentheus says this must be stopped—law must be enforced. He sleuths up into the hills to spy them out. But the women, his own mother among them, catch him, and literally pull him to pieces, tear him limb from limb and strew the bloody fragments all over the place. That's the vengeance of Dionysus."

"How perfectly horrid!" exclaimed Cornelia.

"You know the play, Professor," said Willys, of course.

"Oh yes," I replied, as if I had been intimate with it from infancy. As a matter of fact, Oliver's telegraphic reference to Bacchus had prompted me to chuck Gilbert

Murray's little book on Euripides into my traveling bag for train reading. That accident enabled me to sustain my bluff by a bit of critical wisdom. "The play is curious," I said, "coming from Euripides. He passes for a progressive, an intellectual radical. You would have expected him to sympathize with Pentheus, of course. But I notice that Gilbert Murray doesn't accept the old theory that Euripides recanted and went back to the ancestral gods."

"Well," replied Willys, "in that case, I think Gilbert Murray is wrong—who is this Gilbert Murray? I've got the play here—in my overcoat pocket—somebody or other's translation, of course. You take it with you, Professor, when you go. Read it again and tell me if you don't think I'm right."

I had to laugh; and then we both explained how we happened to be reading, or reading about, the *Bacchae*. Then Willys returned to his argument.

"When I read this play, you know, it hit me in the eye that this thing is as old as history. This prohibition idiocy is as old as the race. If drinking could be rooted out, it would have been rooted out long ago. All the arguments against it were cheesy in the days of Noah. It sticks because, as His Excellency and I are pointing out, it is rooted in necessity. You reformers, as you call yourselves, don't know what you are about. You've bit off what can't be chewed. You are attacking religion; and it's dangerous business. You are trying to kill a god, and it can't be done."

"But my dear Mr. Willys," cried Cornelia, "it isn't *our* God. The Church hasn't really defined its position, and of course some of the bishops are very liberal. But don't the dissenters in this country take a very firm stand in favor of prohibition? Most Americans are dissenters, aren't they? If so, then I should think you would call prohibition itself a religious movement."

"It has long been identified with the popular evangelical churches," I said.

"Don't talk to me about the evangelical churches," cried Willys. "The 'uplift' has hit the churches till they are nothing but community-improvement societies, with no more religion in them than the municipal waterworks. There is no more real relation between religion and prohibition than there is between signing the pledge and seeing the Beatific Vision. Wine is as much a part of our traditional religion as it was of the Greek religion. The Jews still drink their Passover wine. Why shouldn't they? What do you make of that passage in the Old Testament about the winecup in the hand of God? What do you make of the wine at the marriage feast in the New Testament? Or the wine in the Holy Grail? Or the sacramental wine, drunk by all the faithful, till the spirit of mystical fellowship evaporatedin the grape-juice of that paradox, the individual communion cup?"

"But it's much more sanitary that way," said Cornelia firmly, "really much nicer. And since everyone knows that it's only a beautiful old form—"

"Oh, you formalists!" Willys ejaculated. "You formalists are the real atheists. Till the days of frank atheism, we wished our friends Godspeed, we pledged their healths, and we launched our ships with a libation of wine. The central act of religious

worship for two thousand years was a kind of sacred intoxication in the blood of the living God. Omit the central act, and religion disappears; and all you've got left is a lot of unedifying bishops wrangling over 'the higher criticism' of fifty years ago. It's the vengeance of the Dionysiac element in Christianity overtaking them. I repeat what I said before—It's just as true of bishops as it is of workingmen: human life can't be sustained without a little edge of ecstasy. If we try it, something will burst. That's my forecast!"

"And your remedial measure—" said Oliver, "your remedy, rooted in the necessities of the situation?"

"Why, moderate drinking, of course," replied the novelist, lapsing into the wide arms of the chair, like one from whom all the virtue has departed. "Teach Americans to drink as the Greeks drink to-day: wine everywhere, no one drunk."

"Not a bad idea," chuckled His Excellency.

"An idea of quite startling originality," I added.

"Our 'dry battery' is crackling with suppressed thunderbolts," said Oliver. "But"—he glanced at his watch—"it lacks only ten minutes of midnight and the dawn of a better era for the world. While the inhabitants of this borough of Manhattan are meditating on their sins of the past year, and signifying repentance by various acts of atonement, it is fitting that we should not let the hour pass without some appropriate ceremony. Professor, you haven't seen my new set of Casanova—a Christmas gift from the wittiest of my French friends. Let me show it to you. Willys admires it immensely."

Willys and I followed our host to his bookshelves, while Cornelia idly turned the pages of the new *American Mercury*. But why go into details? Oliver's edition of the *Mémoires*, handsomely bound in full morocco and locked in a glass case, proved to be the mask of His Excellency's "diplomatic reserve." From the ingredients of two or three "volumes" he compounded something which he told us was known in Washington as the "Gentlemen's Agreement," because it agreed with gentlemen.

As the clock and the bells and the whistles sounded the knell of 1923, Oliver exclaimed, "Why, Cornelia, where's the Professor's buttermilk," and he and Willys clinked glasses, and drank "To the vengeance of Dionysus!"

V
I EXPLAIN THE POSITION OF CÆSAR'S WIVES

"And now," said His Excellency, stroking his silvered brown beard and turning upon me the raillery of his dynamic dark eyes, "it's up to you, Professor. You've been sitting here like one of Uncle Sam's 'observers' at a peace conference—a chiel a-takin' notes, an' sayin' nuthin'. Don't you know that henceforth there shall be no more neutrals? You are our only representative of the great drouthy forward-looking West. Don't you know that the business of a representative is to represent? The wife of my bosom is on the fence—a friendly noncombatant, as is proper to her sex. But Willys and I have got you backed into a corner. I've shown the economic necessity of prohibition. Willys has shown the religious necessity of drink. What is the Mid-West going to do about it? Which way are you going to break? Break, Professor! But stick, as we have done, to the necessities of the case."

"I am as much a necessitarian as you are, Excellency," I said.

"You'd better be," chuckled Oliver. "Cæsar's wives, I suspect, had better be necessitarians."

"But I am as religious as Willys," I added.

"That's very right," said Willys.

"And so," I continued, "I shall take a middle ground."

"I see," said Oliver, "the golden mean, or temperance. Too little temperance is chronic inebriety. Too much temperance is teetotalism. Prohibition may and must be defended as the only known means to insure moderate drinking among the better sort of people. Exactly my position!"

"No, Excellency," I said, "you don't see. Mine is not exactly your position. I take the middle position according to a precept of Pascal: I seize upon both extremes and occupy all the ground between. But my extremes are not yours. The extremes which I have in mind are your economic necessitarianism and Willys's religion—his theory of the necessity of religious excitement. I lay hold of both those positions as firmly as you and Willys; but I reconcile them, instead of making them mutually destructive. Starting from the same premises, I reach a different conclusion."

"Of course," said Oliver, "of course. But what is it?"

"Before I state it," I said, "may I, since I am on the defensive, take a minute to rebut your fallacies and to present, as you and Willys have done, my more intimate personal feeling and private point of view?"

"Oh, yes," murmured Willys, rather sleepily, "that will be very proper."

"It will be good for you, Willys," I said. "I shall not hurt you more than is necessary. And I shall not be half so tedious as I might be if I were not leaving town on the 2.37. Relief is in sight; my taxi will be here at one."

"At one?" said Cornelia. "The children promised to be home by one, or earlier. Oliver, couldn't you all—"

"Why certainly," Oliver said. "Send away your taxi, Professor. When the Infant comes in with the car, we'll drive you to the station, and then I'll take Willys to his hostelry. But go ahead now, Professor, with your personal narrative of the great drouth in the Mojave Desert."

"It's the first forty years without water that's hardest," I said. "After that, one gets on nicely. Do you know that, far from being keen for thisargument, the entire subject bored me terribly, till you and Willys drenched it again in—in reality. Since my student days a generation ago, I have hardly even seen liquor enough of all sorts to float an old-fashioned alumni reunion for a single evening. A resident during the latter half of my life in a bone-dry district, I, like most of my neighbors, view the annual extension of the dry lands with the aloofest academic interest."

"Of course!" said Oliver, smiling, "of course! But you can abridge that; we all know the quality of a professor's interest in any matter of first-rate importance."

"It was not till bootleggers were commonly reported to be as ubiquitous as German spies in wartime," I resumed, "and men began to attribute all the evils of the hour to prohibition, and seriously to argue that the Volstead Act was forcing drunkenness and criminality upon numberless respectable citizens who thitherto had led lives of unblemished virtue—it was not till then that I began to feel a certain curiosity about the facts, and especially about the mental condition of intelligent and responsible people resident in territory which is still subterraneously wet."

"Their mental condition, Professor?" Oliver inquired. "Why, pray, their mental condition?"

"Because I couldn't understand, Excellency," I replied, "how intelligent men like you and Willys, who have lived abroad, could permit yourselves to attribute the sexually hectic flush of recent literature and life in America to the Volstead Act. All these evils, says Willys, followed prohibition, and he wags his head and mutters, 'Vengeance of Dionysus.' Suppose, now, I seize the same absurd *post-hoc-propter-hoc* principles and attribute the virginal chastity of French, Italian, and English fiction and private life to the free use of intoxicating beverages?"

"I smell irony, Professor, somewhere," said Oliver, "but I grant you that Willys's logic slipped a cog there. We'll have to grant you that America dry is no more sex-obsessed than Europe wet."

"And then," I went on, "I was a little troubled by Willys's plea that, with the general decline of drinking in America, something of real poetic beauty is passing out of our lives. I honestly can't feel that he speaks realistically about that. I know the Anacreontic tradition, the literary romance of nut-brown ale and blood-red wine, perhaps as well as Willys does, and in the bookish imagination of youth used myself to revel with those that 'gloried and drank deep.' Used to spout, you know, about 'Bairam, that great hunter,' and the 'sons of Ben' at the Mermaid, and so on. But when I had an opportunity to compare the Bacchic frenzy of an ancient Greek or Persian or Elizabethan, as represented by the poets, with the Bacchic frenzy of an

American citizen howling drunk—I declare, it was one of the major disillusions of my life. The actual beauty of the real thing has come at last to impress me as very nebulous, like the amours of Thomas the Rhymer with the queen of the fairies. The lover is too often left 'alone and palely loitering,' with a crumpled shirt-front, with his hat in the gutter, by a green lamp-post—'where no birds sing.'"

"Oh, green grapes!" stuttered Willys. "What can you make of green grapes! What can you know about it, Professor? On your own showing it's twenty years since—"

"True, Willys," I replied, "true. But the pathos of distance ought to lend a glamour to one's memories. One has, you know, one's memories. Even a Mid-Western professor has his memories; and in the deep interval of twenty years all that is ugly in them should have faded out, should havebeen gathered into the blue mist of oblivion, leaving the soft contours of the Bacchic landscape bathed in pure beauty. I don't find it so. I see—"

I hesitated. In a company like this, it is a bit awkward to talk on the killjoy side of a question. But Oliver rallied me forward.

"Tell us what you see. Professor," he said. "Life or death, give us only reality. Show us the sad pictures in the prohibitionist gallery of disillusion. We'll try to look interested."

"Well," I said, "Willys's praise of this beautiful old custom of getting drunk now and then did press a button in my gallery of memories and light up a few old pictures. They are relevant only because I did have, in my earlier years, about the average American's chance to feel the æsthetic value of this vanishing phase of our popular culture. I see pictures. As Whitman says, 'The shapes arise.'"

"Whitman was a priest of Dionysus," said Willys.

"So was Emerson," I said, "and so, according to my lights, am I. The shapes arise. I see a strayed reveler, with no vine leaves in his hair,—only a shirt, trousers, and suspenders,—lying on his back, and shouting children towing him by a rope attached to his foot, through the main streets of an Arizona town; the reveler grins and plucks feebly at the rope and says, 'Now, boys!' This picture is thirty years old. I see a driveling swaying figure in a crowd at a street corner in Los Angeles, trying to give away the contents of his pocketbook. I see a Vermont farmer in his haymow, surly and maudlin with the unfreezable alcoholic element of frozen apple-cider; he jabs his cow with the tines of his hayfork. Returning from a mountain camp at midnight to a Massachusetts village, I see in the road before me a dim mass reeling through the moonlight and entering a cottage in the outskirts, and two minutes later I hear a woman's voice shrieking, 'Murder! murder! murder!'"

"Yes," yawned His Excellency, "I have always insisted that the peasantry and the proletariat were nasty in their liquor—serves them right to lose it."

"Don't interrupt my vision," I said. "The shapes arise. I see in a New England city a trolley car full of sick college students scrambling for the rear platform—one of

them lies at full length in the passage; he is a little trampled. I see a fellow student regularly soaking his shredded-wheat biscuit in whiskey; he carries his flask to morning chapel. I see another, stepping—without vine leaves—into the open shaft of an elevator; no god bears him up. I see other youths of the better sort in large numbers in a smoke-heavy place of midnight refreshment, after a football victory, treating to hot whiskey weary-looking painted girls in black—Stephen Phillips's 'disillusioned women sipping fire.' I see five professional men on a moral holiday, seriously approaching the task of consuming three quarts of Scotch and Bourbon before morning. I see groggy alumni embracing one another in tears, hugely pleased to be drunk with men to whom they never speak when they are sober. I see derelict artists and novelists and lawyers, quietly slipping away from professional life to settle down in a rustic hermitage to drink themselves to death. I see a group of permanent class-secretaries in secret session, running through the long list of alumni in every college who never report and never turn up; the secretaries know why, but they publish no report."

"Good heavens, Professor," groaned Willys, "His Excellency and I were not born yesterday, and doubtless even our hostess knows there are some casualties. Whiskey isn't buttermilk. Knives have edges, and are dangerous. Everythingthat's good for anything is dangerous. But really now, what is the point of all this?"

"It has a point," I replied; "it has a point at both ends. It bristles with points; and all of them are dangerous to you and your remedy for our discontents—your moderate drinking. The first point is this: that customary drinking in America, whatever it may be in Greece, has been and is, on the whole, not beautiful but ugly, disgusting, and destructive. The second point is this: that customary drinking in America is so inveterately intemperate that your proposal to institute a custom of temperate drinking is really far more visionary and impractical than prohibition. Your remedy is not conceived with an eye to the essential facts in the case."

"And these are—" prompted His Excellency.

"These are," I said, "that Americans of both upper and lower classes are temperamentally hard to stop when they are started. Ninety out of every hundred Americans feel a curious pride in 'seeing the whole show'; in 'going the whole hog'; in 'sticking the thing out'; in 'going the limit'; in 'getting results'; and in 'getting there first.' This temperament shows in their drinking as in everything else. They care nothing for taste or 'bouquet.' They value their liquor in proportion to the quickness of the 'kick.' 'I can let the stuff alone,' they say, 'but when it speaks to me, I want it to speak with some authority.'"

"The first really sensible thing you've said this evening," said the novelist.

I was tempted to mention his perfectly callous consumption of Oliver's choice Spanish wine as a case in point; but I restrained myself and said:—

"A Frenchman sits down at a table on the boulevard with a single small glass of light wine; and sips, and rolls it under his tongue; and sips, and studies a cloud in the

sky; and sips, and holds the glass up to the light; and sips, and looks at the river, and quotes a couple of verses of Ronsard; and sips, and considers what he was doing in April a year ago; and lifts the glass, and puts it down, and counts his change; and so on for half an hour or an hour; while the Yankee traveler at the next table selects a bottle of the most expensive wine on the list, gulps it down like ice-water, and sighs for a good American cocktail. We were born whiskey-drinkers, high and low, men and women."

"I adore wine, but I abominate the taste of whiskey," said Cornelia.

His Excellency relieved me of the obvious duty of saying that her taste in that, as in all things, is exceptional.

"The Professor," he continued, "overdraws it a little; but there is much in what he says. Historically considered, we have, as a people, rather taken to extremes: George III or pure democracy; abolition or a thousand niggers; the book of Genesis or Robert Ingersoll; for better, for worse till death do us part, or Brigham Young and his twenty-eight wives; the town wide-open or the town bone-dry; milk-shake or whiskey neat. It hangs together. You'll have to admit, Willys, that moderate as you and I are, as a people we insist on going in for a kick. It's rooted in what you yourself called the primitive and profound necessities of our national temper."

"It's rooted," said Willys, "in the artificial necessities created by our national puritanism. It's rooted in the artificial necessity of being ashamed to drink at home, and having to live, like a false little Sunday-School god, in the eyes of a sanctified wife and puritanized children."

"Really, Mr. Willys!" Cornelia exclaimed.

"It's the truth," insisted the novelist. "It is rooted in the necessity thrust upon a poor devil by the surrender of public opinion to the prohibition bullies—the necessity of carrying a portable kick in his hip pocket, or, in the old days, of standing up with his foot on the rail and taking it quick and getting out before his neighbor—came in for his."

"No, cynic," I said, "it is rooted in a deeper necessity than that—and a real one, which can't be essentially changed. I mean, that our national custom of whiskey-drinking was rooted, like all bad things,—according to His Excellency,—in the Mid-West, rooted through a thousand miles of the richest corn-land in the world. Do you know that if the Atlantic Ocean were pumped dry and we Mid-Westerners applied our resources to it, we could fill the basin with corn whiskey every year? That is the real reason why a kick-loving people would, in America, always be a whiskey-drinking people. And that is one of the reasons why we Mid-Westerners have maturely decided to feed our corn to hogs."

"A-ha!" cried Oliver. "Striking into your argument at last! Economic theory of morals! My argument! I 'get' you, as you Midlanders say."

"Yes, Excellency," I assented, "you get me very well. As a 'friend of the plain people,' you get me very well. I accept the whole of your economic argument for the

necessity of prohibition. I accept every word that you say on the expensiveness of the reconstructed workman's club, on the expensiveness of his wife's post-bellum tastes, of the long future in which we may expect high wages, of the continued necessity for maximum production. But you hardly scratched the surface of the argument. You have hardly glimpsed the expanding expensiveness which the average life in America is soon going to exhibit. We are headed straight and hard for an era of broad, inclusive, expensive popular culture. The plain people, whom we've been feeding for a hundred years on the skim-milk and fragments of old morality and religion, are developing an appetite for comfort, for health, for knowledge, for recreation, for variegated pleasure, for style, for art, and for beauty, which is the most expensive thing in the world. Prohibition—and the average man knows this, even the moderately intelligent workman knows this—prohibition has its tap root of necessity in the imperative choice of our entire society between 'booze' on the one hand, and, on the other, beauty, art, style, pleasure, knowledge, health, and comfort—which he knows, and you know, are the real tangible substance of modern upper-class religion."

"Oho!" cried Willys. "Getting around to my argument at last. But it doesn't sound much like what I mean by religion."

"Religion!" cried Cornelia. "Why, it isn't religion at all!"

"What is religion, my dear Cornelia?" I asked.

"Why, religion," she replied, "is what the bishops agree are the fundamental teachings of the Church."

"It is not!" I retorted, with the intimate discourtesy and dogmatism of an old friend who is also an old puritan. "My dear Cornelia," I hastened to add, "that is theology—not religion."

"Tell Cornelia," said Oliver,—whom the high Anglican tendencies of his wife rather amuse,—"tell Cornelia, Professor, what religion is."

"Your religion," I responded, "is what you actually believe in, whatever that is. My religion is what I actually believe in, whatever it is. The religion of the average American is what he actually believes in, whatever it is. What do you actually believe in, Cornelia?"

"I believe," she replied firmly, "in the Apostolic Church, in the communion of saints—"

"His Excellency, for example, among them?" suggested Willys, saucily enough.

"Really, Mr. Willys!" said Cornelia. I felt the air cold on my cheek. I doubt if it lowered the temperature of Willys. He merely said, "I am a realist," and lapsed again.

Cornelia repeated, "I believe in the Apostolic Church—," and this time I interrupted.

"The average American," I said, "does not—at least, he does not believe in it with any such fullness of faith as he accords to baseball."

"The tone of this conversation is becoming decidedly distasteful to me," said Cornelia. She picked up a copy of *Vogue* and buried herself in it, pretending to lose all her interest in our discussion.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I too, like Willys, am a realist. I have learned much from the master realists of my time—I mean the salesmen. I have learned, when I wish to make a religious appeal to man, to appeal to him on the basis of the things in which he really believes. If a man's real belief is small and mean, you've got to begin mean and small. If he believes only in his pocketbook, I must appeal to his pocketbook. If he believes in his children, I can appeal to him through his children."

"Excuse me," said Cornelia, rising, "it's nearly time for the children to come home. I will telephone down to the office to have them send away your taxi." When she returned from giving the message at Oliver's desk-telephone, she picked up her *Vogue* again, and seated herself outside our circle, near the tall windows looking on the street. We readjusted our positions by the fire so that our backs should not be turned to her, and I continued:—

"The real business of religion is to reconcile us to our necessities. According to the powerful drive of Oliver's economic argument, the outstanding necessity to which the average American has now got to be reconciled, is prohibition. That is a rather hard selling-proposition. I don't think it can be put over except under pressure of some sustained religious emotion, or as Willys calls it, 'excitement.' Now don't you see how important it is to know what the average American sustains a religious emotion about—what he really does believe in?"

"Yes, that's all right," said His Excellency. "What next?"

"Well," I said, "if the average American registers no emotion about the Apostolic Church, we can't use that in a case like this, can we? We've got to fall back on our really common bonds of union—like our common belief in modern plumbing, health, youth, the athletic life, education, publicity, automobiling."

"Popular elements, anyway," said Willys. "Automobiling as a substitute for which of the Thirty-nine Articles, Professor?" I glanced to see if Cornelia were listening; but she was plucking at a holly wreath in the window and seemed intent on the street.

"It is a vital element of our popular religion," I insisted, "and by no means so absurd a substitute as you suppose. One has got to take together, you see, this whole group of genuine popular beliefs. Next one asks every honest average man if he doesn't agree that these things are what he wants and believes in, and that the group of them expresses what our modern civilization wants and believes in. Then one turns on the average man and says: 'This, sir, is your effective Shorter Catechism; and you've got to junk whiskey as your national drink, because it is just flatly incompatible with the general distribution of the objects of your religion.' That's the way his religion reconciles him to his necessity."

“I had a hunch, Professor,” said Willys, who had long since grown weary of serious argument, “that automobiling and drinking went together.”

“They have hitherto,” I said, “but—”

VI
I DISCUSS THE ETHICS OF AN AUTOMOBILING CIVILIZATION

My speech was cut short at that point by Cornelia at the window, calling out rather sharply:—

"Oliver, why do you suppose the children don't come?" Almost in the same breath she sprang to her feet and, pulling aside the curtain, cried:—

"Oh! Oh! Oliver, what's that?" And an instant later, "Oh! Oh! Oh! How dreadful! Thank God! Thank God! Oh, thank God, it's not the children!"

"Of course not!" soothed Oliver, with his arm about her shoulder. "Of course not. What was it? Tell us about it."

We ourselves had heard, not indistinctly,—the apartment is on the second floor,—the prolonged steady screech of an automobile horn, and, in response to Cornelia's cry, had rushed to her side, expecting, I suppose, to see the fire department clearing its right of way up the avenue.

"Oh, there's been a dreadful accident," cried Cornelia. "That poor little boy—Oh, that poor little boy! They were driving like mad—to the hospital, I suppose. I saw two policemen standing on the running-board of an open car coming up the street, and another sitting on the front seat by the driver. Then, for just an instant, as it flashed into the bright light under the windows, I could see that the policeman in front was holding in his arms a little boy—seven or eight years old—with his head, face upward, hanging over the edge of the car—bright red with blood—absolutely one bright red disc of blood—and streaming. Oh, it was horrible! You have no idea how horrible! And then, as it went past, I could see that there was a woman crumpled over in the rear seat, and an old man trying to hold her up."

"It must have been a shock," Willys offered; and I added something equally helpful, as one does on such occasions.

"Well, my dear," said Oliver, as we returned to the fireplace, "accidents, you know, do happen. Are you calmer now?"

"Yes," said Cornelia, "yes, I guess so. I'm trembling still. You've simply no idea how it shook me."

She sank into a chair, then recovered herself sharply, and said with a smile: "I'm sorry. Forgive me for making such a fuss over it. I'm allright now. I suppose it's horrid to be so selfish—but, oh, Oliver, aren't you glad it wasn't the children? Aren't you?"

"Certainly, my dear!" said Oliver, in such a droll matter-of-fact tone that we all laughed quite spontaneously. "And now shall we talk of something else? Or do you wish me to telephone to the Infant that their mother has been anxiously expecting them for at least five minutes?"

"No, don't telephone," Cornelia protested. "It's really only just after one. I'm sure they will be here in plenty of time for the train. And please don't change the

subject. I heard what you were saying. You were talking about automobiles and automobile accidents. That is what made me so 'jumpy,' I suppose. I'll not be silly any more. What were you going to say about automobiles when I interrupted?"

"It would be hard," I said, "to avoid 'improving the occasion' a little. Heaven knows I didn't get up the accident to illustrate my argument—and there's no reason to suppose that it does illustrate my argument exactly. These people may all have been perfectly sober. But if this thing, just now, had happened in a story, like that, we should have felt that it was contrived and artificial—I don't recall just where I stopped, but what I was about to say was—the gist of it was, that you can make a live argument based on our automobiling civilization, with almost anybody in the United States, because almost everybody in the United States has some sort of vital interest in a car; and so the argument, as we say, comes home to him."

"That is sound enough," said Oliver.

"Yes," I said, "the things that people have in common are the things that hold them together and enable them to act together. Cars are a much more expensive cultural and social amalgam than, say, abstract fraternity, or a belief in the Apostolic Church, or even than an old family Bible. But the fact remains that cars are at present far more widely diffused and almost infinitely more used among our fellow countrymen than any of the older and less expensive amalgams. I doubt whether there is any other subject whatever upon which our people possess so large a fund of common knowledge and experience. Consider: we have fifteen million cars. That means that perhaps one out of every six or seven men, women, children, and babies in this country actually drives a car. That's what I call practical belief in an article of the popular religion. And you see—if you think—that it's the garage and the filling-station that crowd out the saloon, at every few blocks in the city, in every town and village, at every crossroads from Florida to Montana. It's one—just one, mind you—of the expensive new clubs of the plain people, of the average man."

"Yes," said Oliver, "there's something in that."

"There's a good deal in that," I persisted, "both for economic necessitarians like you and me, and for religious enthusiasts like Willys. For Willys, you remember, the essence of religion is a kind of dangerous and exciting Bacchic escape from humdrum into a few hours of heightened consciousness and mystical fellowship—through the national drink. Well, Willys, when the half gods go, the true gods arrive. The national car does everything that *you* ask of the Holy Grail: it provides the average American with an emotional discharge; it provides him with danger, excitement, the intoxication of speed, heightened consciousness, and a mystical sense of fellowship with the owner of both the Rolls-Royce and the Ford roadster; and it provides these things not on Saturday night only but every day in the year. As you will concede, there is a 'kick', the possibility of a kick—especially in our national car—for every day in the year. And there's one more thing about the religion and ritual of the car."

"Oh at least that!" said Oliver. "But what is it, Professor?"

"It's a thing," I said, "that knocks into a cocked hat His Excellency's private argument for privately nullifying the Eighteenth Amendment. Of course His Excellency didn't invent the argument—I mean that hoary old bore about personal liberty and private conscience and so forth. All the 'wet' newspapers pull it out of the Pyramid of Cheops seven times a week. All the 'wet' city newspapers count the German and Italian and Slavic noses in their constituencies and then get off that tedious drip about the 'puritan minority' and its attempt to bully these honest European consciences, which, being European, are free from sanctimonious scruples against befuddling their wits with liquor."

"*Quo me rapis, tui plenum*—where, O Mid-Western Bacchus," cried Oliver, "where dost thou drag me at the tail of thy car? I feel the thong going through my heels and the rope running up to the axle of your Ford. Crank up! Drag on!"

"Why, don't you see, Excellency," I persisted, "that the car hauls the whole argument clean out of the gumbo of 'personal liberty'—clean out of the slough of 'private conscience'? We don't know how this accident out here in the street took place; but in our Mid-Western metropolis we killed some seven hundred people last year with cars, and, according to the papers, there was more than one such accident as this one from drivers who were drunk. With one out of every seven men, women, children, and babies in the United States driving a car at from twenty to forty miles an hour, along crowded streets and thoroughfares from Maine to California, we have simply got to prevent drivers from being drunk. It's in the necessity of the situation. We are all private engineers nowadays. That's what we want. Very well. If we all want to be private engineers, we've got to submit to the same regulations as governed—long since—engineers on the railways. Our job is not less hazardous than theirs, but more so. A railway engineer who drinks is fired by the railroad, and I understand by his own union."

"I'm stiff on that," said His Excellency. "A man who drives his car when he's drunk should be strung up to the nearest telegraph pole."

"Oh no," said Willys, "you're a little hard on him. You can't stop a man drinking because he occasionally drives his car, drunk. Give him a good fine and take away his license. Or, if he is very drunk, put him where he can sober up."

"That wouldn't," I said, "quite straighten things out—would it—for the occupants of the car that went by here?"

"Oh, but Professor, you are so unrealistic," said Willys, as he rose and clapped a hand over his mouth in order to eject a yawn which he could not swallow. "You are hopelessly unrealistic. If a man doesn't drive when he's drunk, now and then, how in the dickens is he going to get home? What time is it?"

"It's half-past one," said Cornelia, who had also risen at the first opportunity. "And there's the telephone. See what it is, Oliver—quickly, quickly! But nothing could have happened to them—my son is such a careful driver.

VII
THE VENGEANCE OF DIONYSUS

Oliver stepped to his desk and removed the receiver. There was an inevitable moment of suspense. Then tossing to us with a smile: "It's the Infant—they're all right," he turned again to the telephone and listened for nearly five minutes, during which he said "yes" several times, "What's that?" once, and concluded with "I'll come immediately."

Then he faced us with a curious smile, meant to be reassuring, and, with that promptitude of thought and action which idle Americans in Europe are understood to exhibit on the outbreak of war, said swiftly and decisively:—

"Oliver has been arrested for speeding. I'll have to go and bail him out. They are letting the girls come home. They will be here any minute. Willys, will you go downstairs to the office and tell them to send a taxi here at once? Professor, you go, too, and meet the girls downstairs. I want to have a word with Cornelia. If Dorothy comes before I join you, keep her there a minute. Yes, put on your coats—we'llnot come back. Willys and I will look after this business; the Professor will go on, to his train."

In the face of a real little emergency Cornelia's nerves never betray her. As soon as Oliver began to give orders, she became the source instead of the recipient of reassurances, as if her only anxiety had been for a gracious leave-taking. She did it extraordinarily well.

The rest of my impressions of that night I shall drastically telescope because this is not a story, but a conversation, and my impressions relate merely to the incident which had intruded with such coincidental force upon the conversation.

I recall that the first moment in which my imagination began to link the talk and events of the evening vividly together was in the elevator, descending to the ground floor, when Willys, casually thrusting his hands into the pockets of his overcoat, and muttering something about His Excellency's being a little fussed, fished out his copy of the *Bacchae*. As I transferred the book to my own coat, somehow association shot a link from the Greek tragedy and its gory scene in the hills to the red face that Cornelia had seen under the city lamps.

While Willys occupied himself with accelerating the arrival of a taxi, I went out on the street and stood on the curb, waiting reflectively enough for the appearance of Dorothy and her girl friend. Five minutes later they were driven up. With the notion that my function was to shut off a "scene" of any sort, I instantly remarked, in the quiet tone of a man who understands all about the situation, that Dorothy's father was explaining the thing to her mother, who was a little agitated, and that he desired them to wait downstairs till he came down. Both girls looked as if they had been crying, but they were calm now, and seemed indisposed to talk to me. When I had drawn them aside out of observation from the office, and saw no hysterical signs, I ventured to ask

why they had been driving so fast. The other girl, whose name I did not catch, said that they had not been driving fast but had skidded. Before I could utter my natural question, Dorothy turned on her young friend, and said:—

"That is not so. You know it is not so." Then she did a queer thing. She asked me if I was leaving town that night, and when I said I was, she slipped from under her fur coat a small, light oblong parcel wrapped in a man's handkerchief, thrust it into my hands, and whispered with singular intensity: "Take it with you, please! Take it away and pitch it—pitch it where no one will ever find it!" I dropped it discreetly into my overcoat pocket. Then Oliver entered from the elevator, questioned Dorothy for a minute, and sent the two girls up to Cornelia.

Oliver, Willys, and I then entered the waiting taxi and drove away. Oliver sat with his back to the driver, facing us two. I itched to ask him why the other girl had told me that their car had skidded, and why Dorothy had denied it. But it seemed a good time to let Oliver speak first. He sat for a few moments in a frowning concentration, almost as if we had not been there. Then he ejaculated, still as if we had not been there, "My God, what a mess! My God, what a mess!" Willys rallied him on making such an ado over a fine. Then Oliver hurled the whole thing between our eyes, just as he himself had got it, standing there so gaily in the library, smiling histrionically back at us from the telephone. The Infant—he still referred to him as "the Infant"— had been arrested on the charge of manslaughter and driving a car while drunk. He wasn't drunk, but he had been drinking a little at the party, asthe other boys had. He had somehow lost control and hit some people, a woman and a little boy, he thought, just a few blocks from home.

Well, that is the gist of the incident.

As I look back now on that trip to the police-station, I am shocked to remember how self-centred we were, all three. I can't recall that it occurred to any one of us to be concerned about the load of broken humanity that had gone, an hour earlier, to the hospital. Our sole concern seemed to be lest a couple of physically uninjured boys should spend a few hours of the night in jail. And just before the taxi stopped at the police-station to let His Excellency and Willys out, I know that I myself was actually wondering about this remote point: how it would affect Cornelia, and whether she would not suffer more in the injury which her son had inflicted upon others than if he had himself been injured. But what I was actually saying was, that I thought young Oliver did not drink; Cornelia seemed so sure of him. Oliver Senior exclaimed "Oh rot!" And then he added:—

"Why, the Infant and the furnace-man made a keg of raisin wine in the basement of our own apartment last Easter. He told me about it just yesterday. I asked him why he hadn't told me at the time, since we two were on the square with each other. He said that he was afraid of setting me a bad example! Oh, the poor little devil! The poor little devil!"

Willys said it was “a damn shame” and they must see what they could do to get the charge of driving while drunk withdrawn and the charge of exceeding the speed limit substituted. Then we shook hands. Oliver and Willys got out, and I went on to the railway station. I hated not to stand by and see the thing through. But Oliver had assured me that I couldn’t really do anything *but* stand by; and as I had a speaking engagement in Ohio on the next day, and my college work began the day after, I surrendered to the necessity of the situation. My holiday was over.

I started westward with little eagerness—with an odd sensation of repletion and fatigue mixed with cerebral excitement. “The starved silkworm,” I muttered to myself, “has had his feast of mulberry leaves.” I was not sleepy and didn’t wish to spend the small hours of the morning tossing in my berth. I went into the empty dressing-room for a smoke. As I hung up my overcoat, I thought of the parcel that Dorothy had entreated me to “pitch—pitch where no one will ever find it.” Poor pathetic, distracted little Dorothy! It was only an empty silver flask, wrapped in her brother’s handkerchief and neatly engraved with his monogram. Poor little distracted Bacchante—apparently it hadn’t occurred to her that the breath of whiskey still strong in the silver flask was doubtless giving even stronger evidence elsewhere.

The thing hurt me, and I put it away. Everything that I tried to think of, however, hurt me. I wanted to escape from too much sensation. But my mind was in that state of fatigue-intoxication in which one seems to be simply an observer of a succession of pictures which form spontaneously there. I was conscious of wishing to reflect consecutively on a certain idea, namely, whether Willys was right in declaring that one can’t kill a god. But the moment that I began to grip the idea, and ask myself whether in the course of history many terrible old gods and dynasties of gods had not utterly passed away under the pressure of that Necessity which encompasses the gods and is stronger than they—pictures began to form: Bacchanalian women dancing in thehills; Willys’s humorous torn limbs of Pentheus strewn “all over the place”; Cornelia’s terrified picture of the gory head hanging over the car; and—the young Bacchus at the police station.

Sometimes one manages to escape from the persecution of such pictures by reading a book. I had nothing available but the copy of the *Bacchae* that Willys had lent me. When I found it impossible to escape from its suggestions, I decided to face them. I read till the gray morning crept into the car and extinguished the lights. The last lines of the tragedy moved me deeply, with a kind of strange solemnity, a haunting beauty.

O the works of the Gods—in manifold wise they reveal them:
Manifold things unhoped-for the Gods to accomplishment bring,
And the things that we looked for, the Gods deign not to fulfill them;
And the paths undiscerned of our eyes, the Gods unseal them.

I looked out at the window. Another day had come. We were thundering through wintry cornfields—a hint of snow on the withered brown stalks. I rose, and passing through the silent sleepers to the deserted observation-car at therear, I went

out on the platform and pitched the empty silver flask as far as I could pitch it into the wind. I seemed to hear from the corn a remembered godlike voice crying: “O celestial Bacchus, drive them mad!”

BOOK FIVE

APPROACHING RELIGION AND OTHER GRAVE MATTERS

I

WE MEET IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

It is not my intention to make public, in any detail, what I know of the means by which His Excellency got young Oliver out of his New Year's scrape in New York. In recording my conversations with Cornelia and her family, I have been animated throughout by a desire to increase popular respect for the members of our upper class as the suitable persons to give tone to the democracy; and this particular incident happens not to be altogether creditable to the ethical sense of His Excellency—if one uses as a criterion the ethical austerity of Jeanie Deans or George Washington of blessed memory. I am not sure that almost any other man in the same circumstances—even a member of our very moral middle-class—would not have strained a point to keep his own son from public punishment and disgrace. I mean only that we all talk about "equality before the law," until we find ourselves in personal need of special privileges; and that when His Excellency's withers were wrung, he took it as a matter of course that he should use his money and his persuasive tongue,his acquaintance with the police captain, his relationship with Judge Black, and his influence with the newspapers to smooth things over. The matter was adjusted out of court and without publicity, chiefly by the prepayment, while the recovery of the principal victim was in doubt, of the moderate sum which disinterested persons estimated the life of an eight-year-old boy of the laboring class to be worth. His Excellency himself wrote to me, in the latter part of March, as I remember, that everything had been "fixed up—*Gott sei Dank*; so that's over."

What immediate effect the accident and the reparation of it had upon the internal harmony of Cornelia's household, I did not know. In the occasional letters which I had received from her early in the year, she expressed considerable anxiety about the health of her son. She said that the accident was preying on his mind and making him nervous and listless about his school work—and perhaps she should have to take him out of school. In one letter, which she asked me to burn, I thought that I detected a hint of bitterness toward Oliver for concealing from her his knowledge that Oliver Junior had been less innocent of the tastes and follies of his age than she had imagined him to be.But in all the years of our acquaintance, both she and her husband had maintained a proud and—I had supposed—happy reticence regarding their more intimate relations; and except in the essentially comic incident, last summer, of Dorothy's bobbed hair, I had never been admitted to so much as a glimpse of anything like a domestic "difference." Being, myself, an old bachelor with perhaps somewhat idealistic notions of family life, it was quite beyond me to conceive that a serious

misfortune, like the automobile accident, could have any other influence than to cement more closely the family unity.

I was even so guileless as to suspect nothing, when, in the middle of April, I received a letter from Cornelia, saying that Oliver had gone to Paris for some months to get material for his war book, *Lying Abroad for One's Country*; that she was taking the children to southern California for an indefinite sojourn; and that she hoped I might visit them when my college work was over—there was something which she wished very much to talk about. I searched through the letter to see if I could discover what it was. To my obtuse perceptions, the point of interest appeared not to be in the main news but in the incidental reference toCornelia's religious bias, contained in the following paragraph:—

"Don't be afraid," she wrote, "of going to southern California in July. The climate is delightfully right, if only one stays near enough to the coast. I have been hoping for years to spend a summer there, but have always had to give it up because my cousin Ethelwyn lives there! Such a pity: she has a charming Spanish house—Spanish with American improvements—in a walnut grove, with a 'kitchen garden' of orange and fig trees, near a little village ten or fifteen miles north of San Diego. But she—I have told you something about her, haven't I?—she is a Theosophist or a Bahaist or one of those dreadful things that Boston Unitarians become infected with when they live long in California. And the people she has around her—well, fond as I am of her, I myself find them impossible; and Oliver always used to say that he would 'rather be d——d to all eternity with Voltaire than spend ten minutes in Heaven with Ethelwyn.' Well, poor dear Ethelwyn has just had a chance to join a pilgrim ship, which is going by way of China and India to visit some 'saint' in—I think—Arabia; and she has offered me the place, together with all the servants, for a year.My sister Alice will go with me for company. We shall fumigate and air the place thoroughly! I have engaged an excellent tutor for the children—a young man from St. Luke's School; and we shall see what can be done to get them back again to their right minds before they go to college in the fall. So do come and help us!"

To anyone acquainted with either Cornelia or California, it should be needless to say that I went. How I went, may interest the curious. Members of the poor-professor class have, as they have frequently explained to the public, many tastes in common with respectable well-to-do-people—tastes which of course they are unable to gratify. But they have one expensive taste, which, with a little craft, they can indulge almost as fully as people with something to live on. I refer to their inclination for running about the country. I shall always remain in the teaching profession because, no matter whither a poor professor wishes to travel, there is always some group of kindly Americans ready to pay his expenses to and from his base, provided he will speak to them on any side of any subject he pleases—loudly and for not more than fifty minutes. There was, in July, a pretty warm educational convention in Los Angeles, designed tokeep the State of California educationally well in the lead of

Massachusetts. I spoke on three successive mornings, expanding an ancient club-paper into a three-day serial by presenting its platitudes more slowly and impressively than club custom permits. However, we are not now concerned with that.

As I left the auditorium platform on the third morning, and, in the anteroom, was receiving my fee, Dorothy and Oliver Junior, bareheaded and browned by southern sunshine, burst in. “Hello!” cried Oliver, “car’s outside. This your dunnage?” Dorothy, on the impulse of the moment, kissed me, which made me think well of myself, and even better of her than ever, for twenty-four hours afterwards. I was wondering how Oliver felt about driving, when Dorothy jumped in and, taking the wheel, sent me to the rear seat with her brother.

We worked our way cautiously out of the congested somnolent city, which expands its amorphous immensity while it sleeps. Then the efficient young pilot whirled us along at high speed over the four- or five-hour trip, through orange groves and highways lined with palms, by sea and sandy waste, through pines and pale-gold grass, past San Juan Capistrano, gorgeous with flowers, across the mesa by the old Mission road, to the outskirts of La Jolla, then, with a sharp turn up a little valley, into a cool sea-freshened wilderness of green walnut trees among which, cream-yellow, flat-roofed, Santo Espiritu emerges, couched against the foothills of Mount Soledad.

II
OLIVER JUNIOR DISCUSSES HIS PARENTS, THEIR RELIGION, AND HIS OWN

I did not see these things which I have just mentioned; I only remembered them vaguely afterward. Almost as soon as we had seated ourselves in the car, we began to talk about a subject which put landscape quite out of my head. Young Oliver, I might say in passing, is a ready talker with something of the startling candor of his father. I should perhaps add that his preparation for college along with his sister, who is two years younger, is due to the irregularity of his preparatory-school work—interrupted by a period of nearly two years' service as His Excellency's private secretary in Europe.

Ruminating on the possible length of my visit at Santo Espiritu, I had remarked, "I suppose your father will come out later in the year."

"I suppose he won't," said Oliver. "I suspect he intends to live in Paris."

"Intends to do what?" I exclaimed.

"To live abroad somewhere. I suppose you know that my father and mother have separated."

"Nonsense, Ollie," Dorothy shouted back over her shoulder. "You know you don't believe that! They always separate in the summer."

"That's true," said her brother. "Dad always had to have a vacation from the family. He always took one whenever, as he used to say to us, 'Your mother is growing too good to be true. I've got to have a rest.' But other summers they have agreed to separate—peaceably—by collusion. This time father went off in a flaming huff. And I don't think my mother is in a mood to ask him back again. Their relations have been severely strained."

"Oliver," I said, "you are your father over again for diabolical badinage. Cut it out, please. Tell me seriously what you are talking about."

"I'm as serious," he replied, "as a great horned owl. Dolly and I have reasoned earnestly with them both. But our parents are hard people to deal with on a rational basis. My mother has principles, you know; and it's no use talking to people with principles. And my father, when he gets in a huff, is as obstinate as a mule."

"Come now," I urged with a little irritation, "is there anything in this, at all? What was the huff about?"

"Well—a huff, you know," instructed the wise youth, "is just the kettle boiling over, after it has been heated a long time. I'm afraid it all goes back to my New Year's scrape; but it goes back of that to other sins of mine—and maybe Dorothy's—that father knew about and she didn't; and it goes back of that to the big quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. Father is on the modern side—at least he wants to be. My mother is all for the good old ways. So, you see, there's a fundamental incompatibility."

"Yes," I said, "I understand all that; but tell me about the huff."

Oliver leaned forward and spoke in his sister's ear. She nodded. Then he said:—

"Well, the fact is that he and mother hadn't been hitting it off at all this spring. Dolly and I both noticed it months ago. We were all more or less strung up; and they got on each other's nerves—noticeably. My mother is—well you know how my mother is, ordinarily."

"Yes, I do," I said; "your mother has the most perfect temper in the world. Go on."

"Ordinarily, yes," testified her son; "but when she gets a thing on her mind, or her conscience, or wherever it is, she never lets it rest. She is thatway. She gets sort of keyed up or wound up or whatever it is, and then she goes off like an alarm clock. When she gets excited, father begins to jest, and he keeps his head for a while. But she sticks at him till he stops jesting; and then he gets more excited than she is; and then—it's all up."

"Well?"

"Well, all spring mother had been dinning at him—"

"Oh, get out!" I exclaimed, "Your mother doesn't 'din.'"

"Oh, doesn't she! Doesn't she! Very well. All spring, mother had been gently speaking to dad at rather frequent intervals about his not backing her up in her ideas for Dolly's and my salvation. Of course you understand that young people of our age are always in danger of heading for the City of Destruction."

"Yes, that's obvious enough," I said.

"Well, one day I overheard them at it—overheard my mother gently reminding my father about me. She said to him: 'I warned you and warned you and warned you, that if you didn't take a father's part and back me up, Oliver would get into trouble; but you just laughed and encouraged him. Now see what you have broughton us.' That subject wasn't very pleasant to any of us in the first place; and my father had got sick of it in the form of cold hash. Dad said: 'Here beginneth the ninety-ninth lesson!' Mother said: 'But you have got to take a father's part.' Dad said: 'As it was in the beginning: I don't want to hear any more about that.' Mother repeated precisely the same thing in different words. He said: 'Look here! I thought we had agreed to let that subject rest.' Mother varied the phrase and presented her thought again. Father exclaimed: 'Don't repeat that! Are you crazy?' Mother instantly replied: 'You never, never, back me up. You never do a father's part. And now see this horrible, horrible thing you have got us into!' Father began to lose his temper; and as soon as he does that, she seems possessed with a desire to see how far she can make him go."

"I don't believe it."

"All right, you needn't. But you wouldn't forget if you had ever heard it. Mother said it again—the same thing identically, only with a little more sting in it. Then dad began to swear; but he always hates himself for a week afterward when he does, so he pulled himself up, and told her to stop or he didn't know what he'd

do. Well, I sat still and counted, and my mother jabbed him in the wound nine times in all by actual count with that identical taunt. Then poor old dad, who had been stalking back and forth like the tiger over in Balboa Park, bolted without a word. He went down to Washington for a couple of days. When he came back, he just quietly announced that he was going to Paris. 'You may say, to work on my book—for an indefinite period.' Mother said in her most impervious manner: 'Very well, then: go.' Father replied,—as frosty as a wedding cake,—'Thank you, I will.' Then they both bowed. It was like a play. Dorothy and I came in from the wings and offered friendly mediation; in vain. Father packed up and went. Dolly and I don't think either of them is quite sensible."

"H-m," I said reflectively, "h-m-m—What is your mother doing now?"

"Why she's done—we've all done—California from Mount Shasta to Tia Juana, specializing on the Missions and the juniper trees from Palestine that the padres planted. But now we're doing religion. We've settled down in Santo Espiritu with Aunt Alice and our tutor,—Dolly and I call him Father Blakewell to hisface and the Holy Father behind his back; he's going to be an Anglican monk, you know,—we've settled down to do religion, mainly, and get ready for college, incidentally. Mother is really 'doing' it; Dolly and I—well, we 'assist,' in the French sense. We study a little, and go to church a lot, and swim in the afternoon, and play mah jongg after dinner; and the Holy Father reads prayers in the morning on week days and twice on Sundays; and Mother is reading Newman's *Idea of a University* aloud, and she goes to early communion, and fasts on saints' days, and is a member of the altar guild—and she is taking in laundry."

"Taking in what?" I ejaculated.

"Taking in laundry. She has consecrated her hands to the Church. She washes the rector's vestments and things. You know she always had a kind of passion for keeping things clean—souls and bodies and so on. So this job just hits her fancy now, and 'fills her life,' you know. When we started for Los Angeles this morning, she was ironing the vestments, and, believe me, when I saw her bending over the ironing-board, she looked so perfectly blissful that I—I pitied her. It seems kind of daffy to me."

Though the painter was satirical, the picture, to my fond imagination, was delightful. I saw her—herself all in white—bending her golden head over the snowy linen, her hands moving smoothly; it would be a very special iron, silver perhaps. She would do it beautifully, adorably. I should be reminded of some early Italian saint; and all the æsthetic Christianity in me would enjoy a kind of Pre-Raphaelite resurrection.

"H-m," I repeated helplessly. I hadn't the faintest notion how to treat the idea with any profit to a young fellow of Oliver's age and point of view. It simply wasn't in his experience, and I didn't see how to put it there. His fondness for his mother, his complete detachment from her religious interests, his absolute incomprehension of her

position appalled me. One can reason with an earnest young intellectual rebel, occasionally to some effect. But an amused young seraph in Oliver's state, contemplating his mother with kindly compassion from his pinnacle of intellectual certitude and religious inexperience—one can't even draw such a person to the portals of argument.

"I hope," I said, "you and Dorothy are behaving yourselves at home, as well as you know how."

"Oh yes," he replied, "we are being good,aren't we, Dolly? Wait till you hear us after dinner discussing with the Holy Father about the existence of angels, and the Apostolic Succession, and the priority of Persons in the Blessed Trinity. Dorothy and I got together and decided it was up to us to mortify our sinful flesh by holding our tongues this summer. Even father used to do that, most of the time, so far as religion is concerned; and it was harder for him than it is for us."

"How was that?"

"Oh, father, you know, doesn't believe in anything. He calls himself an 'old Voltairean,' and he reads Herbert Spencer and Nietzsche and Henry Adams. But he really doesn't believe in anything but chaos and the 'struggle for survival' and the 'degradation of energy.' We believe in plenty of things."

"Do you really!" I exclaimed, genuinely delighted. "That's good. Tell me what they are."

"Well, in religious matters we agree with father as little as with mother. He is always talking about 'jungle ethics' and 'the law of survival.' He thinks he is the only realist. But that is old stuff, and it doesn't sound good to us. We don't fall for the cave-man line of aristocracy that Dreiser and Mencken and Lawrence and those fellows are trying to bring in."

"Where do you get your line?"

"Oh, out of books and talk and out of the air; some of it we think out ourselves, and a little of it we get from Hoover and Lane and what father calls the 'Western roughneck crowd.' Since January, we're teetotalers; and father, of course, is only a prohibitionist. Then we're sick of war—we don't think it's sensible; and we're sick of supermen; and we're sick of belonging to the 'privileged class.' We believe in the real square deal and good sportsmanship and common sense and common decency and health and hygiene and science and beauty—and a lot of things like that. Of course, father and mother pretend that they do, too—in a way. But we are radical democrats, I guess; and father and mother are both snobs."

Dorothy, listening to as much as she could catch from the steering wheel, called back:—

"Father isn't a snob—mother is."

"You are wrong, Dolly," said her brother; "they are both snobs. We are really interested in the People. Neither of them cares two straws for anyone outside their own class—except, of course, that father has a personal friend here andthere among

the cab-drivers and the police. He thinks that he is being like Roosevelt. And that he's like Roosevelt when he goes around among the 'peasantry,' as he calls them, whooping it up for big families, and patting them on the back for having eighteen little morons, and making it a crime to tell them how to get a chance to live like civilized beings."

"I've heard your father say very sensible things about that. You do him an injustice."

"No, I don't. We believe in telling people the truth; and in finding out first what it is. Father believes in making a Federal statute first, to keep the peasantry peasants, and busy propagating mill-hands and soldiers; and then in violating it himself as he sees fit. Father is personally interested in the truth, and he really knows a lot about it; but he wouldn't dream of telling it to anyone but an intimate friend—he doesn't think it's safe. And mother doesn't think it's decent. Besides, she hates like sin to admit even to herself the existence of any fact that doesn't fit into her vision of a 'nice' world. She likes to sit on the shore and order the sea back. She really enjoys deceiving herself, and is pretty good at it. Father isn't like that."

"So you side with him there?"

"Yes, except that father is a sort of double personality. Privately, you know, dad is a cynical cosmopolitan, and he thinks America is a hick joint except for half a dozen of his own cronies. But you know how he stands in public, wrapping the flag around him, and doing the big bowwow at Japan and Mexico, and standing pat with the pattest element of the Grand Old Party's patriots. Dad knows who cuts the melons. Dolly and I are sick of that. We want to come in on the ground floor and on the square. We want to have careers that we have made for ourselves, and not be handed something on a silver plate by one of father's friends. Then we are sort of sick of this 'cosmopolitan' stuff—which means only that you hate your own things and can't even smoke American tobacco unless it's been imported from England. We've got so tired of it that we are going to organize a new party with Flapjacks and Ham and Eggs for our slogan. The fact is, we get a sort of kick out of our feeling for the country—as our own, you know, a poor thing but our own; and we want to try and see if we can't be honest-to-goodness Americans before we die—if you understand what I mean."

"Bully for you!" I cried, in spite of my neutral intentions.

"But mother," he continued, "has been reading the Barsetshire novels all summer, and Trollope always makes her homesick for the 'old home.' She is crazy anyway over the English cathedral towns, and hopes to be buried in one when she dies. And just now she's got a kind of Golden-Age complex. She hopes to save me from the democracy by sending me to one of the old Eastern colleges, where I shall associate with 'young gentlemen' from Anglicized prep schools, and live in a Gothic dormitory, and be tutored by Rhodes scholars, who are mostly nuts. Dorothy and I have decided that we want to go to a State University and get acquainted with the Plain People. And so mother carries us off to Santo Espiritu and segregates us with the

Holy Father, in the hope that the seeds of grace and exclusiveness will take root in our unsanctified hearts."

"She is 'getting results'!" I said to myself; and then aloud: "But don't you like California?"

"Sure!" he said, with his father's flickering smile. "Who wouldn't? It's just the place to go to Heaven in. But it doesn't seem like our own old Yankee Land out here. No one hurries. No one but the Japanese farmer does a lick ofwork—that's why they hate him so. The white people just sit around and wait for the Mid-Westerners to bring them their savings. Unless you are descended from a Forty-niner, no one cares who your grandfather was, or whether you are a Mormon or a Christian Scientist or a Presbyterian or a Seventh Day Adventist. All the best things in the State are public property and are out of doors where everyone can get at them. There isn't any 'Main Street.' A few of them keep office hours, but they picnic going to and fro; and up in San Francisco the business men take a sea trip every morning and evening. It all feels like a late afternoon in Arcadia."

I glanced at my watch and remarked that we must be near Santo Espiritu.

"Yes," said Oliver; "but let me tell you a little more about the Native Sons. They are having an influence on Dolly's and my religious beliefs. They get so much harmless pleasure out of the world. They sit around eating apricots and looking at the poppy fields most of the time. When they are very energetic, they get up and recite their own verses, or they go into the redwoods and stage a forest play, or, maybe, do some Greek dances in the almost-altogether, interpreting the Song of Solomon or the Eden story. When they weary of improving their minds with art and song, the whole white population goes camping up around Tahoe or hiking in the high Sierras or motoring down to Coronado or sword-fishing over at Catalina. Easterners and Midlanders who come here late in life easily get mixed up, they tell me, in these new religions, the way Cousin Ethelwyn did; but the real Californian doesn't take interest in the future life. The present is good enough for him. 'Wasn't it too bad,' I heard one of them say, 'that Saint John didn't see Santa Barbara before he wrote *Revelation*'! And Dorothy and I have sort of reasoned it out that the so-called decay of religion in our generation is rather complimentary to Providence, indicating that we haven't got such a grouch as some of those old boys had against the land that the Lord gave to our fathers."

"That is a discussible point of view," I admitted.

"But here," he said, "is where we turn off from the main road. It's only a little way now. You'll see, before you've been five minutes in Santo Espiritu, what a colony of aliens we are, practising our austerities in our august retreat on the outskirts of these careless worldlings."

III
TABLE TALK AT SANTO ESPIRITU

I had been having a curiously disquieting premonition—primarily the result of Oliver's indiscreet betrayal of intimate family matters—that Cornelia must have been gravely altered by the shocks and strains of the preceding seven months. She might seem almost a stranger, I thought; and as we plunged into the walnut grove and I caught a glimpse in the distance of the broad yellowish-white front of the villa, and knew that in a few seconds I should see her, I was conscious of a caved-in feeling, together with a tension of the nerves, such as Enoch Arden experienced on turning into his garden walk after a protracted absence. But so far as the eye could see, there was absolutely nothing in my premonition.

As we drew up before the door of Santo Espiritu, she waved to us from an open window and flew out to meet us, with her incredible, indescribable air of a young girl, and in a certain very simple blue gown, or the replica of a blue gown in which I had remarked last summer that shelooked like a bluebird. Cornelia, as I had known her, had at least three principal moods: her winter mood, in which she was His Excellency's hostess, and the note was a quite mature graciousness; her summer mood, in which she was the children's mother, and the note was high ethical solicitude; and her country walking mood, in which she reverted to the appearance of seventeen, and the note approached caprice. When I saw the blue gown,—maybe it was a 'frock,'—I said to myself, "She is in her country walking-mood!"

She greeted me with bright gayety, untinged, so far as I could perceive, by suppressed feeling. Then she led me through a spacious hall and across a magnificent area of Navajo rugs into a pleasant dusky living-room, where I made the acquaintance of her sister Alice, an agreeably quiet woman with peaceful eyes, and the children's tutor, Mr. Blakewell, a young fellow with extraordinarily courteous manner and easy conversation, but with the ascetic pallor and the faded iris which one associates with "spirituality."

I shall not dwell on these minor figures in the scene. They interested me only as notes of the background in which Cornelia had developed a fourth mood, which was new to me.

As soon as the travelers had removed their dust, we all met for an early dinner. This was served in the suave air under the sky canopy of the patio or inner court—a delightful place, equipped with a fireplace against chilly evenings, and partly tiled and spread with Indian rugs; on three sides there was a narrow strip of lawn fringed with roses and sweet-smelling shrubs; wistaria and myrtle and some flaming-blossomed vine tapestried the walls and rambled over the roof and festooned the wide archway on the west, which opened into a walled garden, green beneath a spraying fountain—the removal of the fountain from the patio to the garden being one of the "American improvements."

“Father” Blakewell murmured a Latin grace upon the repast and, in the course of the meal, quoted us some of the rules of an English Benedictine monastery in which he had sojourned. This, I assume, was less to asperse us with the odor of sanctity than with the elements of Latin, which the young people maintained was an unnecessary burden. “Every man,” said Oliver, “should know American; then, if he feels the need of a ‘second language,’ let him study English.” But the children rather took the lead in the conversation announcing that, in honor of Saint Mary of the Sea, the family had adopted a fish diet, and that they had made a penitential hymn, which they at once proceeded to chant. It ran something like this:—

To-day’s Monday,
To-day’s Monday,
Monday, barracuda,
Tuesday, mackerel,
Wednesday, flounder—

and so forth. The only other scraps of the table talk which I retain are connected with Cornelia’s amused and amusing summary of a letter from Ethelwyn, who had visited her “Arabian saint” and reported that the leader of her party, an ex-Evangelical clergyman from Nebraska, who spoke only English and had never before been outside the United States, had, on being addressed by the saint in Arabic, understood perfectly everything that was said to him.

“My Lord!” Oliver exclaimed,—“I beg your pardon,—By Pollux! I wish I could get up my Vergil that way!” Dorothy said that she didn’t understand why her mother and the rest of them made so much fun of Cousin Ethelwyn: it seemed to her, she said demurely, “very much like Pentecost.” Father Blakewell explained the distinction,but I have forgotten just what it was. I infer that the children were cutting up a little on my account; for Oliver followed his sister with a grave-faced remonstrance against their “bigotry” toward the new mystical Oriental cults: they had something, he said, which people seemed to want; and, for his part, though he didn’t care for the style of their prophets, he thought there was a lot of common-sense in some of the Bahaist notions about world peace and about bringing forward the common ethical basis of all the great first-class religions.

“But Oliver dear,” said Cornelia, “you really wouldn’t care for these Orientals, if you had to associate with them. They are so—well, I suppose some of them may be clean. But for a really well-bred, intelligent woman, like Ethelwyn, to go trailing around the world after an ignorant barefooted Arabian peasant seems to me to be almost disgusting—it’s so—so eccentric.”

“I suppose,” replied her son, “that well-bred Romans of the first century felt very much as you do when Saint Paul, the humpbacked tailor of Tarsus, tried to introduce his Levantine fanaticisms into the Forum.”

“Oliver! That, you know, was very different,”said Cornelia. “Saint Paul was in the central religious tradition of the world: what Newman calls the ‘classical’ religion,

the formative power in what he calls our ‘classical’ Western civilization. It means so much to be central and not eccentric.”

“Was Saint Paul ‘central’ when he appeared in Rome?” asked the incorrigible youth.

“You answer him, Mr. Blakewell,” said Cornelia.

“I think,” said the young man quietly and seriously, “that Saint Paul was central wherever he appeared.”

“I see,” said Oliver.

At the same instant he and Dorothy exchanged winks; and all this arguing abruptly ceased. Then we strolled into the garden, where I was urged to light my cigar. We examined the water lilies under the fountain, and the various exotic plants which Ethelwyn’s gardeners had persuaded to perfume the air. Cornelia put a sprig of heliotrope in my buttonhole, smilingly quoting a line of *The Winter’s Tale* about flowers for my “time of day.” Presently the children, with Father Blakewell and their Aunt Alice, returned to the court, where the mah jongg outfit had been set out in place of the dinner-table and alittle fire of cedar wood had been lighted, more for its social fragrance than from any need of it. Soon we heard a pleasant chatter of “seasons” and “green dragons” and “characters.”

It was a pleasant picture, as we looked in on it through the archway. We stood there together for a moment, her shoulder just brushing my sleeve, and we seemed both to be studying the scene, like—I sentimentalized it long afterward—like a pair of happy parents fondly watching their children at play. We seemed both to be thinking of the same thing; but I know that we were not; for I myself was thinking what a wonderful chatelaine Cornelia was, and what elaborate properties she really required for the adequate staging of her part in life, and what an unutterable fool any poor professor would be who should think that, if he picked up that little exquisite body by my side, he could carry off Cornelia, and make her his own. What I loved in her, I said to myself in a kind of bittersweet paroxysm of realization, was paradoxically *not in her*; it was the charming world which she had the gift of creating around her; and it would require a caravan of elephants to provide her with suitable accessories for the lodging of a single night.

“And now,” said Cornelia, recalling me from my swift revery, “if you don’t mind walking so soon after dinner, I’m going to take you down to the sea—for the sunset.” She glanced at me sidewise and upward from gray eyes which deliciously feigned serious question about the words which her lips were framing: “Do you mind

IV
A SILENCE BY THE SEA

It is a half hour's walk from Santo Espiritu to the sea.

As we went through the gate of the walled garden into the walnut grove, Cornelia patted my arm lightly, like a shy, affectionate, approving child, and said softly: "I'm so glad you came."

"And I."

"But let's not talk about that yet. Let's walk first. I do hope there will be a fine sunset. We have them here so seldom. This evening it looks right."

We walked on swiftly, chatting of nothings; through the trees; a short distance along the Santo Espiritu valley road; then up a steepish path to the tufted gopher-burrowed mesa; and across it and down it through zigzags among the sagebrush and thorny gray shrubs toward the ocean, over which hung a dull gray curtain of cloud. There was nothing bright in the scene but the "bluebird gown" of Cornelia, flitting down the gray-lichened slope ahead of me. But the dull blue expanse of the sea brightened a littleas we crossed a strip of level ground at the foot of the mesa and came to a stand on the edge of a long crescent-shaped bluff. I looked out at the fishing boats anchored a quarter of a mile from shore.

"Look down!" said Cornelia. "This is one of our show places. And you'd better sit down, if you are dizzy at all."

We both sat and peered over the undercut rim of the bluff. Fifty feet below us was the sea, deep, still, emerald green, transparent and quivering with waves of pale green light, down into misty recesses where its depth rendered it opaque. Up through the floating foliage of the seaweed, goldfish were swimming idly, big ones in the grand style, tremendously decorative, and thoroughly conscious, I thought, of the stunning effect of their gold in the green water. I was fascinated by them. I stretched myself flat, face downward, and pulled myself to the rim and studied them. A damnable thought was swimming up to me out of submarine caverns of "the unplumbed salt estranging sea."

At first my thought had no shape. It merely stirred in dark obscurity, like an irritated squid or devilfish. Then it emerged—with a goldenhead, like a mermaid's. I am not ordinarily fanciful or figurative. I dislike fanciful people. But I have somehow got to convey the idea that, as I watched those goldfish, the wires in my mind became crossed and tangled and, for a moment, made some sort of horrid imaginative connection between goldfish and mermaids and the enchantingly girlish figure and golden head of the woman whose gray eyes I felt but could not see, playing over my prostrate body and working some charm at the back of my neck. Cornelia had everything—yes, everything: the virtues and the graces, and a beauty and blitheness which often seemed enough in themselves, they made one so immediately, unmistakably glad to be alive within their radius. But wouldn't she have profited—as

Arnold once remarked of the ladies of the English aristocracy, whom Cornelia admires so much—wouldn't she have profited by "a shade more of soul"? Was there much—inside, under those golden scales? Wasn't she pretty near the surface? And was that her fault or her misadventure?

"Do you find them interesting?" asked Cornelia.

"Yes," I replied, continuing my study.

In spite of her nearly grown children, there was something virginal in Cornelia. Somethingcuriously undeveloped; was it, perhaps, her heart? That would be like a mermaiden. She was no Circe, I mused, guilefully weaving subtle spells. She was an otherwise mature woman who had somehow remained essentially innocent and child-hearted, singing still to herself, in her "secret garden," the songs of seventeen. She herself did not know, she could not know, what strains of richer harmony had been lost to her ears—and to mine, because we had never emerged from the walled garden, had not dared to venture together into the "dark forest" of experience. She herself was an undeveloped theme, a divine fragment of melody, which the winds hummed and the sea sang, and which hovered all days and all nights in the tenebrous deeps of my enchanted heart.

"Look up now," said Cornelia softly.

I wriggled back from the verge of the bluff, and sat up, and looked up.

While I had been lying there in prone contemplation of the goldfish, the awaited sunset had arrived, and with a magnificence of splendor unparalleled in my memory. The sun itself was not visible. But the dull gray curtain, which, as we were descending the mesa, hung from the zenith to the sea, had vanished before the passionateresurgency of light. Overhead, extending from north to south, stretched a vast skyland of royal purple, its lower edge, or shore, tinged with deep rose color, where the waves of light beat against it. Near the "shore" was a bright clear crystalline tract, without any cloud; but elsewhere, farther out in that celestial sea, gleamed, glowed, burned an immense archipelago of golden islands. It looked like Polynesia transfigured with fire and praising God on the Day of Judgment.

It took my breath away. I gazed spellbound, like the spellbound color in the sky, to which Cornelia had called my attention just as it reached its brief period of seeming fixed and changeless and eternal. I turned to her. She was quietly watching my response to her sunset. Our eyes met; and for an instant they clinched. Then her lids drooped, and she said:—

"You were so good to come!"

"So good? So good?" I repeated gropingly. "I don't know whether I am good or not. I am happy that I came. I only know that I am very happy. Is that a sign of goodness, Cornelia?"

"Yes," she said, and her eyes met mine again and held them prisoners, while she went past them looking for something behind them, and I wentpast her eyes, also

in search. We said nothing. The sea was still. There was not a sound from the bare brown land between us and the mesa.

Suddenly, out on the bare brown land, a meadowlark sent up her little bubbling fountain of song—once, twice. Then she was still. We smiled at each other as the echoes of the bird's good-night reverberated through our nerves and died away. Then the silence fell, deeper than before. It was delightful at first. Then it became oppressive, exciting. It clutched at one's heart and made it thud. Or was it something else—something that had stolen up, in the silence, between us?

Cornelia broke the spell. "Did you hear it?" she asked.

"The meadowlark, do you mean?"

"No. Of course you heard that!"

"What else—should I have heard?"

"Well, never mind that just now. I want you to tell me something else. How much—how much did the children tell you?"

"Everything."

"I hoped they would; I hoped they would."

"Then it's true, Cornelia?"

"What is true?"

"That you and Oliver have separated."

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"Oh—that? That is a minor matter."

"Minor? How minor?" I exclaimed in some bewilderment.

"Why, compared with other experiences. I wasn't thinking about Oliver just now. It's a horrid thing to say; but I'm not interested in Oliver just now. We've always been separated—in a sense. And just now, I feel as if he didn't belong to me, nor I to him; as if he were someone that I had known once, and didn't know any more."

"How did it happen, Cornelia?—I don't mean what the children told me. But the rest of it—if you—if you want me to know."

"Yes," she said, "I do want you to know, because—well, I want you to understand. You know that I was not in love with Oliver when I married him. I liked him very much. I do now, in a way. But I married him because he offered me the life that I wanted, then, and that my father and mother thought suitable. And I gave him, at least for a long time, what he wanted—mainly—of a wife: a woman who would look well in public with him, and entertain his friends, and be the mother of his children. When the children were little, we were closer together, for a few years,than we have ever been since. Still, as time went on, of course we accumulated 'things in common'—actual things and experiences and acquaintances; and as many of them—nearly all of them—were nice things and pleasant acquaintances and agreeable experiences, I was not dissatisfied; and I began to believe there wasn't much more to be had from life than just the kind of satisfaction I had found. I believed, or pretended

to believe, what you were saying last summer: that the 'inner life' is of small consequence, and that everything that is precious can be—what did you call it?—'externalized,' 'objectified.' Do you really believe it yourself?"

"I try to keep in mind," I explained, "all that can be said for that theory. It is a kind of compromise, a second-best sort of theory, which many of us have to accept, when we are starving, or when a death takes place in the inner chamber of our lives. That's what our wits are for, isn't it—to help us put up gracefully with what we have to put up with—grace or no grace?"

"But the theory is worthless," cried Cornelia; "it's absolutely worthless, when one is in trouble, in serious trouble! I suppose I have had less of it than anyone I know. As I look over my life beforethis year, it seems like a dream, it has been so easy and so fortunate. But when trouble does come,—illness, death, and that sort of thing,—one has to have inner resources. Oliver has no inner resources. Oliver hates trouble, and illness, and pain; and, whenever he can, he runs away from them. When he is sick himself, he acts like an untrained child. He is terrified and certain that he is going to die; he is really dreadfully afraid of death—his own death, or the death of anyone he is fond of."

"That is interesting," I said. "I didn't suppose that at bottom Oliver took anything seriously."

"He doesn't," said Cornelia, "except *that*—trouble to himself, I mean, and to a few others whom he regards as part of himself. As for anyone else, he is always saying, 'It is easy to bear the misfortunes of others.' Generally speaking, he isn't serious about anything. When he isn't in a fit of being pessimistic and panic-stricken about himself, he is just cynical and flippant. He doesn't believe that goodness is worth trying for. He laughs at all the principles which I was taught to regard as elementary. He calls them 'virtues of the bourgeoisie' and 'old maids' morality.' When I protest, Oliver says my humor is 'thin.'Sometimes he says I am 'devoid' of humor. I am not! *Am* I devoid of humor?"

"No, Cornelia," I said. "But humor isn't your strong point. In your lighter vein, you incline rather toward a gleeful gayety. Humor, in Oliver, results from a skepticism regarding first principles; and you are not skeptical about first principles."

"I am not, thank goodness. I do like to see people gay and light-hearted and happy, and I like to be that way myself. But I am light-hearted and gay only because I am clear about what you call 'first principles.' Life hasn't any dignity, any decorum, or justification, even, if one is constantly questioning or mocking at everything there is in it that is axiomatic. Oliver has no axioms except derisive ones that he makes for himself. To me, it isn't endurable to be with people who refuse to take serious things seriously. When one jests at serious things, one not merely destroys their seriousness, but one takes all the joy out of the joyous and light-hearted things—all the bloom from life."

"I suspect," I said, "there is a good deal of truth in that."

"And so," she continued, "when this dreadfulaccident happened on New Year's Eve, I didn't expect *much* of Oliver; but I hoped, hoped, hoped it might make him a little bit serious about the children. It did nothing for him, nothing. All he wanted was to put it out of his mind as quickly as possible. Whenever I tried to talk with him about anything serious—or anything sacred to me—he simply wasn't there."

"Many men," I said, "are shy about those things, and feel more deeply than they can bear to confess. Perhaps you don't quite understand Oliver." I put in this plea, partly because I thought it was true, and partly because I was curious to know the depth of Cornelia's disillusionment and estrangement.

"Often and often I remembered, this spring," she replied evasively, "how my sweet old grandmother used to talk to me, when I was a girl. 'Marry a man, my dear,' she would say, 'who will help you not to be afraid of death or anything that can happen to you in this world.' And then again she would say, 'Marry a man, my dear, who has a sacred place in his own heart; and then everything that is precious to you will be safe; and you will not be alone in the great joys and the great sorrows that life has in store for us all.' And Iwould ask, 'Was grandfather like that?' And the dear old soul would draw in her breath and say: 'Oh, *he* was high! He was *high*!' with an accent of adoration which made one feel that he must have been a beautiful spirit. 'I would have gone anywhere with him,' she always concluded when we talked about him, 'and I would have suffered anything with him gladly, because we were together in a place where nothing in this world could really touch our companionship.'"

"That is very lovely," I murmured. "That was such a union as one reads about in old romances, and dreams about, when one is young."

"And so," she continued, "when I was first married, I hoped that it might be like that with us. Oliver seemed to me then so strong and self-sufficient, and his personality seemed so various and flexible and so full of color and high spirits and charm. I thought that, when I knew him better, and had been taken into the innermost intimacy, I should find there a still serene place, such as my grandmother had described, with a kind of mysterious joy and rapture at the heart of it, because we should be united in loving together everything that had been almost too lovely and too sacred to speak of to anyone else. Thatis what I thought marriage was, the inner meaning of it—and not a barren desolate place, full of darkness and cynicism and the terror of death. Do you understand, a little, why I felt so alone, so helplessly alone early in the year? and why I wanted to talk with you this summer, and why I have just *had* to tell you these things to-night?"

She put out her hand toward mine; mine closed over it.

"Cornelia," I said, "I loved you twenty years ago, and—in some ways I haven't changed much since. Have you?"

"Please—please don't!" she said, gently withdrawing her hand.

"And when the silence fell around us here, a little while ago," I continued, "and the meadowlark sang in it, and then it was still again, didn't you feel, didn't you

know—Cornelia, tell me what the silence said to you, when it grew too intense, and you broke it."

She lifted her head and seemed for a moment to be following the flight of a sea gull winging into the darkening West. Then she turned her cool gray eyes upon mine, steadily, steadily, till their flame burnt under my ribs and close about my heart.

"The silence said to me," she replied, "that I had been a very foolish woman—Isn't it strange how suddenly the color is leaving the sky! You can almost see it fade while you watch it—like the glow in an electric toaster, when you turn it off." She rose, as if talk were over, and we were going home. I followed, bent on a continuation.

"Yes," I said, "I suppose the sun over there behind the cloud bank has just sunk under the sea. You would think someone had pressed a button. It reminds me of the *Ancient Mariner*—'At one stride, came the dark.' But how have you been a 'foolish' woman?"

"Perhaps," said Cornelia, "we had better return the long way, by the road. The dusk does come fast, and I don't like the short cut over the mesa then. There are sometimes snakes."

"I don't mind snakes," I replied: "they add a spice. But if the way by the road is longer, I am for the road."

V
CORNELIA'S RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

After we had started toward Santo Espiritu, a delicate rosy afterglow succeeded the abrupt gray interval, but our backs were now turned upon it, and we only glanced at it now and then over our shoulders.

"The silence said to me," Cornelia resumed, "that I had been a very foolish woman, because I had expected of a human companionship an intimacy of sympathy and understanding which only a Divine companionship can give."

"How do you know, Cornelia? How do you know?"

"I don't know how it is with you—with men. Maybe a man can fill his life so full of the things he is doing—with work and ambition and the improvement of the world—that he doesn't have to have an 'inner life.' For me, for most women, there has to be an inner life. We live so much in our personal relations; and I, at any rate, can't live my life unless I feel every day, all the time, my relation to something that is peaceful and beautiful and good, and that doesn't change."

"Have you really found it? Are you really happy—Bluebird?"

"I like to have you call me Bluebird," she said. "I feel like one. I have never been so happy in my life as in this last month, since I have learned to keep the mood, the adorable mood, of the silence here by the sea."

"I guess," I said, "I caught a bit of it—your mood, to-night. But I know it won't stay. It's a mood that I can't count on. And I don't have it—often. Perhaps my setting isn't right. At any rate I don't seem able to establish the relations which you think are so important. So, with me, the mood is a lovely fugitive."

"I have it all the time," said Cornelia eagerly, "since I began to fill, really fill, my life with the things I love, and to leave the rest out: walking alone on the mesa; and being with the children; and talking with my sister and Mr. Blakewell (he's really a most unusual young man); and going to church in the dear little church here in La Jolla. I always liked to go to church: it made everything seem so certain and peaceful afterward—till Oliver and the children began to argue. And I liked religious music and the little choir boys in white and the lovely procession of themsinging. It put me into a frame of mind that I knew was right, because it harmonized perfectly with all the things that I wanted to have in my mind, and it shut the other things out."

"When did this new mood begin?" I questioned.

"It wasn't," she said, "a very serious matter with me till this last spring. Other things than attending church had put me in the same frame of mind. But after our trouble began and especially after Oliver—went to Paris, and I felt so desperately isolated, isolated inside, I mean, I went to church very regularly, and I began to attend early communion, and often to go into the cathedral and sit for half an hour when no one was there. And by and by the horrible sense of isolation left me. Something came in and filled up the vacancy. I couldn't see just why—nothing had changed; and in the

first month after he left, I hadn't heard a word from Oliver except by his postcards to the children, but somehow I didn't care whether I heard from Oliver or not; and somehow I was growing happy, positively happy, and clear and certain in my own mind. The 'mood' stayed. I know why, now; and now—you may think I am foolish, but now—I have only to go into our little church and touchanything there, or just sit still alone in the dusk, to feel ecstatically happy."

"How do you explain it? I have never felt ecstatically happy, in those circumstances."

"I can't tell you," she replied. "The children want me to discuss it. I don't want to discuss it. The beautiful thing about it is that it doesn't have to be discussed. All I know is, that in this fixed and blessed mood of mine I feel my life in relation with what hasn't changed and won't change; and if one can only keep one's life there, what actually becomes of one, in ordinary personal relations, doesn't matter, simply doesn't matter."

"I felt that way once," I said, "or something like that. It was when I had ended a labor of ten years, and had written the last page of my *Roman Epigraphy*. I didn't care for several days whether I lived or died, after that. 'All the best of me,' I said to myself, 'is there, exempted from time, safe in that book.' But I found that I couldn't get my table companions at the University Club to take that view. When it was published, not a soul of them read a word of my 'best.' They seemed still to prefer the worst of me, the mere empty shell from which the oyster had been extracted—and canned."

Cornelia looked at me gravely. "You are jesting," she said. "Please don't. I am in earnest. When I step into our little church, I say to myself, 'Cornelia, what you really care for is safe here. You don't need to worry because other people don't agree with you, and don't value what you value.' And then the final responsibility, for everything, seems to slip so blissfully from my shoulders, and to be accepted by a Power so much stronger and surer than myself, that sometimes I envy the white-cowled peaceful-faced women who have gone into the Church and closed the door behind them."

"You would have to leave Dorothy and Oliver behind you," I said, "if you did that; and they are worth saving, too. My dear Cornelia, I am afraid this 'blessed mood' is a little dangerous to you, and very dangerous to the rest of us. Don't wrap it too closely around you. I knew a woman once who never gave her husband any occasion for anxiety about any other man, but she fell so much in love with her clothes that she became inaccessible to him, and finally made him frantically jealous—jealous of her necklace and of her gowns."

"Do you think I am really like that?"

"No, but that is a parable. You are becoming very fond of Church clothes. You are so 'dressy' that you have become a little inaccessible to the children, already—to their sympathies, I mean. They are essentially so informal, you see. They don't

understand you. I do understand you—somewhat. And what I understand chills me a little. I understand you to be on the verge of losing heart over the problem of reconciling yourself to the undistinguished mixture of life. Your son would say that you have the 'retreat-complex.'"

"I'm sure I don't know what he would mean by that. What do you mean by it?"

"I understand you to be on the point of making a mystical surrender of your personality—on the verge of lapsing into a beatific mood which will separate you still farther from Oliver—and from me, and will ensure you against the pain and bitterness of reality. If you should surrender and really become spiritual, like Father Blakewell, or saintly, like no one of my acquaintance, you would drop out and desert us. If you became saintly, which Heaven forbid, your character would melt away like a little cloud in the moonlight. Your charm for me, for all of us, is in the definiteness of your personality, the clearness and distinction of yourindividuality. You are piquant and delightful because you are a challenge, a whiff of the wind, a counterblast. You have the 'fighting edge.'"

Cornelia smiled as if she were recalling something sweet. "I am a little tired just now," she said, "of fighting. There are pleasanter things than that. I want to surrender and repent."

"Repent of what?"

"Oh, of being worldly, you might call it."

"Please postpone that till you are ninety. You mustn't repent yet. Do you know, I used to think scornfully of deathbed repentances, but now I think I was wrong; a deathbed is the place for repentance; and the Catholic Church and the Gospels are right in welcoming those who turn up at the eleventh hour. In fact, I half suspect—if we were put into the world to see what we can make of it, and I don't know any other good reason for our presence here—I half suspect that God Himself admires most those who 'surrender' to Him only with their last breath."

"How perfectly shocking!" exclaimed Cornelia. "What can you mean by such absurdity?"

"By surrendering, I mean throwing yourself on God before you have exhausted every possibility of making sense out of the world for yourself.Perhaps there will come a time for you and for me when there will be wisdom in such a surrender. But for young people, and for people at our time of life, too, there is, there ought to be, something repugnant in losing one's intellectual grip, in letting go, in abandoning the effort to find right relations with realities, in giving up the attempt to make a little cosmos out of the chaotic materials at hand. To my mind, it is the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost to desert that fine heartbreaking task in order to take refuge in a mood of mystical 'peace without victory,' peace without substance. Your son would smile at my use of religious phraseology and 'mythological bunk.' But he would understand, I think,—with a little explanation, anyway,—precisely what I mean by not surrendering to God till the last breath."

“The children’s ideas of religion at present,” said Cornelia, “are simply heathenish. Will you believe what Oliver said to Mr. Blakewell the other day? He said something like this: ‘God? What is God? God is a short word composed of three sounds: a guttural, a vowel, and a dental!’”

“It’s true, isn’t it?” I ventured.

“I’m sure I don’t know. But just imagine a boy of nineteen saying a thing like that! No wondereveryone is dismayed at the disappearance of religion among the younger generation.”

“My dear Cornelia,” I replied, “religion itself, as some one has said, is one of the most lovable things in the world. The word sometimes becomes obnoxious and is avoided by young people; the thing itself doesn’t disappear. The word ‘God’ is a symbol for one of the great ideas in the world. The word sometimes acquires obnoxious associations; but young people do not lose interest in the idea which it represents. God and religion are, and always will be, popular, in the best sense, because they come, offering to do for young and old what old and young desire above everything else should be done for them.”

“Well? What horrid paradox next?”

“Not a paradox at all. What everyone desires most in the world is: to be taken seriously. That is what I want, from you. That is what Oliver wants, from his parents. That is what His Excellency wants, perhaps from someone else. That is what you wanted, I suppose, from His Excellency. But none of us, apparently, is quite willing to perform that great boon for any of the others. God and religion take all men and every man seriously. That is why they have such power of conferringhappiness that they could never fall into disrespect if the guttural and vowel and dental which we have just referred to did not, when uttered together, often call into consciousness the obnoxious things which we don’t believe in instead of the desirable things which we do believe in.”

“I don’t quite understand you.”

“Why, I mean that at various times of life and at various ages of the world people get together all the things that they believe necessary and desirable, and then they say that God, meaning all the beneficent power anywhere in the universe, is interested in preserving and forwarding those things.”

“Yes; and then what?”

“And then people acquire a fresh stock of information—about geology and hygiene and economics and slavery and intoxication and sovereignty and war and Asiatics and international relations and so forth. In consequence, they are forced gradually to revise, in the light of their new information, their lists of things which are necessary and desirable. Your son Oliver is busy at just that task now; and he needs a lot of help and sympathy.”

“Oliver is really a dear boy,” said Cornelia, “and I am helping him all I can. We are readingNewman; and I hope by and by to get him to listen to a little of the *Imitation*, at breakfast.”

“You would do much better,” I said, “to read with him John Morley’s *Compromise* or Santayana’s *Poetry and Religion*. Nothing will so decisively check, just now, the growth in him of a religious sense as any attempt to persuade him that the beneficent powers in the universe are pleased with ascetic withdrawals from life, or that they countenance authoritative limitations on the use of the intelligence.”

“But isn’t Morley an atheist?” inquired Cornelia.

I ignored the question, for it was growing dark between the walls of the little valley, and we were entering the deeper darkness of the trees on the domain of Santo Espiritu.

“Oliver,” I said, “is reaching out into the real world, into his own times, and gathering up here and there, without very much high counsel, everything that, as he puts it, sounds good to him. That is going to be the substance of his religion; that will be what he believes in. Whether this collection of his beliefs will acquire for him the compulsion and animating power, the ‘psychological efficacy’ of the religions which possess a greathistory and a great poetry—that will depend on his imagination and on his susceptibility to high and noble emotions. At present he strikes me as a fairly cool-tempered and slightly cocky young positivist, unconscious that he is building an altar, certainly expecting no fire from heaven to light his sacrifice—rather disdainful, indeed, of all cults which profess that they have come down out of the skies.”

“But why, why,” cried Cornelia, “does he disdain what comes down out of the skies? That, for me, is the indispensable essence of religion. That is what makes the difference between a house and a church. Till it comes, there can be nothing sacramental. And unless the sacramental element enters, there is nothing really binding and obligatory and final in all this miscellaneous collection of beliefs. And everything gets so ‘messy’ and so confused. And everyone picks and chooses, and does just what he pleases. I don’t wish to pick and choose—not about the really great things, I mean; I want those things decided.”

We had been strolling slowly up through the deep night of the walnut grove along the path which ends at the gate in the walled garden. The darkness, which had made us almost invisible, hadbrought us physically nearer together. Cornelia seldom takes anyone’s arm; she likes to be free when she walks. But, in the obscurity, our swinging hands occasionally brushed at our sides, with an effect—a mutual effect, I believe—of merely instinctive or “animal” sympathy, which, in me, was instantly heightened into a kind of aching tenderness. At the same time I was conscious that our minds—what we call our minds—had been moving at a widening distance. And now shafts of light from the windows of Santo Espiritu cut across the path, and as we neared the gate, we stepped into the soft radiant glow of the place, and the color in the bluebird gown lived again. We hesitated, then stopped, and a momentary silence fell

on us once more. I pulled the crushed and wilted heliotrope from my buttonhole, and inhaled the faint fragrance, meant for my "time of day." Then I said, with my ultimate effort:—

"Cornelia, when one goes out at the church door, one enters the universe. The only blessed mood that I know comes when I feel that all the universe is holy. And a sacrament, as I understand it, makes not merely the difference between a house and a church; it makes also the difference between a house and a home. When the world is before one,where to choose, as it is for every one of us since Adam's day, don't we have to pick and choose—even about the 'really great things'? Like, for example, how we are going to spend what remains, at our time of life, of our poor little hungry human lives?"

"No," Cornelia replied. "No; for me, there is no choice at all about those things. Everything is perfectly clear to me now. I am going to spend mine with Oliver. The reason why Oliver and I rasped so upon one another last spring was that we were too near together, with no point of contact but our miserable nerves. I have been learning this summer how to 'carry on' with Oliver. When we are together again in the fall, I shall not live with him, any more than I have for years. I shall live in my blessed mood—in my secret garden. And I shall be happy again, perfectly happy."

"And I?"

"You are an old dear!" she said. "A very dear old dear! Come now, let's go in." She seized my hand gayly, like a child, and opened the gate, and led me through the walled garden, damp with the spraying fountain, into the bright colorful patio, fragrant with the cedar-wood fire. The mah jongg game was still in progress but Father Blakewelland Cornelia's sister relinquished their places and withdrew. We played for an hour with the children. Cornelia, who sat opposite me, drew all the "honors" and "wooed" with hands full of seasons and dragons, while I steadily failed to complete my sequences and ended the evening with four winds, one of each kind, on my hands.

When we broke up for the night, Cornelia unfolded a plan for my assisting Mr. Blakewell with tutoring the children several hours a day for the next two weeks; and, as a matter of fact, we adhered strictly to the programme.

They gave me a cool bed in the guest-chamber, with a couch, at my discretion, prepared on the flat roof above, to which a staircase inside my room gave access. I chose the bed on the roof. I lay awake there for a long time, studying the constellations and the star clusters of the Milky Way, and recalling how, in the summer before, after the little flurry over the bobbed hair had kindled in my heart a faint flicker of hope, I had gone out at midnight with a strong field-glass, and had lain for hours in the ferns, trying in vain what I had often heard could easily be accomplished—to disjoint and separate the double stars.

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