Waste

BY GRANVILLE BARKER

At Shapters, GEORGE FARRANT'S house in Hertfordshire. Ten o'clock on a Sunday evening in summer.

Facing you at her piano by the window, from which she is protected by a little screen, sits MRS. FARRANT; *a woman of the interesting age, clear-eyed and all her face serene, except for a little pucker of the brows which shows a puzzled mind upon some important matters. To become almost an ideal hostess has been her achievement; and in her own home, as now, this grace is written upon every movement. Her eyes pass over the head of a girl, sitting in a low chair by a little table, with the shaded lamplight falling on her face. This is* LUCY DAVENPORT; *twenty-three, undefeated in anything as yet and so unsoftened. The book on her lap is closed, for she has been listening to the music. It is possibly some German philosopher, whom she reads with a critical appreciation of his shortcomings. On the sofa near her lounges* MRS. O'CONNELL; *a charming woman, if by charming you understand a woman who converts every quality she possesses into a means of attraction, and has no use for any others. On the sofa opposite sits* MISS TREBELL. *In a few years, when her hair is quite grey, she will assume as by right the dignity of an old maid. Between these two in a low armchair is* LADY DAVENPORT. *She has attained to many dignities. Mother and grandmother, she has brought into the world and nourished not merely life but character. A wonderful face she has, full of proud memories and fearless of the future. Behind her, on a sofa between the windows, is* WALTER KENT. *He is just what the average English father would like his son to be. You can see the light shooting out through the windows and mixing with moonshine upon a smooth lawn. On your left is a door. There are many books in the room, hardly any pictures, a statuette perhaps. The owner evidently sets beauty of form before beauty of colour. It is a woman's room and it has a certain delicate austerity. By the time you have observed everything,* MRS. FARRANT *has played Chopin's prelude opus 28, number 20 from beginning to end.*

LADY DAVENPORT. Thank you, my dear Julia.

WALTER KENT. [*Protesting.*] No more?

MRS. FARRANT. I won't play for a moment longer than I feel musical.

MISS TREBELL. Do you think it right, Julia, to finish with that after an hour's Bach?

MRS. FARRANT. I suddenly came over Chopinesque, Fanny; . . what's your objection? [*as she sits by her.*]

FRANCES TREBELL. What . . when Bach has raised me to the heights of unselfishness!

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Grimacing sweetly, her eyes only half lifted.*] Does he? I'm glad that I don't understand him.

FRANCES TREBELL. [*Putting mere prettiness in its place.*] One may prefer Chopin when one is young.

AMY O'CONNELL. And is that a reproach or a compliment?

WALTER KENT. [*Boldly.*] I do.

FRANCES TREBELL. Or a man may . . unless he's a philosopher.

LADY DAVENPORT. [*To the rescue.*] Miss Trebell, you're very hard on mere humanity.

FRANCES TREBELL. [*Completing the reproof.*] That's my wretched training as a schoolmistress, Lady Davenport . . one grew to fear it above all things.

LUCY DAVENPORT. [*Throwing in the monosyllable with sharp youthful enquiry.*] Why?

FRANCES TREBELL. There were no text books on the subject.

MRS. FARRANT. [*Smiling at her friend.*] Yes, Fanny . . I think you escaped to look after your brother only just in time.

FRANCES TREBELL. In another year I might have been head-mistress, which commits you to approve of the system for ever.

LADY DAVENPORT. [*Shaking her wise head.*] I've watched the Education fever take England . . .

FRANCES TREBELL. If I hadn't stopped teaching things I didn't understand . . !

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Not without mischief.*] And what was the effect on the pupils?

LUCY DAVENPORT. I can tell you that.

AMY O'CONNELL. Frances never taught you.

LUCY DAVENPORT. No, I wish she had. But I was at her sort of a school before I went to Newnham. I know.

FRANCES TREBELL. [*Very distastefully.*] Up-to-date, it was described as.

LUCY DAVENPORT. Well, it was like a merry-go-round at top speed. You felt things wouldn't look a bit like that when you came to a standstill.

AMY O'CONNELL. And they don't?

LUCY DAVENPORT. [*With great decision.*] Not a bit.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*In her velvet tone.*] I was taught the whole duty of woman by a parson-uncle who disbelieved in his Church.

WALTER KENT. When a man at Jude's was going to take orders . . .

AMY O'CONNELL. Jude's?

WALTER KENT. At Oxford. The dons went very gingerly with him over bits of science and history.

[*This wakes a fruitful thought in* JULIA FARRANT'S *brain*.]

MRS. FARRANT. Mamma, have you ever discussed so-called anti-Christian science with Lord Charles?

FRANCES TREBELL. . . Cantelupe?

MRS. FARRANT. Yes. It was over appointing a teacher for the schools down here . . he was staying with us. The Vicar's his fervent disciple. However, we were consulted.

LUCY DAVENPORT. Didn't Lord Charles want you to send the boys there till they were ready for Harrow?

MRS. FARRANT. Yes.

FRANCES TREBELL. Quite the last thing in Toryism!

MRS. FARRANT. Mamma made George say we were too *nouveau riche* to risk it.

LADY DAVENPORT. [*As she laughs.*] I couldn't resist that.

MRS. FARRANT. [*Catching something of her subject's dry driving manner.*] Lord Charles takes the superior line and says . . that with his consent the Church may teach the unalterable Truth in scientific language or legendary, whichever is easier understanded of the people.

LADY DAVENPORT. Is it the prospect of Disestablishment suddenly makes him so accommodating?

FRANCES TREBELL. [*With large contempt.*] He needn't be. The majority of people believe the world was made in an English week.

LUCY DAVENPORT. Oh, no!

FRANCES TREBELL. No Bishop dare deny it.

MRS. FARRANT. [*From the heights of experience.*] Dear Lucy, do you seriously think that the English spirit--the nerve that runs down the backbone--is disturbed by new theology . . or new anything?

LADY DAVENPORT. [*Enjoying her epigram.*] What a waste of persecution history shows us!

WALTER KENT *now captures the conversation with a very young politician's fervour*.

WALTER KENT. Once they're disestablished they must make up their minds what they do believe.

LADY DAVENPORT. I presume Lord Charles thinks it'll hand the Church over to him and his . . dare I say 'Sect'?

WALTER KENT. Won't it? He knows what he wants.

MRS. FARRANT. [*Subtly.*] There's the election to come yet.

WALTER KENT. But now both parties are pledged to a bill of some sort.

MRS. FARRANT. Political prophecies have a knack of not coming true; but, d'you know, Cyril Horsham warned me to watch this position developing . . nearly four years ago.

FRANCES TREBELL. Sitting on the opposition bench sharpens the eye-sight.

WALTER KENT. [*Ironically.*] Has he been pleased with the prospect?

MRS. FARRANT. [*With perfect diplomacy.*] If the Church must be disestablished . . better done by its friends than its enemies.

FRANCES TREBELL. Still I don't gather he's pleased with his dear cousin Charles's conduct.

MRS. FARRANT. [*Shrugging.*] Oh, lately, Lord Charles has never concealed his tactics.

FRANCES TREBELL. And that speech at Leeds was the crowning move I suppose; just asking the Nonconformists to bring things to a head?

MRS. FARRANT. [*Judicially.*] I think that was precipitate.

WALTER KENT. [*Giving them* LORD CHARLES'S *oratory*.] Gentlemen, in these latter days of Radical opportunism!--You know, I was there . . sitting next to an old gentleman who shouted "Jesuit."

FRANCES TREBELL. But supposing Mallaby and the Nonconformists hadn't been able to force the Liberals' hand?

MRS. FARRANT. [*Speaking as of inferior beings.*] Why, they were glad of any cry going to the Country!

FRANCES TREBELL. [*As she considers this.*] Yes . . and Lord Charles would still have had as good a chance of forcing Lord Horsham's. It has been clever tactics.

LUCY DAVENPORT. [*Who has been listening, sharp-eyed.*] Contrariwise, he wouldn't have liked a Radical Bill though, would he?

WALTER KENT. [*With aplomb.*] He knew he was safe from that. The government must have dissolved before Christmas anyway . . and the swing of the pendulum's a sure thing.

MRS. FARRANT. [*With her smile.*] It's never a sure thing.

WALTER KENT. Oh, Mrs. Farrant, look how unpopular the Liberals are.

FRANCES TREBELL. What made them bring in Resolutions?

WALTER KENT. [*Overflowing with knowledge of the subject.*] I was told Mallaby insisted on their showing they meant business. I thought

he was being too clever . . and it turns out he was. Tommy Luxmore told me there was a fearful row in the Cabinet about it. But on their last legs, you know, it didn't seem to matter, I suppose. Even then, if Prothero had mustered up an ounce of tact . . I believe they could have pulled them through . .

FRANCES TREBELL. Not the Spoliation one.

WALTER KENT. Well, Mr. Trebell dished that!

FRANCES TREBELL. Henry says his speech didn't turn a vote.

MRS. FARRANT. [*With charming irony.*] How disinterested of him!

WALTER KENT. [*Enthusiastic.*] That speech did if ever a speech did.

FRANCES TREBELL. Is there any record of a speech that ever did? He just carried his own little following with him.

MRS. FARRANT. But the crux of the whole matter is and has always been . . what's to be done with the Church's money.

LUCY DAVENPORT. [*Visualising sovereigns.*] A hundred millions or so . . think of it!

FRANCES TREBELL. There has been from the start a good deal of anti-Nonconformist feeling against applying the money to secular uses.

MRS. FARRANT. [*Deprecating false modesty, on anyone's behalf.*] Oh, of course the speech turned votes . . twenty of them at least.

LUCY DAVENPORT. [*Determined on information.*] Then I was told Lord Horsham had tried to come to an understanding himself with the Nonconformists about Disestablishment--oh--a long time ago . . over the Education Bill.

FRANCES TREBELL. Is that true, Julia?

MRS. FARRANT. How should I know?

FRANCES TREBELL. [*With some mischief.*] You might.

MRS. FARRANT. [*Weighing her words.*] I don't think it would have been altogether wise to make advances. They'd have asked more than a Conservative government could possibly persuade the Church to give up.

WALTER KENT. I don't see that Horsham's much better off now. He only turned the Radicals out on the Spoliation question by the help of Trebell. And so far . . I mean, till this election is over Trebell counts still as one of them, doesn't he, Miss Trebell? Oh . . perhaps he doesn't.

FRANCES TREBELL. He'll tell you he never has counted as one of them.

MRS. FARRANT. No doubt Lord Charles would sooner have done without his help. And that's why I didn't ask the gentle Jesuit this week-end if anyone wants to know.

WALTER KENT. [*Stupent at this lack of party spirit.*] What . . he'd rather have had the Liberals go to the country undefeated!

MRS. FARRANT. [*With finesse.*] The election may bring us back independent of Mr. Trebell and anything he stands for.

WALTER KENT. [*Sharply.*] But you asked Lord Horsham to meet him.

MRS. FARRANT. [*With still more finesse.*] I had my reasons. Votes aren't everything.

LADY DAVENPORT *has been listening with rather a doubtful smile; she now caps the discussion*.

LADY DAVENPORT. I'm relieved to hear you say so, my dear Julia. On the other hand democracy seems to have brought itself to a pretty pass. Here's a measure, which the country as a whole neither demands

nor approves of, will certainly be carried, you tell me, because a minority on each side is determined it shall be . . for totally different reasons.

MRS. FARRANT. [*Shrugging again.*] It isn't our business to prevent popular government looking foolish, Mamma.

LADY DAVENPORT. Is that Tory cynicism or feminine?

At this moment GEORGE FARRANT *comes through the window; a good-natured man of forty-five. He would tell you that he was educated at Eton and Oxford. But the knowledge which saves his life comes from the thrusting upon him of authority and experience; ranging from the management of an estate which he inherited at twenty-four, through the chairmanship of a newspaper syndicate, through a successful marriage, to a minor post in the last Tory cabinet and the prospect of one in the near-coming next. Thanks to his agents, editors, permanent officials, and his own common sense, he always acquits himself creditably. He comes to his wife's side and waits for a pause in the conversation.*

LADY DAVENPORT. I remember Mr. Disraeli once said to me . . Clever women are as dangerous to the State as dynamite.

FRANCES TREBELL. [*Not to be impressed by Disraeli.*] Well, Lady Davenport, if men will leave our intellects lying loose about . .

FARRANT. Blackborough's going, Julia.

MRS. FARRANT. Yes, George.

LADY DAVENPORT. [*Concluding her little apologue to* MISS TREBELL.] Yes, my dear, but power without responsibility isn't good for the character that wields it either.

[*There follows* FARRANT *through the window a man of fifty. He has about him that unmistakeable air of acquired wealth and power which distinguishes many Jews and has therefore come to be regarded as a solely Jewish characteristic. He speaks always with that swift decision which betokens a narrowed view. This is* RUSSELL

BLACKBOROUGH; *manufacturer, politician . . statesman, his own side calls him*.]

BLACKBOROUGH. [*To his hostess.*] If I start now, they tell me, I shall get home before the moon goes down. I'm sorry I must get back to-night. It's been a most delightful week-end.

MRS. FARRANT. [*Gracefully giving him a good-bye hand.*] And a successful one, I hope.

FARRANT. We talked Education for half an hour.

MRS. FARRANT. [*Her eyebrows lifting a shade.*] Education!

FARRANT. Then Trebell went away to work.

BLACKBOROUGH. I've missed the music, I fear.

MRS. FARRANT. But it's been Bach.

BLACKBOROUGH. No Chopin?

MRS. FARRANT. For a minute only.

BLACKBOROUGH. Why don't these new Italian men write things for the piano? Good-night, Lady Davenport.

LADY DAVENPORT. [*As he bows over her hand.*] And what has Education to do with it?

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Non-committal himself.*] Perhaps it was a subject that compromised nobody.

LADY DAVENPORT. Do you think my daughter has been wasting her time and her tact?

FARRANT. [*Clapping him on the shoulder.*] Blackborough's frankly flabbergasted at the publicity of this intrigue.

MRS. FARRANT. Intrigue! Mr. Trebell walked across the House . . actually into your arms.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*With a certain dubious grimness.*] Well . . we've had some very interesting talks since. And his views upon Education are quite . . Utopian. Good-bye, Miss Trebell.

FRANCES TREBELL. Good-bye.

MRS. FARRANT. I wouldn't be so haughty till after the election, if I were you, Mr. Blackborough.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Indifferently.*] Oh, I'm glad he's with us on the Church question . . so far.

MRS. FARRANT. So far as you've made up your minds? The electoral cat will jump soon.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*A little beaten by such polite cynicism.*] Well . . our conservative principles! After all we know what they are. Good-night, Mrs. O'Connell.

AMY O'CONNELL. Good-night.

FARRANT. Your neuralgia better?

AMY O'CONNELL. By fits and starts.

FARRANT. [*Robustly.*] Come and play billiards. Horsham and Maconochie started a game. They can neither of them play. We left them working out a theory of angles on bits of paper.

WALTER KENT. Professor Maconochie lured me on to golf yesterday. He doesn't suffer from theories about that.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*With approval.*] Started life as a caddie.

WALTER KENT. [*Pulling a wry face.*] So he told me after the first hole.

BLACKBOROUGH. What's this, Kent, about Trebell's making you his secretary?

WALTER KENT. He thinks he'll have me.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Almost reprovingly.*] No question of politics?

FARRANT. More intrigue, Blackborough.

WALTER KENT. [*With disarming candour.*] The truth is, you see, I haven't any as yet. I was Socialist at Oxford . . but of course that doesn't count. I think I'd better learn my job under the best man I can find . . and who'll have me.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Gravely.*] What does your father say?

WALTER KENT. Oh, as long as Jack will inherit the property in a Tory spirit! My father thinks it my wild oats.

A Footman has come in.

THE FOOTMAN. Your car is round, sir.

BLACKBOROUGH. Ah! Good-night, Miss Davenport. Good-bye again, Mrs. Farrant . . a charming week-end.

He makes a business-like departure, FARRANT *follows him.*

THE FOOTMAN. A telephone message from Dr. Wedgecroft, ma'am. His thanks; they stopped the express for him at Hitchin and he has reached London quite safely.

MRS. FARRANT. Thank you.

[*The Footman goes out.* MRS. FARRANT *exhales delicately as if the air were a little refined by* BLACKBOROUGH'S *removal.*]

MRS. FARRANT. Mr. Blackborough and his patent turbines and his gas engines and what not are the motive power of our party nowadays, Fanny.

FRANCES TREBELL. Yes, you claim to be steering plutocracy. Do you never wonder if it isn't steering you?

MRS. O'CONNELL, *growing restless, has wandered round the room picking at the books in their cases*.

AMY O'CONNELL. I always like your books, Julia. It's an intellectual distinction to know someone who has read them.

MRS. FARRANT. That's the Communion I choose.

FRANCES TREBELL. Aristocrat . . fastidious aristocrat.

MRS. FARRANT. No, now. Learning's a great leveller.

FRANCES TREBELL. But Julia . . books are quite unreal. D'you think life is a bit like them?

MRS. FARRANT. They bring me into touch with . . Oh, there's nothing more deadening than to be boxed into a set in Society! Speak to a woman outside it . . she doesn't understand your language.

FRANCES TREBELL. And do you think by prattling Hegel with Gilbert Wedgecroft when he comes to physic you--

MRS. FARRANT. [*Joyously.*] Excellent physic that is. He never leaves a prescription.

LADY DAVENPORT. Don't you think an aristocracy of brains is the best aristocracy, Miss Trebell?

FRANCES TREBELL. [*With a little more bitterness than the abstraction of the subject demands.*] I'm sure it is just as out of touch with humanity as any other . . more so, perhaps. If I were a country I wouldn't be governed by arid intellects.

MRS. FARRANT. Manners, Frances.

FRANCES TREBELL. I'm one myself and I know. They're either dead or dangerous.

GEORGE FARRANT *comes back and goes straight to* MRS. O'CONNELL.

FARRANT. [*Still robustly.*] Billiards, Mrs. O'Connell.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Declining sweetly.*] I think not.

FARRANT. Billiards, Lucy?

LUCY DAVENPORT. [*As robust as he.*] Yes, Uncle George. You shall mark while Walter gives me twenty-five and I beat him.

WALTER KENT. [*With a none-of-your-impudence air.*] I'll give you ten yards start and race you to the billiard room.

LUCY DAVENPORT. Will you wear my skirt? Oh . . Grandmamma's thinking me vulgar.

LADY DAVENPORT. [*Without prejudice.*] Why, my dear, freedom of limb is worth having . . and perhaps it fits better with freedom of tongue.

FARRANT. [*In the proper avuncular tone.*] I'll play you both . . and I'd race you both if you weren't so disgracefully young.

AMY O'CONNELL *has reached an open window*.

AMY O'CONNELL. I shall go for a walk with my neuralgia.

MRS. FARRANT. Poor thing!

AMY O'CONNELL. The moon's good for it.

LUCY DAVENPORT. Shall you come, Aunt Julia?

MRS. FARRANT. [*In flat protest.*] No, I will not sit up while you play billiards.

MRS. O'CONNELL *goes out through the one window, stands for a moment, wistfully romantic, gazing at the moon, then disappears*. FARRANT *and* WALTER KENT *are standing at the other, looking across the lawn*.

FARRANT. Horsham still arguing with Maconochie. They're got to Botany now.

WALTER KENT. Demonstrating something with a . . what's that thing?

WALTER *goes out*.

FARRANT. [*With a throw of his head towards the distant* HORSHAM.] He was so bored with our politics . . having to give his opinion too. We could just hear your piano.

And he follows WALTER.

MRS. FARRANT. Take Amy O'Connell that lace thing, will you, Lucy?

LUCY DAVENPORT. [*Her tone expressing quite wonderfully her sentiments towards the owner.*] Don't you think she'd sooner catch cold?

She catches it up and follows the two men; then after looking round impatiently, swings off in the direction MRS. O'CONNELL *took. The three women now left together are at their ease.*

FRANCES TREBELL. Did you expect Mr. Blackborough to get on well with Henry?

MRS. FARRANT. He has become a millionaire by appreciating clever men when he met them.

LADY DAVENPORT. Yes, Julia, but his political conscience is comparatively new-born.

MRS. FARRANT. Well, Mamma, can we do without Mr. Trebell?

LADY DAVENPORT. Everyone seems to think you'll come back with something of a majority.

MRS. FARRANT. [*A little impatient.*] What's the good of that? The Bill can't be brought into the Lords . . and who's going to take Disestablishment through the Commons for us? Not Eustace Fowler . . not Mr. Blackborough . . not Lord Charles . . not George!

LADY DAVENPORT. [*Warningly.*] Not all your brilliance as a hostess will keep Mr. Trebell in a Tory Cabinet.

MRS. FARRANT. [*With wilful avoidance of the point.*] Cyril Horsham is only too glad.

LADY DAVENPORT. Because you tell him he ought to be.

FRANCES TREBELL. [*Coming to the rescue.*] There is this. Henry has never exactly called himself a Liberal. He really is elected independently.

MRS. FARRANT. I wonder will all the garden-cities become pocket-boroughs.

FRANCES TREBELL. I think he has made a mistake.

MRS. FARRANT. It makes things easier now . . his having kept his freedom.

FRANCES TREBELL. I think it's a mistake to stand outside a system. There's an inhumanity in that amount of detachment . .

MRS. FARRANT. [*Brilliantly.*] I think a statesman may be a little inhuman.

LADY DAVENPORT. [*With keenness.*] Do you mean superhuman? It's not the same thing, you know.

MRS. FARRANT. I know.

LADY DAVENPORT. Most people don't know.

MRS. FARRANT. [*Proceeding with her cynicism.*] Humanity achieves . . what? Housekeeping and children.

FRANCES TREBELL. As far as a woman's concerned.

MRS. FARRANT. [*A little mockingly.*] Now, Mamma, say that is as far as a woman's concerned.

LADY DAVENPORT. My dear, you know I don't think so.

MRS. FARRANT. We may none of us think so. But there's our position . . bread and butter and a certain satisfaction until . . Oh, Mamma, I wish I were like you . . beyond all the passions of life.

LADY DAVENPORT. [*With great vitality.*] I'm nothing of the sort. It's my egoism's dead . . that's an intimation of mortality.

MRS. FARRANT. I accept the snub. But I wonder what I'm to do with myself for the next thirty years.

FRANCES TREBELL. Help Lord Horsham to govern the country.

JULIA FARRANT *gives a little laugh and takes up the subject this time*.

MRS. FARRANT. Mamma . . how many people, do you think, believe that Cyril's *grande passion* for me takes that form?

LADY DAVENPORT. Everyone who knows Cyril and most people who know you.

MRS. FARRANT. Otherwise I seem to have fulfilled my mission in life. The boys are old enough to go to school. George and I have become happily unconscious of each other.

FRANCES TREBELL. [*With sudden energy of mind.*] Till I was forty I never realised the fact that most women must express themselves through men.

MRS. FARRANT. [*Looking at* FRANCES *a little curiously*.] Didn't your instinct lead you to marry . . or did you fight against it?

FRANCES TREBELL. I don't know. Perhaps I had no vitality to spare.

LADY DAVENPORT. That boy is a long time proposing to Lucy.

This effectually startles the other two from their conversational reverie.

MRS. FARRANT. Walter? I'm not sure that he means to. She means to marry him if he does.

FRANCES TREBELL. Has she told you so?

MRS. FARRANT. No. I judge by her business-like interest in his welfare.

FRANCES TREBELL. He's beginning to feel the responsibility of manhood . . doesn't know whether to be frightened or proud of it.

LADY DAVENPORT. It's a pretty thing to watch young people mating. When they're older and marry from disappointment or deliberate choice, thinking themselves so worldly-wise . .

MRS. FARRANT. [*Back to her politely cynical mood.*] Well . . then at least they don't develop their differences at the same fire-side, regretting the happy time when neither possessed any character at all.

LADY DAVENPORT. [*Giving a final douche of common sense.*] My dear, any two reasonable people ought to be able to live together.

FRANCES TREBELL. Granted three sitting rooms. That'll be the next middle-class political cry . . when women are heard.

MRS. FARRANT. [*Suddenly as practical as her mother.*] Walter's lucky . . Lucy won't stand any nonsense. She'll have him in the Cabinet by the time he's fifty.

LADY DAVENPORT. And are you the power behind your brother, Miss Trebell?

FRANCES TREBELL. [*Gravely.*] He ignores women. I've forced enough good manners on him to disguise the fact decently. His affections are two generations ahead.

MRS. FARRANT. People like him in an odd sort of way.

FRANCES TREBELL. That's just respect for work done . . one can't escape from it.

There is a slight pause in their talk. By some not very devious route MRS. FARRANT'S *mind travels to the next subject.*

MRS. FARRANT. Fanny . . how fond are you of Amy O'Connell?

FRANCES TREBELL. She says we're great friends.

MRS. FARRANT. She says that of me.

FRANCES TREBELL. It's a pity about her husband.

MRS. FARRANT. [*Almost provokingly.*] What about him?

FRANCES TREBELL. It seems to be understood that he treats her badly.

LADY DAVENPORT. [*A little malicious.*] Is there any particular reason he should treat her well?

FRANCES TREBELL. Don't you like her, Lady Davenport?

LADY DAVENPORT. [*Dealing out justice.*] I find her quite charming to look at and talk to . . but why shouldn't Justin O'Connell live in Ireland for all that? I'm going to bed, Julia.

She collects her belongings and gets up.

MRS. FARRANT. I must look in at the billiard room.

FRANCES TREBELL. I won't come, Julia.

MRS. FARRANT. What's your brother working at?

FRANCES TREBELL. I don't know. Something we shan't hear of for a year, perhaps.

MRS. FARRANT. On the Church business, I daresay.

FRANCES TREBELL. Did you hear Lord Horsham at dinner on the lack of dignity in an irreligious state?

MRS. FARRANT. Poor Cyril . . he'll have to find a way round that opinion of his now.

FRANCES TREBELL. Does he like leading his party?

MRS. FARRANT. [*After due consideration.*] It's an intellectual exercise. He's the right man, Fanny. You see it isn't a party in the active sense at all, except now and then when it's captured by someone with an axe to grind.

FRANCES TREBELL. [*Humorously.*] Such as my brother.

MRS. FARRANT. [*As humorous.*] Such as your brother. It expresses the thought of the men who aren't taken in by the claptrap of progress.

FRANCES TREBELL. Sometimes they've a queer way of expressing their love for the people of England.

MRS. FARRANT. But one must use democracy. Wellington wouldn't . . Disraeli did.

LADY DAVENPORT. [*At the door.*] Good-night, Miss Trebell.

FRANCES TREBELL. I'm coming . . it's past eleven.

MRS. FARRANT. [*At the window.*] What a gorgeous night! I'll come in and kiss you, Mamma.

FRANCES *follows* LADY DAVENPORT *and* MRS. FARRANT *starts across the lawn to the billiard room . . An hour later you can see no change in the room except that only one lamp is alight on the table in the middle.* AMY O'CONNELL *and* HENRY TREBELL *walk past one window and stay for a moment in the light of the other. Her wrap is about her shoulders. He stands looking down at her.*

AMY O'CONNELL. There goes the moon . . it's quieter than ever now. [*She comes in.*] Is it very late?

TREBELL. [*As he follows.*] Half-past twelve.

TREBELL *is hard-bitten, brainy, forty-five and very sure of himself. He has a cold keen eye, which rather belies a sensitive mouth; hands which can grip, and a figure that is austere.*

AMY O'CONNELL. I ought to be in bed. I suppose everyone has gone.

TREBELL. Early trains to-morrow. The billiard room lights are out.

AMY O'CONNELL. The walk has just tired me comfortably.

TREBELL. Sit down. [*She sits by the table. He sits by her and says with the air of a certain buyer at a market.*] You're very pretty.

AMY O'CONNELL. As well here as by moonlight? Can't you see any wrinkles?

TREBELL. One or two . . under the eyes. But they give character and bring you nearer my age. Yes, Nature hit on the right curve in making you.

She stretches herself cat-like.

AMY O'CONNELL. Praise is the greatest of luxuries, isn't it, Henry? . . Henry . . [*she caresses the name.*]

TREBELL. Quite right . . Henry.

AMY O'CONNELL. Henry . . Trebell.

TREBELL. Having formally taken possession of my name . .

AMY O'CONNELL. I'll go to bed.

His eyes have never moved from her. Now she breaks the contact and goes towards the door.

TREBELL. I wouldn't . . my spare time for love making is so limited.

She turns back, quite at ease, her eyes challenging him.

AMY O'CONNELL. That's the first offensive thing you've said.

TREBELL. Why offensive?

AMY O'CONNELL. I may flirt. Making love's another matter.

TREBELL. Sit down and explain the difference . . Mrs. O'Connell.

She sits down.

AMY O'CONNELL. Quite so. 'Mrs. O'Connell'. That's the difference.

TREBELL. [*Provokingly.*] But I doubt if I'm interested in the fact that your husband doesn't understand you and that your marriage was a mistake . . and how hard you find it to be strong.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Kindly.*] I'm not quite a fool though you think so on a three months' acquaintance. But tell me this . . what education besides marriage does a woman get?

TREBELL. [*His head lifting quickly.*] Education . .

AMY O'CONNELL. Don't be business-like.

TREBELL. I beg your pardon.

AMY O'CONNELL. Do you think the things you like to have taught in schools are any use to one when one comes to deal with you?

TREBELL. [*After a little scrutiny of her face.*] Well, if marriage is only the means to an end . . what's the end? Not flirtation.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*With an air of self-revelation.*] I don't know. To keep one's place in the world, I suppose, one's self-respect and a sense of humour.

TREBELL. Is that difficult?

AMY O'CONNELL. To get what I want, without paying more than it's worth to me . . ?

TREBELL. Never to be reckless.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*With a side-glance.*] One isn't so often tempted.

TREBELL. In fact . . to flirt with life generally. Now, what made your husband marry you?

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Dealing with the impertinence in her own fashion.*] What would make you marry me? Don't say: Nothing on earth.

TREBELL. [*Speaking apparently of someone else.*] A prolonged fit of idleness might make me marry . . a clever woman. But I've never been idle for more than a week. And I've never met a clever woman . . worth calling a woman.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Bringing their talk back to herself, and fastidiously.*] Justin has all the natural instincts.

TREBELL. He's Roman Catholic, isn't he?

AMY O'CONNELL. So am I . . by profession.

TREBELL. It's a poor religion unless you really believe in it.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Appealing to him.*] If I were to live at Linaskea and have as many children as God sent, I should manage to make Justin pretty miserable! And what would be left of me at all I should like to know?

TREBELL. So Justin lives at Linaskea alone?

AMY O'CONNELL. I'm told now there's a pretty housemaid . . [*she shrugs.*]

TREBELL. Does he drink too?

AMY O'CONNELL. Oh, no. You'd like Justin, I daresay. He's clever. The thirteenth century's what he knows about. He has done a book on its statutes . . has been doing another.

TREBELL. And after an evening's hard work I find you here ready to flirt with.

AMY O'CONNELL. What have you been working at?

TREBELL. A twentieth century statute perhaps. That's not any concern of yours either.

She does not follow his thought.

AMY O'CONNELL. No, I prefer you in your unprofessional moments.

TREBELL. Real flattery. I didn't know I had any.

AMY O'CONNELL. That's why you should flirt with me . . Henry . . to cultivate them. I'm afraid you lack imagination.

TREBELL. One must choose something to lack in this life.

AMY O'CONNELL. Not develop your nature to its utmost capacity.

TREBELL. And then?

AMY O'CONNELL. Well, if that's not an end in itself . . [*With a touch of romantic piety.*] I suppose there's the hereafter.

TREBELL. [*Grimly material.*] What, more developing! I watch people wasting time on themselves with amazement . . I refuse to look forward to wasting eternity.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Shaking her head.*] You are very self-satisfied.

TREBELL. Not more so than any machine that runs smoothly. And I hope not self-conscious.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Rather attractively treating him as a child.*] It would do you good to fall really desperately in love with me . . to give me the power to make you unhappy.

He suddenly becomes very definite.

TREBELL. At twenty-three I engaged myself to be married to a charming and virtuous fool. I broke it off.

AMY O'CONNELL. Did she mind much?

TREBELL. We both minded. But I had ideals of womanhood that I wouldn't sacrifice to any human being. Then I fell in with a woman who seduced me, and for a whole year led me the life of a French novel . . played about with my emotion as I had tortured that other poor girl's brains. Education you'd call it in the one case as I called it in the other. What a waste of time!

AMY O'CONNELL. And what has become of your ideal?

TREBELL. [*Relapsing to his former mood.*] It's no longer a personal matter.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*With coquetry.*] You're not interested in my character?

TREBELL. Oh, yes, I am . . up to kissing point.

She does not shrink, but speaks with just a shade of contempt.

AMY O'CONNELL. You get that far more easily than a woman. That's one of my grudges against men. Why can't women take love-affairs so lightly?

TREBELL. There are reasons. But make a good beginning with this one. Kiss me at once.

He leans towards her. She considers him quite calmly.

AMY O'CONNELL. No.

TREBELL. When will you, then?

AMY O'CONNELL. When I can't help myself . . if that time ever comes.

TREBELL. [*Accepting the postponement in a business-like spirit.*] Well . . I'm an impatient man.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Confessing engagingly.*] I made up my mind to bring you within arms' length of me when we'd met at Lady Percival's. Do you remember? [*His face shows no sign of it.*] It was the day after your speech on the Budget.

TREBELL. Then I remember. But I haven't observed the process.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Subtly.*] Your sister grew to like me very soon. That's all the cunning there has been.

TREBELL. The rest is just mutual attraction?

AMY O'CONNELL. And opportunities.

TREBELL. Such as this.

At the drop of their voices they become conscious of the silent house.

AMY O'CONNELL. Do you really think everyone has gone to bed?

TREBELL. [*Disregardful.*] And what is it makes my pressing attentions endurable . . if one may ask?

AMY O'CONNELL. Some spiritual need or other, I suppose, which makes me risk unhappiness . . in fact, welcome it.

TREBELL. [*With great briskness.*] Your present need is a good shaking . . I seriously mean that. You get to attach importance to these shades of emotion. A slight physical shock would settle them all. That's why I asked you to kiss me just now.

AMY O'CONNELL. You haven't very nice ideas, have you?

TREBELL. There are three facts in life that call up emotion . . Birth, Death, and the Desire for Children. The niceties are shams.

AMY O'CONNELL. Then why do you want to kiss me?

TREBELL. I don't . . seriously. But I shall in a minute just to finish the argument. Too much diplomacy always ends in a fight.

AMY O'CONNELL. And if I don't fight . . it'd be no fun for you, I suppose?

TREBELL. You would get that much good out of me. For it's my point of honour . . to leave nothing I touch as I find it.

He is very close to her.

AMY O'CONNELL. You're frightening me a little . .

TREBELL. Come and look at the stars again. Come along.

AMY O'CONNELL. Give me my wrap . . [*He takes it up, but holds it.*] Well, put it on me. [*He puts it round her, but does not withdraw his arms.*] Be careful, the stars are looking at you.

TREBELL. No, they can't see so far as we can. That's the proper creed.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Softly, almost shyly.*] Henry.

TREBELL. [*Bending closer to her.*] Yes, pretty thing.

AMY O'CONNELL. Is this what you call being in love?

He looks up and listens.

TREBELL. Here's somebody coming.

AMY O'CONNELL. Oh! . .

TREBELL. What does it matter?

AMY O'CONNELL. I'm untidy or something . .

She slips out, for they are close to the window. The FOOTMAN *enters, stops suddenly*.

THE FOOTMAN. I beg your pardon, sir. I thought everyone had gone.

TREBELL. I've just been for a walk. I'll lock up if you like.

THE FOOTMAN. I can easily wait up, sir.

TREBELL. [*At the window.*] I wouldn't. What do you do . . just slide the bolt?

THE FOOTMAN. That's all, sir.

TREBELL. I see. Good-night.

THE FOOTMAN. Good-night, sir.

He goes. TREBELL'S *demeanour suddenly changes, becomes alert, with the alertness of a man doing something in secret. He leans out of the window and whispers.*

TREBELL. Amy!

There is no answer, so he gently steps out. For a moment the room is empty and there is silence. Then AMY *has flown from him into the safety of lights. She is flushed, trembling, but rather ecstatic, and her voice has lost all affectation now.*

AMY O'CONNELL. Oh . . oh . . you shouldn't have kissed me like that!

TREBELL *stands in the window-way; a light in his eyes, and speaks low but commandingly*.

TREBELL. Come here.

Instinctively she moves towards him. They speak in whispers.

AMY O'CONNELL. He was locking up.

TREBELL. I've sent him to bed.

AMY O'CONNELL. He won't go.

TREBELL. Never mind him.

AMY O'CONNELL. We're standing full in the light . . anyone could see us.

TREBELL. [*With fierce egotism.*] Think of me . . not of anyone else. [*He draws her from the window; then does not let her go.*] May I kiss you again?

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Her eyes closed.*] Yes.

He kisses her. She stiffens in his arms; then laughs almost joyously, and is commonplace.

AMY O'CONNELL. Well . . let me get my breath.

TREBELL. [*Letting her stand free.*] Now . . go along.

Obediently she turns to the door, but sinks on the nearest chair.

AMY O'CONNELL. In a minute, I'm a little faint. [*He goes to her quickly.*] No, it's nothing.

TREBELL. Come into the air again. [*Then half seriously.*] I'll race you across the lawn.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Still breathless and a little hysterical.*] Thank you!

TREBELL. Shall I carry you?

AMY O'CONNELL. Don't be silly. [*She recovers her self-possession, gets up and goes to the window, then looks back at him and says very beautifully.*] But the night's beautiful, isn't it?

He has her in his arms again, more firmly this time.

TREBELL. Make it so.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Struggling . . with herself.*] Oh, why do you rouse me like this?

TREBELL. Because I want you.

AMY O'CONNELL. Want me to . . ?

TREBELL. Want you to . . kiss me just once.

AMY O'CONNELL. [*Yielding.*] If I do . . don't let me go mad, will you?

TREBELL. Perhaps. [*He bends over her, her head drops back.*] Now.

AMY O'CONNELL. Yes!

She kisses him on the mouth. Then he would release her, but suddenly she clings again.

Oh . . don't let me go.

TREBELL. [*With fierce pride of possession.*] Not yet.

She is fragile beside him. He lifts her in his arms and carries her out into the darkness.

THE SECOND ACT

TREBELL'S house in Queen Anne Street, London. Eleven o'clock on an October morning.

TREBELL'S *working room is remarkable chiefly for the love of sunlight it evidences in its owner. The walls are white; the window which faces you is bare of all but the necessary curtains. Indeed, lack of draperies testifies also to his horror of dust. There faces you besides a double door; when it is opened another door is seen. When that is opened you discover a writing table, and beyond can discern a book-case filled with heavy volumes--law reports perhaps. The little room beyond is, so to speak, an under-study. Between the two rooms a window, again barely curtained, throws light down the staircase. But in the big room, while the books are many the choice of them is catholic; and the book-cases are low, running along the wall. There is an armchair before the bright fire, which is on your right. There is a sofa. And in the middle of the room is an enormous double writing table piled tidily with much appropriate impedimenta, blue books and pamphlets and with an especial heap of unopened letters and parcels. At the table sits* TREBELL *himself, in good health and spirits, but eyeing askance the work to which he has evidently just returned. His sister looks in on him. She is dressed to go out and has a housekeeping air.*

FRANCES. Are you busy, Henry?

TREBELL. More or less. Come in.

FRANCES. You'll dine at home?

TREBELL. Anyone coming?

FRANCES. Julia Farrant and Lucy have run up to town, I think. I thought of going round and asking them to come in . . but perhaps your young man will be going there. Amy O'Connell said something vague about our going to Charles Street . . but she may be out of town by now.

TREBELL. Well . . I'll be in anyhow.

FRANCES. [*Going to the window as she buttons her gloves.*] Were you on deck early this morning? It must have been lovely.

TREBELL. No, I turned in before we got out of le Havre. I left Kent on deck and found him there at six.

FRANCES. I don't think autumn means to come at all this year . . it'll be winter one morning. September has been like a hive of bees, busy and drowsy. By the way, Cousin Mary has another baby . . a girl.

TREBELL. [*Indifferent to the information.*] That's the fourth.

FRANCES. Fifth. They asked me down for the christening . . but I really couldn't.

TREBELL. September's the month for Tuscany. The car chose to break down one morning just as we were starting North again: so we climbed one of the little hills and sat for a couple of hours, while I composed a fifteenth century electioneering speech to the citizens of Siena.

FRANCES. [*With a half smile.*] Have you a vein of romance for holiday time?

TREBELL. [*Dispersing the suggestion.*] Not at all romantic . . nothing but figures and fiscal questions. That was the hardest commercial civilisation there has been, though you only think of its art and its murders now.

FRANCES. The papers on both sides have been very full of you . . saying you hold the moral balance . . or denying it.

TREBELL. An interviewer caught me at Basle. I offered to discuss the state of the Swiss navy.

FRANCES. Was that before Lord Horsham wrote to you?

TREBELL. Yes, his letter came to Innsbruck. He "expressed" it somehow. Why . . it isn't known that he will definitely ask me to join?

FRANCES. The Whitehall had a leader before the Elections were well over to say that he must . . but, of course, that was Mr. Farrant.

TREBELL. [*Knowingly.*] Mrs. Farrant. I saw it in Paris . . it just caught me up.

FRANCES. The Times is very shy over the whole question . . has a letter from a fresh bishop every day . . doesn't talk of you very kindly yet.

TREBELL. Tampering with the Establishment, even Cantelupe's way, will be a pill to the real old Tory right to the bitter end.

WALTER KENT *comes in, very fresh and happy-looking. A young man started in life*, TREBELL *hails him*.

TREBELL. Hullo . . you've not been long getting shaved.

KENT. How do you do, Miss Trebell? Lucy turned me out.

FRANCES. My congratulations. I've not seen you since I heard the news.

KENT. [*Glad and unembarrassed.*] Thank you. I do deserve them, don't I? Mrs. Farrant didn't come down . . she left us to breakfast together. But I've a message for you . . her love and she is in town. I went and saw Lord Charles, sir. He will come to you and be here at half past eleven.

TREBELL. Look at these.

He smacks on the back, so to speak, the pile of parcels and letters.

KENT. Oh, lord! . . I'd better start on them.

FRANCES. [*Continuing in her smooth oldmaidish manner.*] Thank you for getting engaged just before you went off with Henry . . it has given me my only news of him, through Lucy and your postcards.

TREBELL. Oh, what about Wedgecroft?

KENT. I think it was he spun up just as I'd been let in.

TREBELL. Oh, well . . [*And he rings at the telephone which is on his table.*]

KENT. [*Confiding in MISS TREBELL.*] We're a common sense couple, aren't we? I offered to ask to stay behind but she . . .

SIMPSON, *the maid, comes in*.

SIMPSON. Dr. Wedgecroft, sir.

WEDGECROFT *is on her heels. If you have an eye for essentials you may tell at once that he is a doctor, but if you only notice externals you will take him for anything else. He is over forty and in perfect health of body and spirit. His enthusiasms are his vitality and he has too many of them ever to lose one. He squeezes* MISS TREBELL'S *hand with an air of fearless affection which is another of his characteristics and not the least loveable*.

WEDGECROFT. How are you?

FRANCES. I'm very well, thanks.

WEDGECROFT. [*To* TREBELL, *as they shake hands*.] You're looking fit.

TREBELL. [*With tremendous emphasis.*] I am!

WEDGECROFT. You've got the motor eye though.

TREBELL. Full of dust?

WEDGECROFT. Look at Kent's. [*He takes* WALTER'S *arm*.] It's a slight but serious contraction of the pupil . . which I charge fifty guineas to cure.

FRANCES. It's the eye of faith in you and your homeopathic doses. Don't you interfere with it.

FRANCES TREBELL, *housekeeper, goes out*. KENT *has seized on the letters and is carrying them to his room*.

KENT. This looks like popularity and the great heart of the people, doesn't it?

WEDGECROFT. Trebell, you're not ill, and I've work to do.

TREBELL. I want ten minutes. Keep anybody out, Kent.

KENT. I'll switch that speaking tube arrangement to my room.

TREBELL, *overflowing with vitality, starts to pace the floor*.

TREBELL. I've seen the last of Pump Court, Gilbert.

WEDGECROFT. The Bar ought to give you a testimonial . . to the man who not only could retire on twenty years' briefs, but =has=.

TREBELL. Fifteen. But I bled the City sharks with a good conscience . . quite freely.

WEDGECROFT. [*With a pretence at grumbling.*] I wish I could retire.

TREBELL. No you don't. Doctoring's a priestcraft . . you've taken vows.

WEDGECROFT. Then why don't you establish =our= church instead of . .

TREBELL. Yes, my friend . . but you're a heretic. I'd have to give the Medical Council power to burn you at the stake.

KENT. [*With the book packages.*] Parcel from the S. P. C. K., sir.

TREBELL. I know . . Disestablishment a crime against God; sermon preached by the Vicar of something Parva in eighteen seventy three. I hope you're aware it's your duty to read all those.

KENT. Suppose they convert me? Lucy wanted to know if she could see you.

TREBELL. [*His eyebrows up.*] Yes, I'll call at Mrs. Farrant's. Oh, wait. Aren't they coming to dinner?

KENT. To-night? No, I think they go back to Shapters by the five o'clock. I told her she might come round about twelve on the chance.

TREBELL. Yes . . if Cantelupe's punctual . . I'd sooner not have too long with him.

KENT. All right, then.

He goes, shutting the door; then you hear the door of his room shut too. The two friends face each other, glad of a talk.

TREBELL. Well?

WEDGECROFT. Well . . you'll never do it.

TREBELL. Yes, I shall.

WEDGECROFT. You can't carry any bill to be a credit to you with the coming Tory cabinet on your back. You know the Government is cursing you with its dying breath.

TREBELL. [*Rubbing his hands.*] Of course. They've been beaten out of the House and in now. I suppose they will meet Parliament.

WEDGECROFT. They must, I think. It's over a month since--

TREBELL. [*His thoughts running quickly.*] There'll only be a nominal majority of sixteen against them. The Labour lot are committed on their side . . and now that the Irish have gone--

WEDGECROFT. But they'll be beaten on the Address first go.

TREBELL. Yes . . Horsham hasn't any doubt of it.

WEDGECROFT. He'll be in office within a week of the King's speech.

TREBELL. [*With another access of energy.*] I'll pull the bill that's in my head through a Horsham cabinet and the House. Then I'll leave them . . they'll go to the country--

WEDGECROFT. You know Percival's pledge about that at Bristol wasn't very definite.

TREBELL. Horsham means to.

WEDGECROFT. [*With friendly contempt.*] Oh, Horsham!

TREBELL. Anyway, it's about Percival I want you. How ill is he?

WEDGECROFT. Not very.

TREBELL. Is he going to die?

WEDGECROFT. Well, I'm attending him.

TREBELL. [*Pinked.*] Yes . . that's a good answer. How does he stomach me in prospect as a colleague, so far?

WEDGECROFT. Sir, professional etiquette forbids me to disclose what a patient may confess in the sweat of his agony.

TREBELL. He'll be Chancellor again and lead the House.

WEDGECROFT. Why not? He only grumbles that he's getting old.

TREBELL. [*Thinking busily again.*] The difficulty is I shall have to stay through one budget with them. He'll have a surplus . . well, it looks like it . . and my only way of agreeing with him will be to collar it.

WEDGECROFT. But . . good heavens! . . you'll have a hundred million or so to give away when you've disendowed.

TREBELL. Not to give away. I'll sell every penny.

WEDGECROFT. [*With an incredulous grin.*] You're not going back to extending old-age pensions after turning the unfortunate Liberals out on it, are you?

TREBELL. No, no . . none of your half crown measures. They can wait to round off their solution of that till they've the courage to make one big bite of it.

WEDGECROFT. We shan't see the day.

TREBELL. [*Lifting the subject off its feet.*] Not if I come out of the cabinet and preach revolution?

WEDGECROFT. Or will they make a Tory of you?

TREBELL. [*Acknowledging that stroke with a return grin.*] It'll be said they have when the bill is out.

WEDGECROFT. It's said so already.

TREBELL. Who knows a radical bill when he sees it!

WEDGECROFT. I'm not pleased you have to be running a tilt against the party system. [*He becomes a little dubious.*] My friend . . it's a nasty windmill. Oh, you've not seen that article in the Nation on Politics and Society . . it's written at Mrs. Farrant and Lady Lurgashall and that set. They hint that the Tories would never have had you if it hadn't been for this bad habit of opposite party men meeting each other.

TREBELL. [*Unimpressed.*] Excellent habit! What we really want in this country is a coalition of all the shibboleths with the rest of us in opposition . . for five years only.

WEDGECROFT. [*Smiling generously.*] Well, it's a sensation to see you become arbiter. The Tories are owning they can't do without you. Percival likes you personally . . Townsend don't matter . . Cantelupe you buy with a price, I suppose . . Farrant you can put in your pocket. I tell you I think the man you may run up against is Blackborough.

TREBELL. No, all he wants is to be let look big . . and to have an idea given him when he's going to make a speech, which isn't often.

WEDGECROFT. Otherwise . . I suppose . . now I may go down to history as having been in your confidence. I'm very glad you've arrived.

TREBELL. [*With great seriousness.*] I've sharpened myself as a weapon to this purpose.

WEDGECROFT. [*Kindly.*] And you're sure of yourself, aren't you?

TREBELL. [*Turning his wrist.*] Try.

WEDGECROFT. [*Slipping his doctor's fingers over the pulse.*] Seventy, I should say.

TREBELL. I promise you it hasn't varied a beat these three big months.

WEDGECROFT. Well, I wish it had. Perfect balance is most easily lost. How do you know you've the power of recovery? . . and it's that gets one up in the morning day by day.

TREBELL. Is it? My brain works steadily on . . hasn't failed me yet. I keep it well fed. [*He breathes deeply.*] But I'm not sure one shouldn't have been away from England for five years instead of five weeks . . to come back to a job like this with a fresh mind. D'you know why really I went back on the Liberals over this question? Not because they wanted the church money for their pensions . . but because all they can see in Disestablishment is destruction. Any fool can destroy! I'm not going to let a power like the Church get loose from the State. A thirteen hundred years' tradition of service . . and all they can think of is to cut it adrift!

WEDGECROFT. I think the Church is moribund.

TREBELL. Oh, yes, of course you do . . you sentimental agnostic anarchist. Nonsense! The supernatural's a bit blown upon . . till we re-discover what it means. But it's not essential. Nor is the Christian doctrine. Put a Jesuit in a corner and shut the door and he'll own that. No . . the tradition of self-sacrifice and fellowship in service for its own sake . . that's the spirit we've to capture and keep.

WEDGECROFT. [*Really struck.*] A secular Church!

TREBELL. [*With reasoning in his tone.*] Well . . why not? Listen here. In drafting an act of Parliament one must alternately imagine oneself God Almighty and the most ignorant prejudiced little blighter who will be affected by what's passed. God says: Let's have done with Heaven and Hell . . it's the Earth that shan't pass away. Why not turn all those theology mongers into doctors or schoolmasters?

WEDGECROFT. As to doctors--

TREBELL. Quite so, you naturally prejudiced blighter. That priestcraft don't need re-inforcing.

WEDGECROFT. It needs recognition.

TREBELL. What! It's the only thing most people believe in. Talk about superstition! However, there's more life in you. Therefore it's to be schoolmasters.

WEDGECROFT. How?

TREBELL. Listen again, young man. In the youth of the world, when priests were the teachers of men . . .

WEDGECROFT. [*Not to be preached at.*] And physicians of men.

TREBELL. Shut up.

WEDGECROFT. If there's any real reform going, I want my profession made into a state department. I won't shut up for less.

TREBELL. [*Putting this aside with one finger.*] I'll deal with you later. There's still Youth in the world in another sense; but the priests haven't found out the difference yet, so they're wasting most of their time.

WEDGECROFT. Religious education won't do now-a-days.

TREBELL. What's Now-a-days? You're very dull, Gilbert.

WEDGECROFT. I'm not duller than the people who will have to understand your scheme.

TREBELL. They won't understand it. I shan't explain to them that education is religion, and that those who deal in it are priests without any laying on of hands.

WEDGECROFT. No matter what they teach?

TREBELL. No . . the matter is how they teach it. I see schools in the future, Gilbert, not built next to the church, but on the site of the church.

WEDGECROFT. Do you think the world is grown up enough to do without dogma?

TREBELL. Yes, I do.

WEDGECROFT. What! . . and am I to write my prescriptions in English?

TREBELL. Yes, you are.

WEDGECROFT. Lord save us! I never thought to find you a visionary.

TREBELL. Isn't it absurd to think that in a hundred years we shall be giving our best brains and the price of them not to training grown men into the discipline of destruction . . not even to curing the ills which we might be preventing . . but to teaching our children. There's nothing else to be done . . nothing else matters. But it's work for a priesthood.

WEDGECROFT. [*Affected; not quite convinced.*] Do you think you can buy a tradition and transmute it?

TREBELL. Don't mock at money.

WEDGECROFT. I never have.

TREBELL. But you speak of it as an end not as a means. That's unfair.

WEDGECROFT. I speaks as I finds.

TREBELL. I'll buy the Church, not with money, but with the promise of new life. [*A certain rather gleeful cunning comes over him.*] It'll only look like a dose of reaction at first . . Sectarian Training Colleges endowed to the hilt.

WEDGECROFT. What'll the Nonconformists say?

TREBELL. Bribe them with the means of equal efficiency. The crux of the whole matter will be in the statutes I'll force on those colleges.

WEDGECROFT. They'll want dogma.

TREBELL. Dogma's not a bad thing if you've power to adapt it occasionally.

WEDGECROFT. Instead of spending your brains in explaining it. Yes, I agree.

TREBELL. [*With full voice.*] But in the creed I'll lay down as unalterable there shall be neither Jew nor Greek . . What do you think of St. Paul, Gilbert?

WEDGECROFT. I'd make him the head of a college.

TREBELL. I'll make the Devil himself head of a college, if he'll undertake to teach honestly all he knows.

WEDGECROFT. And he'll conjure up Comte and Robespierre for you to assist in this little *rechauffée* of their schemes.

TREBELL. Hullo! Comte I knew about. Have I stolen from Robespierre too?

WEDGECROFT. [*Giving out the epigram with an air.*] Property to him who can make the best use of it.

TREBELL. And then what we must do is to give the children power over their teachers?

Now he is comically enigmatic. WEDGECROFT *echoes him*.

WEDGECROFT. And what exactly do you mean by that?

TREBELL. [*Serious again.*] How positive a pedagogue would you be if you had to prove your cases and justify your creed every century or so to the pupils who had learnt just a little more than you could teach them? Give power to the future, my friend . . not to the past. Give responsibility . . even if you give it for your own discredit. What's beneath trust deeds and last wills and testaments, and even acts of Parliament and official creeds? Fear of the verdict of the next

generation . . fear of looking foolish in their eyes. Ah, we . . doing our best now . . must be ready for every sort of death. And to provide the means of change and disregard of the past is a secret of statesmanship. Presume that the world will come to an end every thirty years if it's not reconstructed. Therefore give responsibility . . give responsibility . . give the children power.

WEDGECROFT. [*Disposed to whistle.*] Those statutes will want some framing.

TREBELL. [*Relapsing to a chuckle.*] There's an incidental change to foresee. Disappearance of the parson into the schoolmaster . . and the Archdeacon into the Inspector . . and the Bishop into--I rather hope he'll stick to his mitre, Gilbert.

WEDGECROFT. Some Ruskin will arise and make him.

TREBELL. [*As he paces the room and the walls of it fade away to him.*] What a church could be made of the best brains in England, sworn only to learn all they could teach what they knew without fear of the future or favour to the past . . sworn upon their honour as seekers after truth, knowingly to tell no child a lie. It will come.

WEDGECROFT. A priesthood of women too? There's the tradition of service with them.

TREBELL. [*With the sourest look yet on his face.*] Slavery . . not quite the same thing. And the paradox of such slavery is that they're your only tyrants.

[*At this moment the bell of the telephone upon the table rings. He goes to it talking the while.*]

One has to be very optimistic not to advocate the harem. That's simple and wholesome . . Yes?

KENT *comes in*.

KENT. Does it work?

TREBELL. [*Slamming down the receiver.*] You and your new toy! What is it?

KENT. I'm not sure about the plugs of it . . I thought I'd got them wrong. Mrs. O'Connell has come to see Miss Trebell, who is out, and she says will we ask you if any message has been left for her.

TREBELL. No. Oh, about dinner? Well, she's round at Mrs. Farrant's.

KENT. I'll ring them up.

He goes back into his room to do so leaving TREBELL'S *door open. The two continue their talk.*

TREBELL. My difficulties will be with Percival.

WEDGECROFT. Not over the Church.

TREBELL. You see I must discover how keen he'd be on settling the Education quarrel, once and for all . . what there is left of it.

WEDGECROFT. He's not sectarian.

TREBELL. It'll cost him his surplus. When'll he be up and about?

WEDGECROFT. Not for a week or more.

TREBELL. [*Knitting his brow.*] And I've to deal with Cantelupe. Curious beggar, Gilbert.

WEDGECROFT. Not my sort. He'll want some dealing with over your bill as introduced to me.

TREBELL. I've not cross-examined company promoters for ten years without learning how to do business with a professional high churchman.

WEDGECROFT. Providence limited . . eh?

They are interrupted by MRS. O'CONNELL'S *appearance in the doorway. She is rather pale, very calm; but there is pain in her eyes and her voice is unnaturally steady.*

AMY. Your maid told me to come up and I'm interrupting business . . I thought she was wrong.

TREBELL. [*With no trace of self-consciousness.*] Well . . how are you, after this long time?

AMY. How do you do? [*Then she sees* WEDGECROFT *and has to control a shrinking from him*.] Oh!

WEDGECROFT. How are you, Mrs. O'Connell?

TREBELL. Kent is telephoning to Frances. He knows where she is.

AMY. How are you, Dr. Wedgecroft? [*then to* TREBELL.] Did you have a good holiday? London pulls one to pieces wretchedly. I shall give up living here at all.

WEDGECROFT. You look very well.

AMY. Do I!

TREBELL. A very good holiday. Sit down . . he won't be a minute.

She sits on the nearest chair.

AMY. You're not ill . . interviewing a doctor?

TREBELL. The one thing Wedgecroft's no good at is doctoring. He keeps me well by sheer moral suasion.

KENT *comes out of his room and is off downstairs*.

TREBELL *calls to him*.

TREBELL. Mrs. O'Connell's here.

KENT. Oh! [*He comes back and into the room.*] Miss Trebell hasn't got there yet.

WEDGECROFT *has suddenly looked at his watch*.

WEDGECROFT. I must fly. Good bye, Mrs. O'Connell.

AMY. [*Putting her hand, constrained by its glove, into his open hand.*] I am always a little afraid of you.

WEDGECROFT. That isn't the feeling a doctor wants to inspire.

KENT. [*To* TREBELL.] David Evans--

TREBELL. Evans?

KENT. The reverend one . . is downstairs and wants to see you.

WEDGECROFT. [*As he comes to them.*] Hampstead Road Tabernacle . . Oh, the mammon of righteousness!

TREBELL. Shut up! How long have I before Lord Charles--?

KENT. Only ten minutes.

MRS. O'CONNELL *goes to sit at the big table, and apparently idly takes a sheet of paper to scribble on*.

TREBELL. [*Half thinking, half questioning.*] He's a man I can say nothing to politely.

WEDGECROFT. I'm off to Percival's now. Then I've another case and I'm due back at twelve. If there's anything helpful to say I'll look in again for two minutes . . not more.

TREBELL. You're a good man.

WEDGECROFT. [*As he goes.*] Congratulations, Kent.

KENT. [*Taking him to the stairs.*] Thank you very much.

AMY. [*Beckoning with her eyes.*] What's this, Mr. Trebell?

TREBELL. Eh? I beg your pardon.

He goes behind her and reads over her shoulder what she has written. KENT *comes back.*

KENT. Shall I bring him up here?

TREBELL *looks up and for a moment stares at his secretary rather sharply, then speaks in a matter-of-fact voice*.

TREBELL. See him yourself, downstairs. Talk to him for five minutes . . find out what he wants. Tell him it will be as well for the next week or two if he can say he hasn't seen me.

KENT. Yes.

He goes. TREBELL *follows him to the door which he shuts. Then he turns to face* AMY, *who is tearing up the paper she wrote on*.

TREBELL. What is it?

AMY. [*Her steady voice breaking, her carefully calculated control giving way.*] Oh Henry . . Henry!

TREBELL. Are you in trouble?

AMY. You'll hate me, but . . oh, it's brutal of you to have been away so long.

TREBELL. Is it with your husband?

AMY. Perhaps. Oh, come nearer to me . . do.

TREBELL. [*Coming nearer without haste or excitement.*] Well? [*Her eyes are closed.*] My dear girl, I'm too busy for love-making now. If there are any facts to be faced, let me have them . . quite quickly.

She looks up at him for a moment; then speaks swiftly and sharply as one speaks of disaster.

AMY. There's a danger of my having a child . . your child . . some time in April. That's all.

TREBELL. [*A sceptic who has seen a vision.*] Oh . . it's impossible.

AMY. [*Flashing at him, revengefully.*] Why?

TREBELL. [*Brought to his mundane self.*] Well . . are you sure?

AMY. [*In sudden agony.*] D'you think I want it to be true? D'you think I--? You don't know what it is to have a thing happening in spite of you.

TREBELL. [*His face set in thought.*] Where have you been since we met?

AMY. Not to Ireland . . I haven't seen Justin for a year.

TREBELL. All the easier for you not to see him for another year.

AMY. That wasn't what you meant.

TREBELL. It wasn't . . but never mind.

They are silent for a moment . . miles apart. . Then she speaks dully.

AMY. We do hate each other . . don't we!

TREBELL. Nonsense. Let's think of what matters.

AMY. [*Aimlessly.*] I went to a man at Dover . . picked him out of the directory . . didn't give my own name . . pretended I was off abroad. He was a kind old thing . . said it was all most satisfactory. Oh, my God!

TREBELL. [*He goes to bend over her kindly.*] Yes, you've had a torturing month or two. That's been wrong, I'm sorry.

AMY. Even now I have to keep telling myself that it's so . . otherwise I couldn't understand it. Any more than one really believes one will ever die . . one doesn't believe that, you know.

TREBELL. [*On the edge of a sensation that is new to him.*] I am told that a man begins to feel unimportant from this moment forward. Perhaps it's true.

AMY. What has it to do with you anyhow? We don't belong to each other. How long were we together that night? Half an hour! You didn't seem to care a bit until after you'd kissed me and . . this is an absurd consequence.

TREBELL. Nature's a tyrant.

AMY. Oh, it's my punishment . . I see that well enough . . for thinking myself so clever . . forgetting my duty and religion . . not going to confession, I mean. [*Then hysterically.*] God can make you believe in Him when he likes, can't he?

TREBELL. [*With comfortable strength.*] My dear girl, this needs your pluck. [*And he sits by her.*] All we have to do is to prevent it being found out.

AMY. Yes . . the scandal would smash you, wouldn't it?

TREBELL. There isn't going to be any scandal.

AMY. No . . if we're careful. You'll tell me what to do, won't you? Oh, it's a relief to be able to talk about it.

TREBELL. For one thing, you must take care of yourself and stop worrying.

It soothes her to feel that he is concerned; but it is not enough to be soothed.

AMY. Yes, I wouldn't like to have been the means of smashing you, Henry . . especially as you don't care for me.

TREBELL. I intend to care for you.

AMY. Love me, I mean. I wish you did . . a little; then perhaps I shouldn't feel so degraded.

TREBELL. [*A shade impatiently, a shade contemptuously.*] I can say I love you if that'll make things easier.

AMY. [*More helpless than ever.*] If you'd said it at first I should be taking it for granted . . though it wouldn't be any more true, I daresay, than now . . when I should know you weren't telling the truth.

TREBELL. Then I'd do without so much confusion.

AMY. Don't be so heartless.

TREBELL. [*As he leaves her.*] We seem to be attaching importance to such different things.

AMY. [*Shrill even at a momentary desertion.*] What do you mean? I want affection now just as I want food. I can't do without it . . I can't reason things out as you can. D'you think I haven't tried? [*Then in sudden rebellion.*] Oh, the physical curse of being a woman . . no better than any savage in this condition . . worse off than an animal. It's unfair.

TREBELL. Never mind . . you're here now to hand me half the responsibility, aren't you?

AMY. As if I could! If I have to lie through the night simply shaking with bodily fear much longer . . I believe I shall go mad.

This aspect of the matter is meaningless to him. He returns to the practical issue.

TREBELL. There's nobody that need be suspecting, is there?

AMY. My maid sees I'm ill and worried and makes remarks . . only to me so far. Don't I look a wreck? I nearly ran away when I saw Dr. Wedgecroft . . some of these men are so clever.

TREBELL. [*Calculating.*] Someone will have to be trusted.

AMY. [*Burrowing into her little tortured self again.*] And I ought to feel as if I had done Justin a great wrong . . but I don't. I hate you now; now and then. I was being myself. You've brought me down. I feel worthless.

The last word strikes him. He stares at her.

TREBELL. Do you?

AMY. [*Pleadingly.*] There's only one thing I'd like you to tell me, Henry . . it isn't much. That night we were together . . it was for a moment different to everything that has ever been in your life before, wasn't it?

TREBELL. [*Collecting himself as if to explain to a child.*] I must make you understand . . I must get you to realise that for a little time to come you're above the law . . above even the shortcomings and contradictions of a man's affection.

AMY. But let us have one beautiful memory to share.

TREBELL. [*Determined she shall face the cold logic of her position.*] Listen. I look back on that night as one looks back on a fit of drunkenness.

AMY. [*Neither understanding nor wishing to; only shocked and hurt.*] You beast.

TREBELL. [*With bitter sarcasm.*] No, don't say that. Won't it comfort you to think of drunkenness as a beautiful thing? There are precedents enough . . classic ones.

AMY. You mean I might have been any other woman.

TREBELL. [*Quite inexorable.*] Wouldn't any other woman have served the purpose . . and is it less of a purpose because we didn't know we had it? Does my unworthiness then . . if you like to call it so . . make you unworthy now? I must make you see that it doesn't.

AMY. [*Petulantly hammering at her idée fixe.*] But you didn't love me . . and you don't love me.

TREBELL. [*Keeping his patience.*] No . . only within the last five minutes have I really taken the smallest interest in you. And now I believe I'm half jealous. Can you understand that? You've been talking a lot of nonsense about your emotions and your immortal soul. Don't you see it's only now that you've become a person of some importance to the world . . and why?

AMY. [*Losing her patience, childishly.*] What do you mean by the World? You don't seem to have any personal feelings at all. It's horrible you should have thought of me like that. There has been no other man than you that I would have let come anywhere near me . . not for more than a year.

He realises that she will never understand.

TREBELL. My dear girl, I'm sorry to be brutal. Does it matter so much to you that I should have =wished= to be the father of your child?

AMY. [*Ungracious but pacified by his change of tone.*] It doesn't matter now.

TREBELL. [*Friendly still.*] On principle I don't make promises. But I think I can promise you that if you keep your head and will keep your health, this shall all be made as easy for you as if everyone could know. And let's think what the child may mean to you . . just the fact of his birth. Nothing to me, of course! Perhaps that accounts for the touch of jealousy. I've forfeited my rights because I hadn't honourable intentions. You can't forfeit yours. Even if you never see him and he has to grow up among strangers . . just to have had a child must make a difference to you. Of course, it may be a girl. I wonder.

As he wanders on so optimistically she stares at him and her face changes. She realises . .

AMY. Do you expect me to go through with this? Henry! . . I'd sooner kill myself.

There is silence between them. He looks at her as one looks at some unnatural thing. Then after a moment he speaks, very coldly.

TREBELL. Oh . . indeed. Don't get foolish ideas into your head. You've no choice now . . no reasonable choice.

AMY. [*Driven to bay; her last friend an enemy.*] I won't go through with it.

TREBELL. It hasn't been so much the fear of scandal then--

AMY. That wouldn't break my heart. You'd marry me, wouldn't you? We could go away somewhere. I could be very fond of you, Henry.

TREBELL. [*Marvelling at these tangents.*] Marry you! I should murder you in a week.

This sounds only brutal to her; she lets herself be shamed.

AMY. You've no more use for me than the use you've made of me.

TREBELL. [*Logical again.*] Won't you realise that there's a third party to our discussion . . that I'm of no importance beside him and you of very little. Think of the child.

AMY *blazes into desperate rebellion*.

AMY. There's no child because I haven't chosen there shall be and there shan't be because I don't choose. You'd have me first your plaything and then Nature's, would you?

TREBELL. [*A little abashed.*] Come now, you knew what you were about.

AMY. [*Thinking of those moments.*] Did I? I found myself wanting you, belonging to you suddenly. I didn't stop to think and explain. But are we never to be happy and irresponsible . . never for a moment?

TREBELL. Well . . one can't pick and choose consequences.

AMY. Your choices in life have made you what you want to be, haven't they? Leave me mine.

TREBELL. But it's too late to argue like that.

AMY. If it is, I'd better jump into the Thames. I've thought of it.

He considers how best to make a last effort to bring her to her senses. He sits by her.

TREBELL. Amy . . if you were my wife--

AMY. [*Unresponsive to him now.*] I was Justin's wife, and I went away from him sooner than bear him children. Had I the right to choose or had I not?

TREBELL. [*Taking another path.*] Shall I tell you something I believe? If we were left to choose, we should stand for ever deciding whether to start with the right foot or the left. We blunder into the best things in life. Then comes the test . . have we faith enough to go on . . to go through with the unknown thing?

AMY. [*So bored by these metaphysics.*] Faith in what?

TREBELL. Our vitality. I don't give a fig for beauty, happiness, or brains. All I ask of myself is . . can I pay Fate on demand?

AMY. Yes . . in imagination. But I've got physical facts to face.

But he has her attention now and pursues the advantage.

TREBELL. Very well then . . let the meaning of them go. Look forward simply to a troublesome illness. In a little while you can go

abroad quietly and wait patiently. We're not fools and we needn't find fools to trust in. Then come back to England . . .

AMY. And forget. That seems simple enough, doesn't it?

TREBELL. If you don't want the child let it be mine . . not yours.

AMY. [*Wondering suddenly at this bond between them.*] Yours! What would you do with it?

TREBELL. [*Matter-of-fact.*] Provide for it, of course.

AMY. Never see it, perhaps.

TREBELL. Perhaps not. If there were anything to be gained . . for the child. I'll see that he has his chance as a human being.

AMY. How hopeful! [*Now her voice drops. She is looking back, perhaps at a past self.*] If you loved me . . perhaps I might learn to love the thought of your child.

TREBELL. [*As if half his life depended on her answer.*] Is that true?

AMY. [*Irritably.*] Why are you picking me to pieces? I think that is true. If you had been loving me for a long, long time-- [*The agony rushes back on her.*] But now I'm only afraid. You might have some pity for me . . I'm so afraid.

TREBELL. [*Touched.*] Indeed . . indeed, I'll take what share of this I can.

She shrinks from him unforgivingly.

AMY. No, let me alone. I'm nothing to you. I'm a sick beast in danger of my life, that's all . . cancerous!

He is roused for the first time, roused to horror and protest.

TREBELL. Oh, you unhappy woman! . . . if life is like death to you . . .

AMY. [*Turning on him.*] Don't lecture me! If you're so clever put a stop to this horror. Or you might at least say you're sorry.

TREBELL. Sorry! [*The bell on the table rings jarringly.*] Cantelupe!

He goes to the telephone. She gets up cold and collected, steadied merely by the unexpected sound.

AMY. I mustn't keep you from governing the country. I'm sure you'll do it very well.

TREBELL. [*At the telephone.*] Yes, bring him up, of course . . isn't Mr. Kent there? [*then to her.*] I may be ten minutes with him or half an hour. Wait and we'll come to a conclusion.

KENT *comes in, an open letter in his hand*.

KENT. This note, sir. Had I better go round myself and see him?

TREBELL. [*As he takes the note.*] Cantelupe's come.

KENT. [*Glancing at the telephone.*] Oh, has he!

TREBELL. [*As he reads.*] Yes I think you had.

KENT. Evans was very serious.

He goes back into his room. AMY *moves swiftly to where* TREBELL *is standing and whispers*.

AMY. Won't you tell me whom to go to?

TREBELL. No.

AMY. Oh, really . . what unpractical sentimental children you men are! You and your consciences . . you and your laws. You drive us to distraction and sometimes to death by your stupidities. Poor women--!

The Maid comes in to announce LORD CHARLES CANTELUPE, *who follows her*. CANTELUPE *is forty, unathletic, and a gentleman in the best and worst sense of the word. He moves always with a caution which may betray his belief in the personality of the Devil. He speaks cautiously too, and as if not he but something inside him were speaking. One feels that before strangers he would not if he could help it move or speak at all. A pale face: the mouth would be hardened by fanaticism were it not for the elements of Christianity in his religion: and he has the limpid eye of the enthusiast.*

TREBELL. Glad to see you. You know Mrs. O'Connell.

CANTELUPE *bows in silence*.

AMY. We have met.

She offers her hand. He silently takes it and drops it.

TREBELL. Then you'll wait for Frances.

AMY. Is it worth while?

KENT *with his hat on leaves his room and goes downstairs*.

TREBELL. Have you anything better to do?

AMY. There's somewhere I can go. But I mustn't keep you chatting of my affairs. Lord Charles is impatient to disestablish the Church.

CANTELUPE. [*Unable to escape a remark.*] Forgive me, since that is also your affair.

AMY. Oh . . but I was received at the Oratory when I was married.

CANTELUPE. [*With contrition.*] I beg your pardon.

Then he makes for the other side of the room. TREBELL *and* MRS. O'CONNELL *stroll to the door, their eyes full of meaning*.

AMY. I think I'll go on to this place that I've heard of. If I wait . . for your sister . . she may disappoint me again.

TREBELL. Wait.

KENT'S *room is vacant*.

AMY. Well . . in here?

TREBELL. If you like law-books.

AMY. I haven't been much of an interruption now, have I?

TREBELL. Please wait.

AMY. Thank you.

TREBELL *shuts her in, for a moment seems inclined to lock her in, but he comes back into his own room and faces* CANTELUPE, *who having primed and trained himself on his subject like a gun, fires off a speech, without haste, but also apparently without taking breath*.

CANTELUPE. I was extremely thankful, Mr. Trebell, to hear last week from Horsham that you will see your way to join his cabinet and undertake the disestablishment bill in the House of Commons. Any measure of mine, I have always been convinced, would be too much under the suspicion of blindly favouring Church interests to command the allegiance of that heterogeneous mass of thought . . in some cases, alas, of free thought . . which now-a-days composes the Conservative party. I am more than content to exercise what influence I may from a seat in the cabinet which will authorise the bill.

TREBELL. Yes. That chair's comfortable.

CANTELUPE *takes another*.

CANTELUPE. Horsham forwarded to me your memorandum upon the conditions you held necessary and I incline to think I may accept them in principle on behalf of those who honour me with their confidences.

He fishes some papers from his pocket. TREBELL *sits squarely at his table to grapple with the matter*.

TREBELL. Horsham told me you did accept them . . it's on that I'm joining.

CANTELUPE. Yes . . in principle.

TREBELL. Well . . we couldn't carry a bill you disapproved of, could we?

CANTELUPE. [*With finesse.*] I hope not.

TREBELL. [*A little dangerously.*] And I have no intention of being made the scapegoat of a wrecked Tory compromise with the Nonconformists.

CANTELUPE. [*Calmly ignoring the suggestion.*] So far as I am concerned I meet the Nonconformists on their own ground . . that Religion had better be free from all compromise with the State.

TREBELL. Quite so . . if you're set free you'll look after yourselves. My discovery must be what to do with the men who think more of the state than their Church . . the majority of parsons, don't you think? . . if the question's really put and they can be made to understand it.

CANTELUPE. [*With sincere disdain.*] There are more profitable professions.

TREBELL. And less. Will you allow me that it is statecraft to make a profession profitable?

CANTELUPE *picks up his papers, avoiding theoretical discussion*.

CANTELUPE. Well now . . will you explain to me this project for endowing Education with your surplus?

TREBELL. Putting Appropriation, the Buildings and the Representation question on one side for the moment?

CANTELUPE. Candidly, I have yet to master your figures . . .

TREBELL. The roughest figures so far.

CANTELUPE. Still I have yet to master them on the first two points.

TREBELL. [*Firmly premising.*] We agree that this is not diverting church money to actually secular uses.

CANTELUPE. [*As he peeps from under his eyelids.*] I can conceive that it might not be. You know that we hold Education to be a Church function. But . . .

TREBELL. Can you accept thoroughly now the secular solution for all Primary Schools?

CANTELUPE. Haven't we always preferred it to the undenominational? Are there to be facilities for any of the teachers giving dogmatic instruction?

TREBELL. I note your emphasis on any. I think we can put the burden of that decision on local authorities. Let us come to the question of Training Colleges for your teachers. It's on that I want to make my bargain.

CANTELUPE. [*Alert and cautious.*] You want to endow colleges?

TREBELL. Heavily.

CANTELUPE. Under public control?

TREBELL. Church colleges under Church control.

CANTELUPE. There'd be others?

TREBELL. To preserve the necessary balance in the schools.

CANTELUPE. Not founded with church money?

TREBELL. Think of the grants in aid that will be released. I must ask the Treasury for a further lump sum and with that there may be sufficient for secular colleges . . if you can agree with me upon the statutes of those over which you'd otherwise have free control.

TREBELL *is weighing his words*.

CANTELUPE. "You" meaning, for instance . . what authorities in the Church?

TREBELL. Bishops, I suppose . . and others. [CANTELUPE *permits himself to smile.*] On that point I shall be weakness itself and . . may I suggest . . your seat in the cabinet will give you some control.

CANTELUPE. Statutes?

TREBELL. To be framed in the best interests of educational efficiency.

CANTELUPE. [*Finding an opening.*] I doubt if we agree upon the meaning to be attached to that term.

TREBELL. [*Forcing the issue.*] What meaning do you attach to it?

CANTELUPE. [*Smiling again.*] I have hardly a sympathetic listener.

TREBELL. You have an unprejudiced one . . the best you can hope for. I was not educated myself. I learnt certain things that I desired to know . . from reading my first book--Don Quixote it was--to mastering Company Law. You see, as a man without formulas either for education or religion, I am perhaps peculiarly fitted to settle the double question. I have no grudges . . no revenge to take.

CANTELUPE. [*Suddenly congenial.*] Shelton's translation of Don Quixote I hope . . the modern ones have no flavour. And you took all the adventures as seriously as the Don did?

TREBELL. [*Not expecting this.*] I forget.

CANTELUPE. It's the finer attitude . . the child's attitude. And it would enable you immediately to comprehend mine towards an education consisting merely of practical knowledge. The life of Faith is still the happy one. What is more crushingly finite than knowledge? Moral discipline is a nation's only safety. How much of your science tends in support of the great spiritual doctrine of sacrifice!

TREBELL *returns to his subject as forceful as ever*.

TREBELL. The Church has assimilated much in her time. Do you think it wise to leave agnostic science at the side of the plate? I think, you know, that this craving for common knowledge is a new birth in the mind of man; and if your church won't recognise that soon, by so much will she be losing her grip for ever over men's minds. What's the test of godliness, but your power to receive the new idea in whatever form it comes and give it life? It is blasphemy to pick and choose your good. [*For a moment his thoughts seem to be elsewhere.*] That's an unhappy man or woman or nation . . I know it if it has only come to me this minute . . and I don't care what their brains or their riches or their beauty or any of their triumph may be . . they're unhappy and useless if they can't tell life from death.

CANTELUPE. [*Interested in the digression.*] Remember that the Church's claim has ever been to know that difference.

TREBELL. [*Fastening to his subject again.*] My point is this: A man's demand to know the exact structure of a fly's wing, and his assertion that it degrades any child in the street not to know such a thing, is a religious revival . . a token of spiritual hunger. What else can it be? And we commercialise our teaching!

CANTELUPE. I wouldn't have it so.

TREBELL. Then I'm offering you the foundation of a new Order of men and women who'll serve God by teaching his children. Now shall we finish the conversation in prose?

CANTELUPE. [*Not to be put down.*] What is the prose for God?

TREBELL. [*Not to be put down either.*] That's what we irreligious people are giving our lives to discover. [*He plunges into detail.*] I'm proposing to found about seventy-two new colleges, and of course, to bring the ones there are up to the new standard. Then we must gradually revise all teaching salaries in government schools . . to a scale I have in mind. Then the course must be compulsory and the training time doubled--

CANTELUPE. Doubled! Four years?

TREBELL. Well, a minimum of three . . a university course. Remember we're turning a trade into a calling.

CANTELUPE. There's more to that than taking a degree.

TREBELL. I think so. You've fought for years for your tests and your atmosphere with plain business men not able to understand such lunacy. Quite right . . atmosphere's all that matters. If one and one don't make two by God's grace . . .

CANTELUPE. Poetry again!

TREBELL. I beg your pardon. Well . . you've no further proof. If you can't plant your thumb on the earth and your little finger on the pole star you know nothing of distances. We must do away with text-book teachers.

CANTELUPE *is opening out a little in spite of himself.*

CANTELUPE. I'm waiting for our opinions to differ.

TREBELL. [*Businesslike again.*] I'll send you a draft of the statutes I propose within a week. Meanwhile shall I put the offer this way. If I accept your tests will you accept mine?

CANTELUPE. What are yours?

TREBELL. I believe if one provides for efficiency one provides for the best part of truth . . honesty of statement. I shall hope for a little more elasticity in your dogmas than Becket or Cranmer or Laud

would have allowed. When you've a chance to re-formulate the reasons of your faith for the benefit of men teaching mathematics and science and history and political economy, you won't neglect to answer or allow for criticisms and doubts. I don't see why . . in spite of all the evidence to the contrary . . such a thing as progress in a definite religious faith is impossible.

CANTELUPE. Progress is a soiled word. [*And now he weighs his words.*] I shall be very glad to accept on the Church's behalf control of the teaching of teachers in these colleges.

TREBELL. Good. I want the best men.

CANTELUPE. You are surprisingly inexperienced if you think that creeds can ever become mere forms except to those who have none.

TREBELL. But teaching--true teaching--is learning, and the wish to know is going to prevail against any creed . . so I think. I wish you cared as little for the form in which a truth is told as I do. On the whole, you see, I think I shall manage to plant your theology in such soil this spring that the garden will be fruitful. On the whole I'm a believer in Churches of all sorts and their usefulness to the State. Your present use is out-worn. Have I found you in this the beginnings of a new one?

CANTELUPE. The Church says: Thank you, it is a very old one.

TREBELL. [*Winding up the interview.*] To be sure, for practical politics our talk can be whittled down to your accepting the secular solution for Primary Schools, if you're given these colleges under such statutes as you and I shall agree upon.

CANTELUPE. And the country will accept.

TREBELL. The country will accept any measure if there's enough money in it to bribe all parties fairly.

CANTELUPE. You expect very little of the constancy of my Church to her Faith, Mr. Trebell.

TREBELL. I have only one belief myself. That is in human progress--yes, progress--over many obstacles and by many means. I have no ideals. I believe it is statesmanlike to use all the energy you find . . turning it into the nearest channel that points forward.

CANTELUPE. Forward to what?

TREBELL. I don't know . . and my caring doesn't matter. We do know . . and if we deny it it's only to be encouraged by contradiction . . that the movement is forward and with some gathering purpose. I'm friends with any fellow traveller.

CANTELUPE *has been considering him very curiously. Now he gets up to go.*

CANTELUPE. I should like to continue our talk when I've studied your draft of the statutes. Of course the political position is favourable to a far more comprehensive bill than we had ever looked for . . and you've the advantage now of having held yourself very free from party ties. In fact not only will you give us the bill we shall most care to accept, but I don't know what other man would give us a bill we and the other side could accept at all.

TREBELL. I can let you have more Appropriation figures by Friday. The details of the Fabrics scheme will take a little longer.

CANTELUPE. In a way there's no such hurry. We're not in office yet.

TREBELL. When I'm building with figures I like to give the foundations time to settle. Otherwise they are the inexactest things.

CANTELUPE. [*Smiling to him for the first time.*] We shall have you finding Faith the only solvent of all problems some day.

TREBELL. I hope my mind is not afraid . . even of the Christian religion.

CANTELUPE. I am sure that the needs of the human soul . . be it dressed up in whatever knowledge . . do not alter from age to age . .

He opens the door to find WEDGECROFT *standing outside, watch in hand*.

TREBELL. Hullo . . . waiting?

WEDGECROFT. I was giving you two minutes by my watch. How are you, Cantelupe?

CANTELUPE, *with a gesture which might be mistaken for a bow, folds himself up*.

TREBELL. Shall I bring you the figures on Friday . . that might save time.

CANTELUPE, *by taking a deeper fold in himself seems to assent*.

TREBELL. Will the afternoon do? Kent shall fix the hour.

CANTELUPE. [*With an effort.*] Kent?

TREBELL. My secretary.

CANTELUPE. Friday. Any hour before five. I know my way.

The three phrases having meant three separate efforts, CANTELUPE *escapes*. WEDGECROFT *has walked to the table, his brows a little puckered. Now* TREBELL *notices that* KENT'S *door is open; he goes quickly into the room and finds it empty. Then he stands for a moment irritable and undecided before returning.*

TREBELL. Been here long?

WEDGECROFT. Five minutes . . more, I suppose.

TREBELL. Mrs. O'Connell gone?

WEDGECROFT. To her dressmaker's.

TREBELL. Frances forgot she was coming and went out.

WEDGECROFT. Pretty little fool of a woman! D'you know her husband?

TREBELL. No.

WEDGECROFT. Says she's been in Ireland with him since we met at Shapters. He has trouble with his tenantry.

TREBELL. Won't he sell or won't they purchase?

WEDGECROFT. Curious chap. A Don at Balliol when I first knew him. Warped of late years . . perhaps by his marriage.

TREBELL. [*Dismissing that subject.*] Well . . how's Percival?

WEDGECROFT. Better this morning. I told him I'd seen you . . and in a little calculated burst of confidence what I'd reason to think you were after. He said you and he could get on though you differed on every point; but he didn't see how you'd pull with such a blasted weak-kneed lot as the rest of the Horsham's cabinet would be. He'll be up in a week or ten days.

TREBELL. Can I see him?

WEDGECROFT. You might. I admire the old man . . the way he sticks to his party, though they misrepresent now most things he believes in!

TREBELL. What a damnable state to arrive at . . doubly damned by the fact you admire it.

WEDGECROFT. And to think that at this time of day you should need instructing in the ethics of party government. But I'll have to do it.

TREBELL. Not now. I've been at ethics with Cantelupe.

WEDGECROFT. Certainly not now. What about my man with the stomach-ache at twelve o'clock sharp! Good-bye.

He is gone. TREBELL *battles with uneasiness and at last mutters*. "Oh . . why didn't she wait?" *Then the telephone bell rings. He goes quickly as if it were an answer to his anxiety.* "Yes?" *Of course, it isn't . .* "Yes." *He paces the room, impatient, wondering what to do. The Maid comes in to announce* MISS DAVENPORT. LUCY *follows her. She has gained lately perhaps a little of the joy which was lacking and at least she brings now into this room a breath of very wholesome womanhood.*

LUCY. It's very good of you to let me come; I'm not going to keep you more than three minutes.

TREBELL. Sit down.

Only women unused to busy men would call him rude.

LUCY. What I want to say is . . don't mind my being engaged to Walter. It shan't interfere with his work for you. If you want a proof that it shan't . . it was I got Aunt Julia to ask you to take him . . Though he didn't know . . so don't tell him that.

TREBELL. You weren't engaged then.

LUCY. I . . thought that we might be.

TREBELL. [*With cynical humour.*] Which I'm not to tell him either?

LUCY. Oh, that wouldn't matter.

TREBELL. [*With decision.*] I'll make sure you don't interfere.

LUCY. [*Deliberately . . not to be treated as a child.*] You couldn't, you know, if I wanted to.

TREBELL. Why, is Walter a fool?

LUCY. He's very fond of me, if that's what you mean?

TREBELL *looks at her for the first time and changes his tone a little*.

TREBELL. If it was what I meant . . I'm disposed to withdraw the suggestion.

LUCY. And, because I'm fond of his work as well, I shan't therefore ask him to tell me things . . secrets.

TREBELL. [*Reverting to his humour.*] It'll be when you're a year or two married that danger may occur . . in his desperate effort to make conversation.

LUCY *considers this and him quite seriously.*

LUCY. You're rather hard on women, aren't you . . just because they don't have the chances men do.

TREBELL. Do you want the chances?

LUCY. I think I'm as clever as most men I meet, though I know less, of course.

TREBELL. Perhaps I should have offered you the secretaryship instead.

LUCY. [*Readily.*] Don't you think I'm taking it in a way . . by marrying Walter? That's fanciful of course. But marriage is a very general and complete sort of partnership, isn't it? At least, I'd like to make mine so.

TREBELL. He'll be more under your thumb in some things if you leave him free in others.

She receives the sarcasm in all seriousness and then speaks to him as she would to a child.

LUCY. Oh . . I'm not explaining what I mean quite well perhaps. Walter has been everywhere and done everything. He speaks three languages . . which all makes him an ideal private secretary.

TREBELL. Quite.

LUCY. Do you think he'd develop into anything else . . but for me?

TREBELL. So I have provided just a first step, have I?

LUCY. [*With real enthusiasm.*] Oh, Mr. Trebell, it's a great thing for us. There isn't anyone worth working under but you. You'll make him think and give him ideas instead of expecting them from him. But just for that reason he'd get so attached to you and be quite content to grow old in your shadow . . if it wasn't for me.

TREBELL. True . . I should encourage him in nothingness. What's more, I want extra brains and hands. It's not altogether a pleasant thing, is it . . the selfishness of the hard worked man?

LUCY. If you don't grudge your own strength, why should you be tender of other people's?

He looks at her curiously.

TREBELL. Your ambition is making for only second-hand satisfaction though.

LUCY. What's a woman to do? She must work through men, mustn't she?

TREBELL. I'm told that's degrading . . the influencing of husbands and brothers and sons.

LUCY. [*Only half humorously.*] But what else is one to do with them? Of course, I've enough money to live on . . so I could take up some woman's profession. . . What are you smiling at?

TREBELL. [*Who has smiled very broadly.*] As you don't mean to . . don't stop while I tell you.

LUCY. But I'd sooner get married. I want to have children. [*The words catch him and hold him. He looks at her reverently this time. She remembers she has transgressed convention; then, remembering that it is only convention, proceeds quite simply.*] I hope we shall have children.

TREBELL. I hope so.

LUCY. Thank you. That's the first kind thing you've said.

TREBELL. Oh . . you can do without compliments, can't you?

She considers for a moment.

LUCY. Why have you been talking to me as if I were someone else?

TREBELL. [*Startled.*] Who else?

LUCY. No one particular. But you've shaken a moral fist so to speak. I don't think I provoked it.

TREBELL. It's a bad parliamentary habit. I apologise.

She gets up to go.

LUCY. Now I shan't keep you longer . . you're always busy. You've been so easy to talk to. Thank you very much.

TREBELL. Why . . I wonder?

LUCY. I knew you would be or I shouldn't have come. You think Life's an important thing, don't you? That's priggish, isn't it? Good-bye. We're coming to dinner . . Aunt Julia and I. Miss Trebell arrived to ask us just as I left.

TREBELL. I'll see you down.

LUCY. What waste of time for you. I know how the door opens.

As she goes out WALTER KENT *is on the way to his room. The two nod to each other like old friends.* TREBELL *turns away with something of a sigh*.

KENT. Just come?

LUCY. Just going.

KENT. I'll see you at dinner.

LUCY. Oh, are you to be here? . . that's nice.

LUCY *departs as purposefully as she came*. KENT *hurries to* TREBELL, *whose thoughts are away again by now*.

KENT. I haven't been long there and back, have I? The Bishop gave me these letters for you. He hasn't answered the last . . but I've his notes of what he means to say. He'd like them back to-night. He was just going out. I've one or two notes of what Evans said. Bit of a charlatan, don't you think?

TREBELL. Evans?

KENT. Well, he talked of his Flock. There are quite fifteen letters you'll have to deal with yourself, I'm afraid.

TREBELL *stares at him: then, apparently, making up his mind* . .

TREBELL. Ring up a messenger, will you . . I must write a note and send it.

KENT. Will you dictate?

TREBELL. I shall have done it while you're ringing . . it's only a personal matter. Then we'll start work.

KENT *goes into his room and tackles the telephone there*. TREBELL *sits down to write the note, his face very set and anxious*.

THE THIRD ACT

At LORD HORSHAM'S house in Queen Anne's Gate, in the evening, a week later.

If rooms express their owners' character, the grey and black of LORD HORSHAM'S *drawing room, the faded brocade of its furniture, reveal him as a man of delicate taste and somewhat thin intellectuality. He stands now before a noiseless fire, contemplating with a troubled eye either the pattern of the Old French carpet, or the black double doors of the library opposite, or the moulding on the Adams ceiling, which the flicker of all the candles casts into deeper relief. His grey hair and black clothes would melt into the decoration of his room, were the figure not rescued from such oblivion by the British white glaze of his shirt front and--to a sympathetic eye--by the loveable perceptive face of the man. Sometimes he looks at the sofa in front of him, on which sits* WEDGECROFT, *still in the frock coat of a busy day, depressed and irritable. With his back to them, on a sofa with its back to them, is* GEORGE FARRANT, *planted with his knees apart, his hands clasped, his head bent; very glum. And sometimes* HORSHAM *glances at the door, as if waiting for it to open. Then his gaze will travel back, up the long shiny black piano, with a volume of the Well Tempered Clavichord open on its desk, to where* CANTELUPE *is perched uncomfortably on the bench; paler than ever; more self-contained than ever, looking, to one who knows him as well as* HORSHAM *does, a little dangerous. So he returns to contemplation of the ceiling or the carpet. They wait there as men wait who have said all they want to say upon an unpleasant subject and yet cannot dismiss it. At last* FARRANT *breaks the silence*.

FARRANT. What time did you ask him to come, Horsham?

HORSHAM. Eh . . O'Connell? I didn't ask him directly. What time did you say, Wedgecroft?

WEDGECROFT. Any time after half past ten, I told him.

FARRANT. [*Grumbling.*] It's a quarter to eleven. Doesn't Blackborough mean to turn up at all?

HORSHAM. He was out of town . . my note had to be sent after him. I couldn't wire, you see.

FARRANT. No.

CANTELUPE. It was by the merest chance your man caught me, Cyril. I was taking the ten fifteen to Tonbridge and happened to go to James Street first for some papers.

The conversation flags again.

CANTELUPE. But since Mrs. O'Connell is dead what is the excuse for a scandal?

At this unpleasant dig into the subject of their thoughts the three other men stir uncomfortably.

HORSHAM. Because the inquest is unavoidable . . apparently.

WEDGECROFT. [*Suddenly letting fly.*] I declare I'd have risked penal servitude and given a certificate, but just before the end O'Connell would call in old Fielding Andrews, who has moral scruples about everything--it's his trademark--and of course about this . . !

FARRANT. Was he told of the whole business?

WEDGECROFT. No . . O'Connell kept things up before him. Well . . the woman was dying.

HORSHAM. Couldn't you have kept the true state of the case from Sir Fielding?

WEDGECROFT. And been suspected of the malpractice myself if he'd found it out? . . which he would have done . . he's no fool. Well . . I thought of trying that. . .

FARRANT. My dear Wedgecroft . . how grossly quixotic! You have a duty to yourself.

HORSHAM. [*Rescuing the conversation from unpleasantness.*] I'm afraid I feel that our position to-night is most irregular, Wedgecroft.

WEDGECROFT. Still if you can make O'Connell see reason. And if you all can't . . [*He frowns at the alternative.*]

CANTELUPE. Didn't you say she came to you first of all?

WEDGECROFT. I met her one morning at Trebell's.

FARRANT. Actually at Trebell's!

WEDGECROFT. The day he came back from abroad.

FARRANT. Oh! No one seems to have noticed them together much at any time. My wife. . . No matter!

WEDGECROFT. She tackled me as a doctor with one part of her trouble . . added she'd been with O'Connell in Ireland, which of course it turns out wasn't true . . asked me to help her. I had to say I couldn't.

HORSHAM. [*Echoing rather than querying.*] You couldn't.

FARRANT. [*Shocked.*] My dear Horsham!

WEDGECROFT. Well, if she'd told me the truth! . . No, anyhow I couldn't. I'm sure there was no excuse. One can't run these risks.

FARRANT. Quite right, quite right.

WEDGECROFT. There are men who do on one pretext or another.

FARRANT. [*Not too shocked to be curious.*] Are there really?

WEDGECROFT. Oh yes, men well known . . in other directions. I could give you four addresses . . but of course I wasn't going to give her one. Though there again . . if she'd told me the whole truth! . . My God, women are such fools! And they prefer quackery . . look at the decent doctors they simply turn into charlatans. Though, there again, that all comes of letting a trade work mysteriously under the thumb of a benighted oligarchy . . which is beside the question. But one day I'll make you sit up on the subject of the Medical Council, Horsham.

HORSHAM *assumes an impenetrable air of statesmanship*.

HORSHAM. I know. Very interesting . . very important . . very difficult to alter the status quo.

WEDGECROFT. Then the poor little liar said she'd go off to an appointment with her dressmaker; and I heard nothing more till she sent for me a week later, and I found her almost too ill to speak. Even then she didn't tell me the truth! So, when O'Connell arrived, of course I spoke to him quite openly and all he told me in reply was that it wouldn't have been his child.

FARRANT. Poor devil!

WEDGECROFT. O'Connell?

FARRANT. Yes, of course.

WEDGECROFT. I wonder. Perhaps she didn't realize he'd been sent for . . or felt then she was dying and didn't care . . or lost her head. I don't know.

FARRANT. Such a pretty little woman!

WEDGECROFT. If I could have made him out and dealt with him, of course, I shouldn't have come to you. Farrant's known him even longer than I have.

FARRANT. I was with him at Harrow.

WEDGECROFT. So I went to Farrant first.

That part of the subject drops. CANTELUPE, *who has not moved, strikes in again.*

CANTELUPE. How was Trebell's guilt discovered?

FARRANT. He wrote her one letter which she didn't destroy. O'Connell found it.

WEDGECROFT. Picked it up from her desk . . it wasn't even locked up.

FARRANT. Not twenty words in it . . quite enough though.

HORSHAM. His habit of being explicit . . of writing things down . . I know!

He shakes his head, deprecating all rashness. There is another pause. FARRANT, *getting up to pace about, breaks it*.

FARRANT. Look here, Wedgecroft, one thing is worrying me. Had Trebell any foreknowledge of what she did and the risk she was running and could he have stopped it?

WEDGECROFT. [*Almost ill-temperedly.*] How could he have stopped it?

FARRANT. Because . . well, I'm not a casuist . . but I know by instinct when I'm up against the wrong thing to do; and if he can't be cleared on that point I won't lift a finger to save him.

HORSHAM. [*With nice judgment.*] In using the term Any Foreknowledge, Farrant, you may be more severe on him than you wish to be.

FARRANT, *unappreciative, continues*.

FARRANT. Otherwise . . well, we must admit, Cantelupe, that if it hadn't been for the particular consequence of this it wouldn't be anything to be so mightily shocked about.

CANTELUPE. I disagree.

FARRANT. My dear fellow, it's our business to make laws and we know the difference of saying in one of 'em you may or you must. Who ever proposed to insist on pillorying every case of spasmodic adultery? One would never have done! Some of these attachments do more harm . . to the third party, I mean . . some less. But it's only when a menage becomes socially impossible that a sensible man will interfere. [*He adds quite unnecessarily.*] I'm speaking quite impersonally, of course.

CANTELUPE. [*As coldly as ever.*] Trebell is morally responsible for every consequence of the original sin.

WEDGECROFT. That is a hard saying.

FARRANT. [*Continuing his own remarks quite independently.*] And I put aside the possibility that he deliberately helped her to her death to save a scandal because I don't believe it is a possibility. But if that were so I'd lift my finger to help him to his. I'd see him hanged with pleasure.

WEDGECROFT. [*Settling this part of the matter.*] Well, Farrant, to all intents and purposes he didn't know and he'd have stopped it if he could.

FARRANT. Yes, I believe that. But what makes you so sure?

WEDGECROFT. I asked him and he told me.

FARRANT. That's no proof.

WEDGECROFT. You read the letter that he sent her . . unless you think it was written as a blind.

FARRANT. Oh . . to be sure . . yes. I might have thought of that.

He settles down again. Again no one has anything to say.

CANTELUPE. What is to be said to Mr. O'Connell when he comes?

HORSHAM. Yes . . what exactly do you propose we shall say to O'Connell, Wedgecroft?

WEDGECROFT. Get him to open his oyster of a mind and . . .

FARRANT. So it is and his face like a stone wall yesterday. Absolutely refused to discuss the matter with me!

CANTELUPE. May I ask, Cyril, why are we concerning ourselves with this wickedness at all?

HORSHAM. Just at this moment when we have official weight without official responsibility, Charles . .

WEDGECROFT. I wish I could have let Percival out of bed, but these first touches of autumn are dangerous to a convalescent of his age.

HORSHAM. But you saw him, Farrant . . and he gave you his opinion, didn't he?

FARRANT. Last night . . yes.

HORSHAM. I suppose it's a pity Blackborough hasn't turned up.

FARRANT. Never mind him.

HORSHAM. He gets people to agree with him. That's a gift.

FARRANT. Wedgecroft, what is the utmost O'Connell will be called upon to do for us . . for Trebell?

WEDGECROFT. Probably only to hold his tongue at the inquest to-morrow. As far as I know there's no one but her maid to prove that Mrs. O'Connell didn't meet her husband some time in the summer. He'll be called upon to tell a lie or two by implication.

FARRANT. Cantelupe . . what does perjury to that extent mean to a Roman Catholic?

CANTELUPE'S *face melts into an expression of mild amazement*.

CANTELUPE. Your asking such a question shows that you would not understand my answer to it.

FARRANT. [*Leaving the fellow to his subtleties.*] Well, what about the maid?

WEDGECROFT. She may suspect facts but not names, I think. Why should they question her on such a point if O'Connell says nothing?

HORSHAM. He's really very late. I told . . [*He stops.*] Charles, I've forgotten that man's name again.

CANTELUPE. Edmunds, you said it was.

HORSHAM. Edmunds. Everybody's down at Lympne . . I've been left with a new man here and I don't know his name. [*He is very pathetic.*] I told him to put O'Connell in the library there. I thought that either Farrant or I might perhaps see him first and--

At this moment EDMUNDS *comes in, and, with that air of discreet tact which he considers befits the establishment of a Prime Minister, announces*, "Mr. O'Connell, my lord." *As* O'CONNELL *follows him*, HORSHAM *can only try not to look too disconcerted*. O'CONNELL, *in his tightly buttoned frock coat, with his shaven face and close-cropped iron grey hair, might be mistaken for a Catholic priest; except that he has not also acquired the easy cheerfulness which professional familiarity with the mysteries of that religion seems to give. For the moment, at least, his features are so impassive that they may tell either of the deepest grief or the purest indifference; or it may be, merely of reticence on entering a stranger's room. He only bows towards* HORSHAM'S *half-proffered hand. With instinctive respect for the situation of this tragically made widower the men have risen and stand in various uneasy attitudes.*

HORSHAM. Oh . . how do you do? Let me see . . do you know my cousin Charles Cantelupe? Yes . . we were expecting Russell Blackborough. Sir Henry Percival is ill. Do sit down.

O'CONNELL *takes the nearest chair and gradually the others settle themselves*; FARRANT *seeking an obscure corner. But there follows an uncomfortable silence, which* O'CONNELL *at last breaks*.

O'CONNELL. You have sent for me, Lord Horsham?

HORSHAM. I hope that by my message I conveyed no impression of sending for you.

O'CONNELL. I am always in some doubt as to by what person or persons in or out of power this country is governed. But from all I hear you are at the present moment approximately entitled to send for me.

The level music of his Irish tongue seems to give finer edge to his sarcasm.

HORSHAM. Well, Mr. O'Connell . . you know our request before we make it.

O'CONNELL. Yes, I understand that if the fact of Mr. Trebell's adultery with my wife were made as public as its consequences to her must be to-morrow, public opinion would make it difficult for you to include him in your cabinet.

HORSHAM. Therefore we ask you . . though we have no right to ask you . . to consider the particular circumstances and forget the man in the statesman, Mr. O'Connell.

O'CONNELL. My wife is dead. What have I to do at all with Mr. Trebell as a man? As a statesman I am in any case uninterested in him.

Upon this throwing of cold water, EDMUNDS *returns to mention even more discreetly . . .*

EDMUNDS. Mr. Blackborough is in the library, my lord.

HORSHAM. [*Patiently impatient.*] No, no . . here.

WEDGECROFT. Let me go.

HORSHAM. [*To the injured* EDMUNDS.] Wait . . wait.

WEDGECROFT. I'll put him *au fait*. I shan't come back.

HORSHAM. [*Gratefully.*] Yes, yes. [*Then to* EDMUNDS *who is waiting with perfect dignity*.] Yes . . yes . . yes.

EDMUNDS *departs and* WEDGECROFT *makes for the library door, glad to escape*.

O'CONNELL. If you are not busy at this hour, Wedgecroft, I should be grateful if you'd wait for me. I shall keep you, I think, but a very few minutes.

WEDGECROFT. [*In his most matter-of-fact tone.*] All right, O'Connell.

He goes into the library.

CANTELUPE. Don't you think, Cyril, it would be wiser to prevent your man coming into the room at all while we're discussing this?

HORSHAM. [*Collecting his scattered tact.*] Yes, I thought I had arranged that he shouldn't. I'm very sorry. He's a fool. However, there's no one else to come. Once more, Mr. O'Connell . . [*He frames no sentence.*]

O'CONNELL. I am all attention, Lord Horsham.

CANTELUPE *with a self-denying effort has risen to his feet*.

CANTELUPE. Mr. O'Connell, I remain here almost against my will. I cannot think quite calmly about this double and doubly heinous sin. Don't listen to us while we make light of it. If we think of it as a political bother and ask you to smooth it away . . I am ashamed. But I believe I may not be wrong if I put it to you that, looking to the future and for the sake of your own Christian dignity, it may become you to be merciful. And I pray too . . I think we may believe . . that Mr. Trebell is feeling need of your forgiveness. I have no more to say. [*He sits down again.*]

O'CONNELL. It may be. I have never met Mr. Trebell.

HORSHAM. I tell you, Mr. O'Connell, putting aside Party, that your country has need of this man just at this time.

They hang upon O'CONNELL'S *reply. It comes with deliberation.*

O'CONNELL. I suppose my point of view must be an unusual one. I notice, at least, that twenty four hours and more has not enabled Farrant to grasp it.

FARRANT. For God's sake, O'Connell, don't be so cold-blooded. You have the life or death of a man's reputation to decide on.

O'CONNELL. [*With a cold flash of contempt.*] That's a petty enough thing now-a-days it seems to me. There are so many clever men . . and they are all so alike . . surely one will not be missed.

CANTELUPE. Don't you think that is only sarcasm, Mr. O'Connell?

The voice is so gently reproving that O'CONNELL *must turn to him.*

O'CONNELL. Will you please to make allowance, Lord Charles, for a mediaeval scholar's contempt of modern government? =You= at least will partly understand his horror as a Catholic at the modern superstitions in favour of popular opinion and control which it encourages. You see, Lord Horsham, I am not a party man, only a little less enthusiastic for the opposite cries than for his own. You appealed very strangely to my feelings of patriotism for this country; but you see even my own is--in the twentieth century--foreign to me. From my point of view neither Mr. Trebell, nor you, nor the men you have just defeated, nor any discoverable man or body of men will make laws which matter . . or differ in the slightest. You are all part of your age and you all voice--though in separate keys, or even tunes they may be--only the greed and follies of your age. That you should do this and nothing more is, of course, the democratic ideal. You will forgive my thinking tenderly of the statesmanship of the =first= Edward.

The library door opens and RUSSELL BLACKBOROUGH *comes in. He has on evening clothes, complicated by a long silk comforter and the motoring cap which he carries.*

HORSHAM. You know Russell Blackborough.

O'CONNELL. I think not.

BLACKBOROUGH. How d'you do?

O'CONNELL *having bowed*, BLACKBOROUGH *having nodded, the two men sit down*, BLACKBOROUGH *with an air of great attention*, O'CONNELL *to continue his interrupted speech*.

O'CONNELL. And you are as far from me in your code of personal morals as in your politics. In neither do you seem to realise that such a thing as passion can exist. No doubt you use the words Love and Hatred; but do you know that love and hatred for principles or persons should come from beyond a man? I notice you speak of forgiveness as if it were a penny in my pocket. You have been endeavouring for these two days to rouse me from my indifference towards Mr. Trebell. Perhaps you are on the point of succeeding . . but I do not know what you may rouse.

HORSHAM. I understand. We are much in agreement, Mr. O'Connell. What can a man be--who has any pretensions to philosophy--but helplessly indifferent to the thousands of his fellow creatures whose fates are intertwined with his?

O'CONNELL. I am glad that you understand. But, again . . have I been wrong to shrink from personal relations with Mr. Trebell? Hatred is as sacred a responsibility as love. And you will not agree with me when I say that punishment can be the salvation of a man's soul.

FARRANT. [*With aggressive common sense.*] Look here, O'Connell, if you're indifferent it doesn't hurt you to let him off. And if you hate him . . ! Well, one shouldn't hate people . . there's no room for it in this world.

CANTELUPE. [*Quietly as ever.*] We have some authority for thinking that the punishment of a secret sin is awarded by God secretly.

O'CONNELL. We have very poor authority, sir, for using God's name merely to fill up the gaps in an argument, though we may thus have

our way easily with men who fear God more than they know him. I am not one of those. Yes, Farrant, you and your like have left little room in this world except for the dusty roads on which I notice you beginning once more to travel. The rule of them is the same for all, is it not . . from the tramp and the labourer to the plutocrat in his car? This is the age of equality; and it's a fine practical equality . . the equality of the road. But you've fenced the fields of human joy and turned the very hillsides into hoardings. Commercial opportunity is painted on them, I think.

FARRANT. [*Not to be impressed.*] Perhaps it is O'Connell. My father made his money out of newspapers and I ride in a motor car and you came from Holyhead by train. What has all that to do with it? Why can't you make up your mind? You know in this sort of case one talks a lot . . and then does the usual thing. You must let Trebell off and that's all about it.

O'CONNELL. Indeed. And do they still think it worth while to administer an oath to your witnesses?

He is interrupted by the flinging open of the door and the triumphant right-this-time-anyhow voice in which EDMUNDS *announces* "Mr. Trebell, my lord." *The general consternation expresses itself through* HORSHAM, *who complains aloud and unreservedly*.

HORSHAM. Good God . . No! Charles, I must give him notice at once . . he'll have to go. [*He apologises to the company.*] I beg your pardon.

By this time TREBELL *is in the room and has discovered the stranger, who stands to face him without emotion or anger*. BLACKBOROUGH'S *face wears the grimmest of smiles*, CANTELUPE *is sorry*, FARRANT *recovers from the fit of choking which seemed imminent and* EDMUNDS, *dimly perceiving by now some fly in the perfect amber of his conduct, departs. The two men still face each other.* FARRANT *is prepared to separate them should they come to blows, and indeed is advancing in that anticipation when* O'CONNELL *speaks*.

O'CONNELL. I am Justin O'Connell.

TREBELL. I guess that.

O'CONNELL. There's a dead woman between us, Mr. Trebell.

A tremor sweeps over TREBELL; *then he speaks simply*.

TREBELL. I wish she had not died.

O'CONNELL. I am called upon by your friends to save you from the consequences of her death. What have you to say about that?

TREBELL. I have been wondering what sort of expression the last of your care for her would find . . but not much. My wonder is at the power over me that has been given to something I despised.

Only O'CONNELL *grasps his meaning. But he, stirred for the first time and to his very depths, drives it home.*

O'CONNELL. Yes . . If I wanted revenge I have it. She was a worthless woman. First my life and now yours! Dead because she was afraid to bear your child, isn't she?

TREBELL. [*In agony.*] I'd have helped that if I could.

O'CONNELL. Not the shame . . not the wrong she had done me . . but just fear--fear of the burden of her woman-hood. And because of her my children are bastards and cannot inherit my name. And I must live in sin against my church, as--God help me--I can't against my nature. What are men to do when this is how women use the freedom we have given them? Is the curse of barrenness to be nothing to a man? And that's the death in life to which you gentlemen with your fine civilisation are bringing us. I think we are brothers in misfortune, Mr. Trebell.

TREBELL. [*Far from responding.*] Not at all, sir. If you wanted children you did the next best thing when she left you. My own problem is neither so simple nor is it yet anyone's business but my own. I apologise for alluding to it.

HORSHAM *takes advantage of the silence that follows*.

HORSHAM. Shall we . .

O'CONNELL. [*Measuring* TREBELL *with his eyes*.] And by which shall I help you to a solution . . telling lies or the truth to-morrow?

TREBELL. [*Roughly, almost insolently.*] If you want my advice . . I should do the thing that comes more easily to you, or that will content you most. If you haven't yet made up your mind as to the relative importance of my work and your conscience, it's too late to begin now. Nothing you may do can affect =me=.

HORSHAM. [*Fluttering fearfully into this strange dispute.*] O'Connell . . if you and I were to join Wedgecroft . .

O'CONNELL. You value your work more than anything else in the world?

TREBELL. Have I anything else in the world?

O'CONNELL. Have you not? [*With grim ambiguity.*] Then I am sorry for you, Mr. Trebell. [*Having said all he had to say, he notices* HORSHAM.] Yes, Lord Horsham, by all means . .

Then HORSHAM *opens the library door and sees him safely through. He passes* TREBELL *without any salutation, nor does* TREBELL *turn after him; but when* HORSHAM *also is in the library and the door is closed, comments viciously*.

TREBELL. The man's a sentimentalist . . like all men who live alone or shut away. [*Then surveying his three glum companions, bursts out.*] Well . . ? We can stop thinking of this dead woman, can't we? It's a waste of time.

FARRANT. Trebell, what did you want to come here for?

TREBELL. Because you thought I wouldn't. I knew you'd be sitting round, incompetent with distress, calculating to a nicety the force of a scandal. . .

BLACKBOROUGH. [*With the firmest of touches.*] Horsham has called some of us here to discuss the situation. I am considering my opinion.

TREBELL. You are not, Blackborough. You haven't recovered yet from the shock of your manly feelings. Oh, cheer up. You know we're an adulterous and sterile generation. Why should you cry out at a proof now and then of what's always in the hearts of most of us?

FARRANT. [*Plaintively.*] Now, for God's sake, Trebell . . O'Connell has been going on like that.

TREBELL. Well then . . think of what matters.

BLACKBOROUGH. Of you and your reputation in fact.

FARRANT. [*Kindly.*] Why do you pretend to be callous?

He strokes TREBELL'S *shoulder, who shakes him off impatiently*.

TREBELL. Do you all mean to out-face the British Lion with me after to-morrow . . dare to be Daniels?

BLACKBOROUGH. Bravado won't carry this off.

TREBELL. Blackborough . . it would immortalize you. I'll stand up in my place in the House of Commons and tell everything that has befallen soberly and seriously. Why should I flinch?

FARRANT. My dear Trebell, if your name comes out at the inquest--

TREBELL. If it does! . . whose has been the real offence against Society . . hers or mine? It's I who am most offended . . if I choose to think so.

BLACKBOROUGH. You seem to forget the adultery.

TREBELL. Isn't Death divorce enough for her? And . . oh, wasn't I right? . . What do you start thinking of once the shock's over? Punishment . . revenge . . uselessness . . waste of me.

FARRANT. [*With finality.*] If your name comes out at the inquest, to talk of anything but retirement from public life is perfect lunacy . . and you know it.

HORSHAM *comes back from the passage. He is a little distracted; then the more so at finding himself again in a highly-charged atmosphere.*

HORSHAM. He's gone off with Wedgecroft.

TREBELL. [*Including* HORSHAM *now in his appeal.*] Does anyone think he knows me now to be a worse man . . less fit, less able . . than he did a week ago?

From the piano-stool comes CANTELUPE'S *quiet voice*.

CANTELUPE. Yes, Trebell . . I do.

TREBELL *wheels round at this and ceases all bluster*.

TREBELL. On what grounds?

CANTELUPE. Unarguable ones.

HORSHAM. [*Finding refuge again in his mantelpiece.*] You know, he has gone off without giving me his promise.

FARRANT. That's your own fault, Trebell.

HORSHAM. The fool says I didn't give him explicit instructions.

FARRANT. What fool?

HORSHAM. That man . . [*The name fails him.*] . . my new man. One of those touches of Fate's little finger, really.

He begins to consult the ceiling and the carpet once more. TREBELL *tackles* CANTELUPE *with gravity*.

TREBELL. I have only a logical mind, Cantelupe. I know that to make myself a capable man I've purged myself of all the sins . . I never was idle enough to commit. I know that if your God didn't make use of men, sins and all . . what would ever be done in the world? That one natural action, which the slight shifting of a social law could have made as negligible as eating a meal, can make me incapable . . takes the linch-pin out of one's brain, doesn't it?

HORSHAM. Trebell, we've been doing our best to get you out of this mess. Your remarks to O'Connell weren't of any assistance, and . .

CANTELUPE *stands up, so momentously that* HORSHAM'S *gentle flow of speech dries up*.

CANTELUPE. Perhaps I had better say at once that, whatever hushing up you may succeed in, it will be impossible for me to sit in a cabinet with Mr. Trebell.

It takes even FARRANT *a good half minute to recover his power of speech on this new issue*.

FARRANT. What perfect nonsense, Cantelupe! I hope you don't mean that.

BLACKBOROUGH. Complication number one, Horsham.

FARRANT. [*Working up his protest.*] Why on earth not? You really mustn't drag your personal feelings and prejudices into important matters like this . . matters of state.

CANTELUPE. I think I have no choice, when Trebell stands convicted of a mortal sin, of which he has not even repented.

TREBELL. [*With bitterest cynicism.*] Dictate any form of repentance you like . . my signature is yours.

CANTELUPE. Is this a matter for intellectual jugglery?

TREBELL. [*His defence failing at last.*] I offered to face the scandal from my place in the House. That was mad, wasn't it . .

BLACKBOROUGH--*his course mapped out--changes the tone of the discussion*.

BLACKBOROUGH. Horsham, I hope Trebell will believe I have no personal feelings in this matter, but we may as well face the fact even now that O'Connell holding his tongue to-morrow won't stop gossip in the House, club gossip, gossip in drawing rooms. What do the Radicals really care so long as a scandal doesn't get into the papers! There's an inner circle with its eye on us.

FARRANT. Well, what does that care as long as scandal's its own copyright? Do you know, my dear father refused a peerage because he felt it meant putting blinkers on his best newspaper.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*A little subtly.*] Still . . now you and Horsham are cousins, aren't you?

FARRANT. [*Off the track and explanatory.*] No, no . . my wife's mother . . .

BLACKBOROUGH. I'm inaccurate, for I'm not one of the family circle myself. My money gets me here and any skill I've used in making it. It wouldn't keep me at a pinch. And Trebell . . [*He speaks through his teeth.*] . . do you think your accession to power in the party is popular at the best? Who is going to put out a finger to make it less awkward for Horsham to stick to you if there's a chance of your going under?

TREBELL *smiles at some mental picture he is making*.

TREBELL. Can your cousins and aunts make it so awkward for you, Horsham?

HORSHAM. [*Repaying humour with humour.*] I bear up against their affectionate attentions.

TREBELL. But I quite understand how uncongenial I may be. What made you take up with me at all?

FARRANT. Your brains, Trebell.

TREBELL. He should have enquired into my character first, shouldn't he, Cantelupe?

CANTELUPE. [*With crushing sincerity.*] Yes.

TREBELL. Oh, the old unnecessary choice . . Wisdom or Virtue. We all think we must make it . . and we all discover we can't. But if you've to choose between Cantelupe and me, Horsham, I quite see you've no choice.

HORSHAM *now takes the field, using his own weapons*.

HORSHAM. Charles, it seems to me that we are somewhat in the position of men who have overheard a private conversation. Do you feel justified in making public use of it?

CANTELUPE. It is not I who am judge. God knows I would not sit in judgment upon anyone.

TREBELL. Cantelupe, I'll take your personal judgment if you can give it me.

FARRANT. Good Lord, Cantelupe, didn't you sit in a cabinet with . . Well, we're not here to rake up old scandals.

BLACKBOROUGH. I am concerned with the practical issue.

HORSHAM. We know, Blackborough. [*Having quelled the interruption he proceeds.*] Charles, you spoke, I think, of a mortal sin.

CANTELUPE. In spite of your lifted eyebrows at the childishness of the word.

HORSHAM. Theoretically, we must all wish to guide ourselves by eternal truths. But you would admit, wouldn't you, that we can only deal with temporal things?

CANTELUPE. [*Writhing slightly under the sceptical cross-examination.*] There are divine laws laid down for our guidance . . I admit no disbelief in them.

HORSHAM. Do they place any time-limit to the effect of a mortal sin? If this affair were twenty years old would you do as you are doing? Can you forecast the opinion you will have of it six months hence?

CANTELUPE. [*Positively.*] Yes.

HORSHAM. Can you? Nevertheless I wish you had postponed your decision even till to-morrow.

Having made his point he looks round almost for approval.

BLACKBOROUGH. What had Percival to say on the subject, Farrant?

FARRANT. I was only to make use of his opinion under certain circumstances.

BLACKBOROUGH. So it isn't favourable to your remaining with us, Mr. Trebell.

FARRANT. [*Indignantly emerging from the trap.*] I never said that.

Now TREBELL *gives the matter another turn, very forcefully*.

TREBELL. Horsham . . I don't bow politely and stand aside at this juncture as a gentleman should, because I want to know how the work's to be done if I leave you what I was to do.

BLACKBOROUGH. Are we so incompetent?

TREBELL. I daresay not. I want to know . . that's all.

CANTELUPE. Please understand, Mr. Trebell, that I have in no way altered my good opinion of your proposals.

BLACKBOROUGH. Well, I beg to remind you, Horsham, that from the first I've reserved myself liberty to criticise fundamental points in the scheme.

HORSHAM. [*Pacifically.*] Quite so . . quite so.

BLACKBOROUGH. That nonsensical new standard of teachers' salaries for one thing . . you'd never pass it.

HORSHAM. Quite easily. It's an administrative point, so leave the legislation vague. Then, as the appropriation money falls in, the qualifications rise and the salaries rise. No one will object because no one will appreciate it but administrators past or future . . and they never cavil at money. [*He remains lost in the beauty of this prospect.*]

TREBELL. Will you take charge of the bill, Blackborough?

BLACKBOROUGH. Are you serious?

HORSHAM. [*Brought to earth.*] Oh no! [*He corrects himself smiling.*] I mean, my dear Blackborough, why not stick to the Colonies?

BLACKBOROUGH. You see, Trebell, there's still the possibility that O'Connell may finally spike your gun tomorrow. You realise that, don't you?

TREBELL. Thank you. I quite realise that.

CANTELUPE. Can nothing further be done?

BLACKBOROUGH. Weren't we doing our best?

HORSHAM. Yes . . if we were bending our thoughts to that difficulty now . . .

TREBELL. [*Hardly.*] May I ask you to interfere on my behalf no further?

FARRANT. My dear Trebell!

TREBELL. I assure you that I am interested in the Disestablishment Bill.

So they turn readily enough from the more uncomfortable part of their subject.

BLACKBOROUGH. Well . . here's Farrant.

FARRANT. I'm no good. Give me Agriculture.

BLACKBOROUGH. Pity you're in the Lords, Horsham.

TREBELL. Horsham, I'll devil for any man you choose to name . . feed him sentence by sentence. . .

HORSHAM. That's impossible.

TREBELL. Well, what's to become of my bill? I want to know.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Casting his care on Providence.*] We shall manage somehow. Why, if you had died suddenly . . or let us say, never been born. . .

TREBELL. Then, Blackborough . . speaking as a dying man . . if you go back on the integrity of this scheme, I'll haunt you. [*Having said this with some finality, he turns his back.*]

CANTELUPE. Cyril, I agree with what Trebell is saying. Whatever happens there must be no tampering with the comprehensiveness of the scheme. Remember you are in the hands of the extremists . . on both sides. I won't support a compromise on one . . nor will they on the other.

HORSHAM. Well, I'll confess to you candidly, Trebell, that I don't know of any man available for this piece of work but you.

TREBELL. Then I should say it would be almost a relief to you if O'Connell tells on me to-morrow.

FARRANT. We seem to have got off that subject altogether. [*There comes a portentous tap at the door.*] Good Lord! . . I'm getting jumpy.

HORSHAM. Excuse me.

A note is handed to him through the half opened door; and obviously it is at EDMUNDS *whom he frowns. Then he returns fidgetting for his glasses.*

Oh, it turns out . . I'm so sorry you were blundered in here, Trebell . . this man . . what's his name . . Edwards . . had been reading the papers and thought it was a cabinet council . . seemed proud of himself. This is from Wedgecroft . . scribbled in a messenger office. I never can read his writing . . it's like prescriptions. Can you?

It has gradually dawned on the three men and then on TREBELL *what this note may have in it.* FARRANT'S *hand even trembles a little as he takes it. He gathers the meaning himself and looks at the others with a smile before he reads the few words aloud.*

FARRANT. "All right. He has promised."

BLACKBOROUGH. O'Connell?

FARRANT. Thank God. [*He turns enthusiastically to* TREBELL *who stands rigid.*] My dear fellow . . I hope you know how glad I am.

CANTELUPE. I am very glad.

BLACKBOROUGH. Of course we're all very glad indeed, Trebell . . very glad we persuaded him.

FARRANT. That's dead and buried now, isn't it?

TREBELL *moves away from them all and leaves them wondering. When he turns round his face is as hard as ever; his voice, if possible, harder.*

TREBELL. But, Horsham, returning to the more important question . . you've taken trouble, and O'Connell's to perjure himself for nothing if you still can't get me into your child's puzzle . . to make the pretty picture that a Cabinet should be.

HORSHAM *looks at* BLACKBOROUGH *and scents danger*.

HORSHAM. We shall all be glad, I am sure, to postpone any further discussion. . .

TREBELL. I shall not.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Encouragingly.*] Quite so, Trebell. We're on the subject, and it won't discount our pleasure that you're out of this mess, to continue it. This habit of putting off the hour of disagreement is . . well, Horsham, it's contrary to my business instincts.

TREBELL. If one time's as good as another for you . . this moment is better than most for me.

HORSHAM. [*A little irritated at the wantonness of this dispute.*] There is nothing before us on which we are capable of coming to any decision . . in a technical sense.

BLACKBOROUGH. That's a quibble. [*Poor* HORSHAM *gasps*.] I'm not going to pretend either now or in a month's time that I think Trebell anything but a most dangerous acquisition to the party. I pay you a compliment in that, Trebell. Now, Horsham proposes that we should go to the country when Disestablishment's through.

HORSHAM. It's the condition of Nonconformist support.

BLACKBOROUGH. One condition. Then you'd leave us, Trebell?

HORSHAM. I hope not.

BLACKBOROUGH. And carry with you the credit of our one big measure. Consider the effect upon our reputation with the Country.

FARRANT. [*Waking to* BLACKBOROUGH'S *line of action*.] Why on earth should you leave us, Trebell? You've hardly been a Liberal, even in name.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Vigorously making his point.*] Then what would be the conditions of your remaining? You're not a party man, Trebell. You haven't the true party feeling. You are to be bought. Of course you take your price in measures, not in money. But you are preeminently a man of ideas . . an expert. And a man of ideas is often a grave embarrassment to a government.

HORSHAM. And vice-versa . . vice-versa!

TREBELL. [*Facing* BLACKBOROUGH *across the room*.] Do I understand that you for the good of the Tory party . . just as Cantelupe for the good of his soul . . will refuse to sit in a cabinet with me.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Unembarrassed.*] I don't commit myself to saying that.

CANTELUPE. No, Trebell . . it's that I must believe your work could not prosper . . in God's way.

TREBELL *softens to his sincerity*.

TREBELL. Cantelupe, I quite understand. You may be right . . it's a very interesting question. Blackborough, I take it that you object first of all to the scheme that I'm bringing you.

BLACKBOROUGH. I object to those parts of it which I don't think you'll get through the House.

FARRANT. [*Feeling that he must take part.*] For instance?

BLACKBOROUGH. I've given you one already.

CANTELUPE. [*His eye on* BLACKBOROUGH.] Understand there are things in that scheme we must stand or fall by.

Suddenly TREBELL *makes for the door*. HORSHAM *gets up concernedly*.

TREBELL. Horsham, make up your mind to-night whether you can do with me or not. I have to see Percival again to-morrow . . we cut short our argument at the important point. Good-bye . . don't come down. Will you decide to-night?

HORSHAM. I have made up my own mind.

TREBELL. Is that sufficient?

HORSHAM. A collective decision is a matter of development.

TREBELL. Well, I shall expect to hear.

HORSHAM. By hurrying one only reaches a rash conclusion.

TREBELL. Then be rash for once and take the consequences. Good-night.

He is gone before HORSHAM *can compose another epigram*.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Deprecating such conduct.*] Lost his temper!

FARRANT. [*Ruffling considerably.*] Horsham, if Trebell is to be hounded out of your cabinet . . he won't go alone.

HORSHAM. [*Bitter-sweet.*] My dear Farrant . . I have yet to form my cabinet.

CANTELUPE. You are forming it to carry disestablishment, are you not, Cyril? Therefore you will form it in the best interests of the best scheme possible.

HORSHAM. Trebell was and is the best man I know of for the purpose. I'm a little weary of saying that.

He folds his arms and awaits further developments. After a moment CANTELUPE *gets up as if to address a meeting*.

CANTELUPE. Then if you would prefer not to include me . . I shall feel justified in giving independent support to a scheme I have great faith in. [*And he sits down again.*]

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Impatiently.*] My dear Cantelupe, if you think Horsham can form a disestablishment cabinet to include Trebell and exclude you, you're vastly mistaken. I for one . . .

FARRANT. But do both of you consider how valuable, how vital Trebell is to us just at this moment? The Radicals trust him. . .

BLACKBOROUGH. They hate him.

HORSHAM. [*Elucidating.*] Their front bench hates him because he turned them out. The rest of them hate their front bench. After six years of office, who wouldn't?

BLACKBOROUGH. That's true.

FARRANT. Oh, of course, we must stick to Trebell, Blackborough.

BLACKBOROUGH *is silent; so* HORSHAM *turns his attention to his cousin*.

HORSHAM. Well, Charles, I won't ask you for a decision now. I know how hard it is to accept the dictates of other men's consciences . . but a necessary condition of all political work; believe me.

CANTELUPE. [*Uneasily.*] You can form your cabinet without me, Cyril.

At this BLACKBOROUGH *charges down on them, so to speak*.

BLACKBOROUGH. No, I tell you, I'm damned if he can. Leaving the whole high church party to blackmail all they can out of us and vote how they like! Here . . I've got my Yorkshire people to think of. I

can bargain for them with you in a cabinet . . not if you've the pull of being out of it.

HORSHAM. [*With charming insinuation.*] And have you calculated, Blackborough, what may become of us if Trebell has the pull of being out of it?

BLACKBOROUGH *makes a face*.

BLACKBOROUGH. Yes . . I suppose he might turn nasty.

FARRANT. I should hope he would.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Tackling* FARRANT *with great ease*.] I should hope he would consider the matter not from the personal, but from the political point of view . . as I am trying to do.

HORSHAM. [*Tasting his epigram with enjoyment.*] Introspection is the only bar to such an honourable endeavour, [BLACKBOROUGH *gapes*.] You don't suffer from that as--for instance--Charles here, does.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Pugnaciously.*] D'you mean I'm just pretending not to attack him personally?

HORSHAM. [*Safe on his own ground.*] It's only a curious metaphysical point. Have you never noticed your distaste for the colour of a man's hair translate itself ultimately into an objection to his religious opinions . . or what not? I am sure--for instance--I could trace Charles's scruples about sitting in a cabinet with Trebell back to a sort of academic reverence for women generally which he possesses. I am sure I could . . if he were not probably now doing it himself. But this does not make the scruples less real, less religious, or less political. We must be humanly biased in expression . . or not express ourselves.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Whose thoughts have wandered.*] The man's less of a danger than he was . . I mean he'll be alone. The Liberals won't have him back. He smashed his following there to come over to us.

FARRANT. [*Giving a further meaning to this.*] Yes, Blackborough, he did.

BLACKBOROUGH. To gain his own ends! Oh, my dear Horsham, can't you see that if O'Connell had blabbed to-morrow it really would have been a blessing in disguise? I don't pretend to Cantelupe's standard . . but there must be something radically wrong with a man who could get himself into such a mess as that . . now mustn't there? Ah! . . you have a fatal partiality for clever people. I tell you . . though this might be patched up . . Trebell would fail us in some other way before we were six months older.

This speech has its effect; but HORSHAM *looks at him a little sternly*.

HORSHAM. And am I to conclude that you don't want Charles to change his mind?

BLACKBOROUGH. [*On another tack.*] Farrant has not yet allowed us to hear Percival's opinion.

FARRANT *looks rather alarmed*.

FARRANT. It has very little reference to the scandal.

BLACKBOROUGH. As that is at an end . . all the more reason we should hear it.

HORSHAM. [*Ranging himself with* FARRANT.] I called this quite informal meeting, Blackborough, only to dispose of the scandal, if possible.

BLACKBOROUGH. Well, of course, if Farrant chooses to insult Percival so gratuitously by burking his message to us . .

There is an unspoken threat in this. HORSHAM *sees it and without disguising his irritation*. . .

HORSHAM. Let us have it, Farrant.

FARRANT. [*With a sort of puzzled discontent.*] Well . . I never got to telling him of the O'Connell affair at all. He started talking to me . . saying that he couldn't for a moment agree to Trebell's proposals for the finance of his bill . . I couldn't get a word in edgeways. Then his wife came up. . .

HORSHAM *takes something in this so seriously that he actually interrupts*.

HORSHAM. Does he definitely disagree? What is his point?

FARRANT. He says Disestablishment's a bad enough speculation for the party as it is.

BLACKBOROUGH. It is inevitable.

FARRANT. He sees that. But then he says . . to go to the country again having bolstered up Education and quarrelled with everybody will be bad enough . . to go having spent fifty millions on it will dish us all for our lifetimes.

HORSHAM. What does he propose?

FARRANT. He'll offer to draft another bill and take it through himself. He says . . do as many good turns as we can with the money . . don't put it all on one horse.

BLACKBOROUGH. He's your man, Horsham. That's one difficulty settled.

HORSHAM'S *thoughts are evidently beyond* BLACKBOROUGH, *beyond the absent* PERCIVAL *even*.

HORSHAM. Oh . . any of us could carry that sort of a bill.

CANTELUPE *has heard this last passage with nothing less than horror and pale anger, which he contains no longer*.

CANTELUPE. I won't have this. I won't have this opportunity frittered away for party purposes.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Expostulating reasonably.*] My dear Cantelupe . . you'll get whatever you think it right for the Church to have. You carry a solid thirty eight votes with you.

HORSHAM'S *smooth voice intervenes. He speaks with finesse.*

HORSHAM. Percival, as an old campaigner, expresses himself very roughly. The point is, that we are after all only the trustees of the party. If we know that a certain step will decimate it . . clearly we have no right to take the step.

CANTELUPE. [*Glowing to white heat.*] Is this a time to count the consequences to ourselves?

HORSHAM. [*Unkindly.*] By your action this evening, Charles, you evidently think not. [*He salves the wound.*] No matter, I agree with you . . the bill should be a comprehensive one, whoever brings it in.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Not without enjoyment of the situation.*] Whoever brings it in will have to knuckle under to Percival over its finance.

FARRANT. Trebell won't do that. I warned Percival.

HORSHAM. Then what did he say?

FARRANT. He only swore.

HORSHAM *suddenly becomes peevish*.

HORSHAM. I think, Farrant, you should have given me this message before.

FARRANT. My dear Horsham, what had it to do with our request to O'Connell?

HORSHAM. [*Scolding the company generally.*] Well then, I wish he hadn't sent it. I wish we were not discussing these points at all. The proper time for them is at a cabinet meeting. And when we have

actually assumed the responsibilities of government . . then threats of resignation are not things to be played about with.

FARRANT. Did you expect Percival's objection to the finance of the scheme?

HORSHAM. Perhaps . . perhaps. I knew Trebell was to see him last Tuesday. I expect everybody's objections to any parts of every scheme to come at a time when I am in a proper position to reconcile them . . not now.

Having vented his grievances he sits down to recover. BLACKBOROUGH *takes advantage of the ensuing pause*.

BLACKBOROUGH. It isn't so easy for me to speak against Trebell, since he evidently dislikes me personally as much as I dislike him . . but I'm sure I'm doing my duty. Horsham . . here you have Cantelupe who won't stand in with the man, and Percival who won't stand in with his measure, while I would sooner stand in with neither. Isn't it better to face the situation now than take trouble to form the most makeshift of Cabinets, and if that doesn't go to pieces, be voted down in the House by your own party?

There is an oppressive silence. HORSHAM *is sulky. The matter is beyond* FARRANT. CANTELUPE *whose agonies have expressed themselves in slight writhings, at last, with an effort, writhes himself to his feet*.

CANTELUPE. I think I am prepared to reconsider my decision.

FARRANT. That's all right then!

He looks round wonderingly for the rest of the chorus to find that neither BLACKBOROUGH *nor* HORSHAM *have stirred*.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Stealthily.*] Is it, Horsham?

HORSHAM. [*Sotto voce.*] Why did you ever make it?

BLACKBOROUGH *leaves him for* CANTELUPE.

BLACKBOROUGH. You're afraid for the integrity of the bill.

CANTELUPE. It must be comprehensive . . that's vital.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Very forcefully.*] I give you my word to support its integrity, if you'll keep with me in persuading Horsham that the inclusion of Trebell in his cabinet will be a blow to the whole Conservative Cause. Horsham, I implore you not to pursue this short-sighted policy. All parties have made up their minds to Disestablishment . . surely nothing should be easier than to frame a bill which will please all parties.

FARRANT. [*At last perceiving the drift of all this.*] But good Lord, Blackborough . . now Cantelupe has come round and will stand in . . .

BLACKBOROUGH. That's no longer the point. And what's all this nonsense about going to the country again next year?

HORSHAM. [*Mildly.*] After consulting me Percival said at Bristol. . .

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Quite unchecked.*] I know. But if we pursue a thoroughly safe policy and the bye-elections go right . . there need be no vote of censure carried for three or four years. The Radicals want a rest with the country and they know it. And one has no right, what's more, to go wantonly plunging the country into the expenses of these constant general elections. It ruins trade.

FARRANT. [*Forlornly sticking to his point.*] What has all this to do with Trebell?

HORSHAM. [*Thoughtfully.*] Farrant, beyond what you've told us, Percival didn't recommend me to throw him over.

FARRANT. No, he didn't . . that is, he didn't exactly.

HORSHAM. Well . . he didn't?

FARRANT. I'm trying to be accurate! [*Obviously their nerves are now on edge.*] He said we should find him tough to assimilate--as he warned you.

HORSHAM *with knit brows, loses himself in thought again*. BLACKBOROUGH *quietly turns his attention to* FARRANT.

BLACKBOROUGH. Farrant, you don't seriously think that . . outside his undoubted capabilities . . Trebell is an acquisition to the party?

FARRANT. [*Unwillingly.*] Perhaps not. But if you're going to chuck a man . . don't chuck him when he's down.

BLACKBOROUGH. He's no longer down. We've got him O'Connell's promise and jolly grateful he ought to be. I think the least we can do is to keep our minds clear between Trebell's advantage and the party's.

CANTELUPE. [*From the distant music-stool.*] And the party's and the Country's.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Countering quite deftly.*] Cantelupe, either we think it best for the country to have our party in power or we don't.

FARRANT. [*In judicious temper.*] Certainly, I don't feel our responsibility towards him is what it was ten minutes ago. The man has other careers besides his political one.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Ready to praise.*] Clever as paint at the Bar--best Company lawyer we've got.

CANTELUPE. It is not what he loses, I think . . but what we lose in losing him.

He says this so earnestly that HORSHAM *pays attention.*

HORSHAM. No, my dear Charles, let us be practical. If his position with us is to be made impossible it is better that he shouldn't assume it.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Soft and friendly.*] How far are you actually pledged to him?

HORSHAM *looks up with the most ingenuous of smiles*.

HORSHAM. That's always such a difficult sort of point to determine, isn't it? He thinks he is to join us. But I've not yet been commanded to form a cabinet. If neither you--nor Percival--nor perhaps others will work with him . . what am I to do? [*He appeals to them generally to justify this attitude.*]

BLACKBOROUGH. He no longer thinks he's to join us . . it's the question he left us to decide.

He leaves HORSHAM, *whose perplexity is diminishing*. FARRANT *makes an effort*.

FARRANT. But the scandal won't weaken his position with us now. There won't be any scandal . . there won't, Blackborough.

HORSHAM. There may be. Though, I take it we're all guiltless of having mentioned the matter.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*Very detached.*] I've only known of it since I came into this house . . but I shall not mention it.

FARRANT. Oh, I'm afraid my wife knows. [*He adds hastily.*] My fault . . my fault entirely.

BLACKBOROUGH. I tell you Rumour's electric.

HORSHAM *has turned to* FARRANT *with a sweet smile and with the air of a man about to be relieved of all responsibility*.

HORSHAM. What does she say?

FARRANT. [*As one speaks of a nice woman.*] She was horrified.

HORSHAM. Of course. [*Once more he finds refuge and comfort on the hearthrug, to say, after a moment, with fine resignation.*] I suppose I must let him go.

CANTELUPE. [*On his feet again.*] Cyril!

HORSHAM. Yes, Charles?

With this query he turns an accusing eye on CANTELUPE, *who is silenced*.

BLACKBOROUGH. Have you made up your mind to that?

FARRANT. [*In great distress.*] You're wrong, Horsham. [*Then in greater.*] That is . . I =think= you're wrong.

HORSHAM. I'd sooner not let him know to-night.

BLACKBOROUGH. But he asked you to.

HORSHAM. [*All show of resistance gone.*] Did he? Then I suppose I must. [*He sighs deeply.*]

BLACKBOROUGH. Then I'll get back to Aylesbury.

He picks up his motor-cap from the table and settles it on his head with immense aplomb.

HORSHAM. So late?

BLACKBOROUGH. Really one can get along quicker at night if one knows the road. You're in town, aren't you, Farrant? Shall I drop you at Grosvenor Square?

FARRANT. [*Ungraciously.*] Thank you.

BLACKBOROUGH. [*With a conqueror's geniality.*] I don't mind telling you now, Horsham, that ever since we met at Shapters I've been wondering how you'd escape from this association with Trebell. Thought he was being very clever when he crossed the House to us!

It's needed a special providence. You'd never have got a cabinet together to include him.

HORSHAM. [*With much intention.*] No.

FARRANT. [*Miserably.*] Yes, I suppose that intrigue was a mistake from the beginning.

BLACKBOROUGH. Well, good-night. [*As he turns to go he finds* CANTELUPE *upright, staring very sternly at him*.] Good-night, Cantelupe.

CANTELUPE. From what motives have we thrown Trebell over?

BLACKBOROUGH. Never mind the motives if the move is the right one. [*Then he nods at* HORSHAM.] I shall be up again next week if you want me.

And he flourishes out of the room; a man who has done a good hour's work. FARRANT, *who has been mooning depressedly around, now backs towards the door*.

FARRANT. In one way, of course, Trebell won't care a damn. I mean, he knows as well as we do that office isn't worth having . . he has never been a place-hunter. On the other hand . . what with one thing and the other . . Blackborough is a sensible fellow. I suppose it can't be helped.

HORSHAM. Blackborough will tell you so. Good-night.

So FARRANT *departs, leaving the two cousins together*. CANTELUPE *has not moved and now faces* HORSHAM *just as accusingly*.

CANTELUPE. Cyril, this is tragic.

HORSHAM. [*More to himself than in answer.*] Yes . . most annoying.

CANTELUPE. Lucifer, son of the morning! Why is it always the highest who fall?

HORSHAM *shies fastidiously at this touch of poetry*.

HORSHAM. No, my dear Charles, let us above all things keep our mental balance. Trebell is a most capable fellow. I'd set my heart on having him with me . . he'll be most awkward to deal with in opposition. But we shall survive his loss and so would the country.

CANTELUPE. [*Desperately.*] Cyril, promise me there shall be no compromise over this measure.

HORSHAM. [*Charmingly candid.*] No . . no unnecessary compromise, I promise you.

CANTELUPE. [*With a sigh.*] If we had done what we have done to-night in the right spirit! Blackborough was almost vindictive.

HORSHAM. [*Smiling without amusement.*] Didn't you keep thinking . . I did . . of that affair of his with Mrs. Parkington . . years ago?

CANTELUPE. There was never any proof of it.

HORSHAM. No . . he bought off the husband.

CANTELUPE. [*Uneasily.*] His objections to Trebell were--political.

HORSHAM. Yours weren't.

CANTELUPE. [*More uneasily still.*] I withdrew mine.

HORSHAM. [*With elderly reproof.*] I don't think, Charles, you have the least conception of what a nicely balanced machine a cabinet is.

CANTELUPE. [*Imploring comfort.*] But should we have held together through Trebell's bill?

HORSHAM. [*A little impatient.*] Perhaps not. But once I had them all round a table . . Trebell is very keen on office for all his independent airs . . he and Percival could have argued the thing out. However, it's too late now.

CANTELUPE. Is it?

For a moment HORSHAM *is tempted to indulge in the luxury of changing his mind; but he puts Satan behind him with a shake of the head*.

HORSHAM. Well, you see . . Percival I can't do without. Now that Blackborough knows of his objections to the finance he'd go to him and take Chisholm and offer to back them up. I know he would . . he didn't take Farrant away with him for nothing. [*Then he flashes out rather shrilly.*] It's Trebell's own fault. He ought not to have committed himself definitely to any scheme until he was safely in office. I warned him about Percival . . I warned him not to be explicit. One cannot work with men who will make up their minds prematurely. No, I shall not change my mind. I shall write to him.

He goes firmly to his writing desk leaving CANTELUPE *forlorn*.

CANTELUPE. What about a messenger?

HORSHAM. Not at this time of night. I'll post it.

CANTELUPE. I'll post it as I go.

He seeks comfort again in the piano and this time starts to play, with one finger and some hesitation, the first bars of a Bach fugue. HORSHAM'S *pen-nib is disappointing him and the letter is not easy to phrase*.

HORSHAM. But I hate coming to immediate decisions. The administrative part of my brain always tires after half an hour. Does yours, Charles?

CANTELUPE. What do you think Trebell will do now?

HORSHAM. [*A little grimly.*] Punish us all he can.

On reaching the second voice in the fugue CANTELUPE'S *virtuosity breaks down*.

CANTELUPE. All that ability turned to destructiveness . . what a pity! That's the paradox of human activities . .

Suddenly HORSHAM *looks up and his face is lighted with a seraphic smile*.

HORSHAM. Charles . . I wish we could do without Blackborough.

CANTELUPE. [*Struck with the idea.*] Well . . why not?

HORSHAM. Yes . . I must think about it. [*They both get up, cheered considerably.*] You won't forget this, will you?

CANTELUPE. [*The letter in* HORSHAM'S *hand accusing him*.] No . . no. I don't think I have been the cause of your dropping Trebell, have I?

HORSHAM, *rid of the letter, is rid of responsibility and his charming equable self again. He comforts his cousin paternally.*

HORSHAM. I don't think so. The split would have come when Blackborough checkmated my forming a cabinet. It would have pleased him to do that . . and he could have, over Trebell. But now that question's out of the way . . you won't get such a bad measure with Trebell in opposition. He'll frighten us into keeping it up to the mark, so to speak.

CANTELUPE. [*A little comforted.*] But I shall miss one or two of those ideas . .

HORSHAM. [*So pleasantly sceptical.*] Do you think they'd have outlasted the second reading? Dullness in the country one expects. Dullness in the House one can cope with. But do you know, I have never sat in a cabinet yet that didn't greet anything like a new idea in chilling silence.

CANTELUPE. Well, I should regret to have caused you trouble, Cyril.

HORSHAM. [*His hand on the other's shoulder.*] Oh . . we don't take politics so much to heart as that, I hope.

CANTELUPE. [*With sweet gravity.*] I take politics very much to heart. Yes, I know what you mean . . but that's the sort of remark that makes people call you cynical. [HORSHAM *smiles as if at a compliment and starts with* CANTELUPE *towards the door*. CANTELUPE, *who would not hurt his feelings, changes the subject*.] By the bye, I'm glad we met this evening! Do you hear Aunt Mary wants to sell the Burford Holbein? Can she?

HORSHAM. [*Taking as keen, but no keener, an interest in this than in the difficulty he has just surmounted.*] Yes, by the will she can, but she mustn't. Dear me, I thought I'd put a stop to that foolishness. Well now, we must take that matter up very seriously. . .

They go out talking arm in arm.

THE FOURTH ACT

At TREBELL'S again; later, the same evening.

His room is in darkness but for the flicker the fire makes and the streaks of moonlight between the curtains. The door is open, though, and you see the light of the lamp on the stairs. You hear his footstep too. On his way he stops to draw back the curtains of the passage-way window; the moonlight makes his face look very pale. Then he serves the curtains of his own window the same; flings it open, moreover, and stands looking out. Something below draws his attention. After leaning over the balcony with a short "Hullo" *he goes quickly downstairs again. In a minute* WEDGECROFT *comes up*. TREBELL *follows, pausing by the door a moment to light up the room*. WEDGECROFT *is radiant*.

TREBELL. [*With a twist of his mouth.*] Promised, has he?

WEDGECROFT. Suddenly broke out as we walked along, that he liked the look of you and that men must stand by one another

nowadays against these women. Then he said good-night and walked away.

TREBELL. Back to Ireland and the thirteenth century.

WEDGECROFT. After to-morrow.

TREBELL. [*Taking all the meaning of to-morrow.*] Yes. Are you in for perjury, too?

WEDGECROFT. [*His thankfulness checked a little.*] No . . not exactly.

TREBELL *walks away from him.*

TREBELL. It's a pity the truth isn't to be told, I think. I suppose the verdict will be murder.

WEDGECROFT. They won't catch the man.

TREBELL. You don't mean . . me.

WEDGECROFT. No, no . . my dear fellow.

TREBELL. You might, you know. But nobody seems to see this thing as I see it. If I were on that jury I'd say murder too and accuse . . so many circumstances, Gilbert, that we should go home . . and look in the cupboards. What a lumber of opinions we inherit and keep!

WEDGECROFT. [*Humouring him.*] Ought we to burn the house down?

TREBELL. Rules and regulations for the preservation of rubbish are the laws of England . . and I was adding to their number.

WEDGECROFT. And so you shall . . to the applause of a grateful country.

TREBELL. [*Studying his friend's kindly encouraging face.*] Gilbert, it is not so much that you're an incorrigible optimist . . but why do you subdue your mind to flatter people into cheerfulness?

WEDGECROFT. I'm a doctor, my friend.

TREBELL. You're a part of our tendency to keep things alive by hook or by crook . . not a spark but must be carefully blown upon. The world's old and tired; it dreads extinction. I think I disapprove . . I think I've more faith.

WEDGECROFT. [*Scolding him.*] Nonsense . . you've the instinct to preserve your life as everyone else has . . and I'm here to show you how.

TREBELL. [*Beyond the reach of his kindness.*] I assure you that these two days while you've been fussing around O'Connell--bless your kind heart--I've been waiting events, indifferent enough to understand his indifference.

WEDGECROFT. Not indifferent.

TREBELL. Lifeless enough already, then. [*Suddenly a thought strikes him.*] D'you think it was Horsham and his little committee persuaded O'Connell?

WEDGECROFT. On the contrary.

TREBELL. So you need not have let them into the secret?

WEDGECROFT. No.

TREBELL. Think of that.

He almost laughs; but WEDGECROFT *goes on quite innocently.*

WEDGECROFT. Yes . . I'm sorry.

TREBELL. Upsetting their moral digestion for nothing.

WEDGECROFT. But when O'Connell wouldn't listen to us we had to rope in the important people.

TREBELL. With their united wisdom. [*Then he breaks away again into great bitterness.*] No . . what do they make of this woman's death? I saw them in that room, Gilbert, like men seen through the wrong end of a telescope. D'you think if the little affair with Nature . . her offence and mine against the conveniences of civilization . . had ended in my death too . . then they'd have stopped to wonder at the misuse and waste of the only force there is in the world . . come to think of it, there is no other . . than this desire for expression . . in words . . or through children. Would they have thought of that and stopped whispering about the scandal?

Through this WEDGECROFT *has watched him very gravely*.

WEDGECROFT. Trebell . . if the inquest to-morrow had put you out of action . .

TREBELL. Should I have grown a beard and travelled abroad and after ten years timidly tried to climb my way back into politics? When public opinion takes its heel from your face it keeps it for your finger-tips. After twenty years to be forgiven by your more broad-minded friends and tolerated as a dotard by a new generation. . .

WEDGECROFT. Nonsense. What age are you now . . forty-six . . forty-seven?

TREBELL. Well . . let's instance a good man. Gladstone had done his best work by sixty-five. Then he began to be popular. Think of his last years of oratory.

He has gone to his table and now very methodically starts to tidy his papers, WEDGECROFT *still watching him*.

WEDGECROFT. You'd have had to thank Heaven for a little that there were more lives than one to lead.

TREBELL. That's another of your faults, Gilbert . . it's a comfort just now to enumerate them. You're an anarchist . . a kingdom to yourself.

You make little treaties with Truth and with Beauty, and what can disturb you? I'm a part of the machine I believe in. If my life as I've made it is to be cut short . . the rest of me shall walk out of the world and slam the door . . with the noise of a pistol shot.

WEDGECROFT. [*Concealing some uneasiness.*] Then I'm glad it's not to be cut short. You and your cabinet rank and your disestablishment bill!

TREBELL *starts to enjoy his secret*.

TREBELL. Yes . . our minds have been much relieved within the last half hour, haven't they?

WEDGECROFT. I scribbled Horsham a note in a messenger office and sent it as soon as O'Connell had left me.

TREBELL. He'd be glad to get that.

WEDGECROFT. He has been most kind about the whole thing.

TREBELL. Oh, he means well.

WEDGECROFT. [*Following up his fancied advantage.*] But, my friend . . suicide whilst of unsound mind would never have done . . The hackneyed verdict hits the truth, you know.

TREBELL. You think so?

WEDGECROFT. I don't say there aren't excuses enough in this miserable world, but fundamentally . . no sane person will destroy life.

TREBELL. [*His thoughts shifting their plane.*] Was she so very mad? I'm not thinking of her own death.

WEDGECROFT. Don't brood, Trebell. Your mind isn't healthy yet about her and--

TREBELL. And my child.

Even WEDGECROFT'S *kindness is at fault before the solemnity of this*.

WEDGECROFT. Is that how you're thinking of it?

TREBELL. How else? It's very inexplicable . . this sense of fatherhood. [*The eyes of his mind travel down--what vista of possibilities. Then he shakes himself free.*] Let's drop the subject. To finish the list of shortcomings, you're a bit of an artist too . . therefore I don't think you'll understand.

WEDGECROFT. [*Successfully decoyed into argument.*] Surely an artist is a man who understands.

TREBELL. Everything about life, but not life itself. That's where art fails a man.

WEDGECROFT. That's where everything but living fails a man. [*Drifting into introspection himself.*] Yes, it's true. I can talk cleverly and I've written a book . . but I'm barren. [*Then the healthy mind re-asserts itself.*] No, it's not true. Our thoughts are children . . and marry and intermarry. And we're peopling the world . . not badly.

TREBELL. Well . . either life is too little a thing to matter or it's so big that such specks of it as we may be are of no account. These are two points of view. And then one has to consider if death can't be sometimes the last use made of life.

There is a tone of menace in this which recalls WEDGECROFT *to the present trouble*.

WEDGECROFT. I doubt the virtue of sacrifice . . or the use of it.

TREBELL. How else could I tell Horsham that my work matters? Does he think so now? . . not he.

WEDGECROFT. You mean if they'd had to throw you over?

Once again TREBELL *looks up with that secretive smile*.

TREBELL. Yes . . if they'd had to.

WEDGECROFT. [*Unreasonably nervous, so he thinks.*] My dear fellow, Horsham would have thought it was the shame and disgrace if you'd shot yourself after the inquest. That's the proper sentimental thing for you so-called strong men to do on like occasions. Why, if your name were to come out to-morrow, your best meaning friends would be sending you pistols by post, requesting you to use them like a gentleman. Horsham would grieve over ten dinner-tables in succession and then return to his philosophy. One really mustn't waste a life trying to shock polite politicians. There'd even be a suspicion of swagger in it.

TREBELL. Quite so . . the bomb that's thrown at their feet must be something otherwise worthless.

FRANCES *comes in quickly, evidently in search of her brother. Though she has not been crying, her eyes are wide with grief.*

FRANCES. Oh, Henry . . I'm so glad you're still up. [*She notices* WEDGECROFT.] How d'you do, Doctor?

TREBELL. [*Doubling his mask of indifference.*] Meistersinger's over early.

FRANCES. Is it?

TREBELL. Not much past twelve yet.

FRANCES. [*The little gibe lost on her.*] It was Tristan to-night. I'm quite upset. I heard just as I was coming away . . Amy O'Connell's dead. [*Both men hold their breath.* TREBELL *is the first to find control of his and give the cue*.]

TREBELL. Yes . . Wedgecroft has just told me.

FRANCES. She was only taken ill last week . . it's so extraordinary. [*She remembers the doctor.*] Oh . . have you been attending her?

WEDGECROFT. Yes.

FRANCES. I hear there's to be an inquest.

WEDGECROFT. Yes.

FRANCES. But what has been the matter?

TREBELL. [*Sharply forestalling any answer.*] You'll know to-morrow.

FRANCES. [*The little snub almost bewildering her.*] Anything private? I mean . .

TREBELL. No . . I'll tell you. Don't make Gilbert repeat a story twice . . He's tired with a good day's work.

WEDGECROFT. Yes . . I'll be getting away.

FRANCES *never heeds this flash of a further meaning between the two men*.

FRANCES. And I meant to have gone to see her to-day. Was the end very sudden? Did her husband arrive in time?

WEDGECROFT. Yes.

FRANCES. They didn't get on . . he'll be frightfully upset.

TREBELL *resists a hideous temptation to laugh*.

WEDGECROFT. Good night, Trebell.

TREBELL. Good night, Gilbert. Many thanks.

There is enough of a caress in TREBELL'S *tone to turn* FRANCES *towards their friend, a little remorseful for treating him so casually, now as always*.

FRANCES. He's always thanking you. You're always doing things for him.

WEDGECROFT. Good night. [*Seeing the tears in her eyes.*] Oh, don't grieve.

FRANCES. One shouldn't be sorry when people die, I know. But she liked me more than I liked her. . [*This time* TREBELL *does laugh, silently*.] . . so I somehow feel in her debt and unable to pay now.

TREBELL. [*An edge on his voice.*] Yes . . people keep on dying at all sorts of ages, in all sorts of ways. But we seem never to get used to it . . narrow-minded as we are.

WEDGECROFT. Don't you talk nonsense.

TREBELL. [*One note sharper yet.*] One should occasionally test one's sanity by doing so. If we lived in the logical world we like to believe in, I could also prove that black was white. As it is . . there are more ways of killing a cat than hanging it.

WEDGECROFT. Had I better give you a sleeping draught?

FRANCES. Are you doctoring him for once? Henry, have you at last managed to overwork yourself?

TREBELL. No . . I started the evening by a charming little dinner at the Van Meyer's . . sat next to Miss Grace Cutler, who is writing a *vie intime* of Louis Quinze and engaged me with anecdotes of the same.

FRANCES. A champion of her sex, whom I do not like.

WEDGECROFT. She's writing such a book to prove that women are equal to anything.

He goes towards the door and FRANCES *goes with him*. TREBELL *never turns his head*.

TREBELL. I shall not come and open the door for you . . but mind you shut it.

FRANCES *comes back.*

FRANCES. Henry . . this is dreadful about that poor little woman.

TREBELL. An unwelcome baby was arriving. She got some quack to kill her.

These exact words are like a blow in the face to her, from which, being a woman of brave common sense, she does not shrink.

TREBELL. What do you say to that?

She walks away from him, thinking painfully.

FRANCES. She had never had a child. There's the common-place thing to say . . Ungrateful little fool! But . .

TREBELL. If you had been in her place?

FRANCES. [*Subtly.*] I have never made the mistake of marrying. She grew frightened, I suppose. Not just physically frightened. How can a man understand?

TREBELL. The fear of life . . do you think it was . . which is the beginning of all evil?

FRANCES. A woman must choose what her interpretation of life is to be . . as a man must too in his way . . as you and I have chosen, Henry.

TREBELL. [*Asking from real interest in her.*] Was yours a deliberate choice and do you never regret it?

FRANCES. [*Very simply and clearly.*] Perhaps one does nothing quite deliberately and for a definite reason. My state has its compensations . . if one doesn't value them too highly. I've travelled in thought over all this question. You mustn't blame a woman for wishing not to bear children. But . . well, if one doesn't like the fruit one mustn't cultivate the flower. And I suppose that saying condemns poor Amy . .

condemned her to death . . [*Then her face hardens as she concentrates her meaning.*] and brands most men as . . let's unsentimentally call it =illogical=, doesn't it?

He takes the thrust in silence.

TREBELL. Did you notice the light in my window as you came in?

FRANCES. Yes . . in both as I got out of the cab. Do you want the curtains drawn back?

TREBELL. Yes . . don't touch them.

He has thrown himself into his chair by the fire. She lapses into thought again.

FRANCES. Poor little woman.

TREBELL. [*In deep anger.*] Well, if women will be little and poor . .

She goes to him and slips an arm over his shoulder.

FRANCES. What is it you're worried about . . if a mere sister may ask?

TREBELL. [*Into the fire.*] I want to think. I haven't thought for years.

FRANCES. Why, you have done nothing else.

TREBELL. I've been working out problems in legal and political algebra.

FRANCES. You want to think of =yourself=.

TREBELL. Yes.

FRANCES. [*Gentle and ironic.*] Have you ever, for one moment, thought in that sense of anyone else?

TREBELL. Is that a complaint?

FRANCES. The first in ten years' housekeeping.

TREBELL. No, I never have . . but I've never thought selfishly either.

FRANCES. That's a paradox I don't quite understand.

TREBELL. Until women do they'll remain where they are . . and what they are.

FRANCES. Oh, I know you hate us.

TREBELL. Yes, dear sister, I'm afraid I do. And I hate your influence on men . . compromise, tenderness, pity, lack of purpose. Women don't know the values of things, not even their own value.

For a moment she studies him, wonderingly.

FRANCES. I'll take up the counter-accusation to-morrow. Now I'm tired and I'm going to bed. If I may insult you by mothering you, so should you. You look tired and I've seldom seen you.

TREBELL. I'm waiting up for a message.

FRANCES. So late?

TREBELL. It's a matter of life and death.

FRANCES. Are you joking?

TREBELL. Yes. If you want to spoil me find me a book to read.

FRANCES. What will you have?

TREBELL. Huckleberry Finn. It's on a top shelf towards the end somewhere . . or should be.

She finds the book. On her way back with it she stops and shivers.

FRANCES. I don't think I shall sleep to-night. Poor Amy O'Connell!

TREBELL. [*Curiously.*] Are you afraid of death?

FRANCES. [*With humorous stoicism.*] It will be the end of me, perhaps.

She gives him the book, with its red cover; the '86 edition, a boy's friend evidently. He fingers it familiarly.

TREBELL. Thank you. Mark Twain's a jolly fellow. He has courage . . . comic courage. That's what's wanted. Nothing stands against it. You be-little yourself by laughing . . then all this world and the last and the next grow little too . . and so you grow great again. Switch off some light, will you?

FRANCES. [*Clicking off all but his reading lamp.*] So?

TREBELL. Thanks. Good night, Frankie.

She turns at the door, with a glad smile.

FRANCES. Good night. When did you last use that nursery name?

Then she goes, leaving him still fingering the book, but looking into the fire and far beyond. Behind him through the open window one sees how cold and clear the night is.

* * * * *

At eight in the morning he is still here. His lamp is out, the fire is out and the book laid aside. The white morning light penetrates every crevice of the room and shows every line on TREBELL'S *face. The spirit of the man is strained past all reason. The door opens suddenly and* FRANCES *comes in, troubled, nervous. Interrupted in her dressing, she has put on some wrap or other.*

FRANCES. Henry . . Simpson says you've not been to bed all night.

He turns his head and says with inappropriate politeness--

TREBELL. No. Good morning.

FRANCES. Oh, my dear . . what is wrong?

TREBELL. The message hasn't come . . and I've been thinking.

FRANCES. Why don't you tell me? [*He turns his head away.*] I think you haven't the right to torture me.

TREBELL. Your sympathy would only blind me towards the facts I want to face.

SIMPSON, *the maid, undisturbed in her routine, brings in the morning's letters*. FRANCES *rounds on her irritably*.

FRANCES. What is it, Simpson?

MAID. The letters, Ma'am.

TREBELL *is on his feet at that*.

TREBELL. Ah . . I want them.

FRANCES. [*Taking the letters composedly enough.*] Thank you.

SIMPSON *departs and* TREBELL *comes to her for his letters. She looks at him with baffled affection.*

FRANCES. Can I do nothing? Oh, Henry!

TREBELL. Help me to open my letters.

FRANCES. Don't you leave them to Mr. Kent?

TREBELL. Not this morning.

FRANCES. But there are so many.

TREBELL. [*For the first time lifting his voice from its dull monotony.*] What a busy man I was.

FRANCES. Henry . . you're a little mad.

TREBELL. Do you find me so? That's interesting.

FRANCES. [*With the ghost of a smile.*] Well . . maddening.

By this time he is sitting at his table; she near him watching closely. They halve the considerable post and start to open it.

TREBELL. We arrange them in three piles . . personal . . political . . and preposterous.

FRANCES. This is an invitation . . the Anglican League.

TREBELL. I can't go.

She looks sideways at him as he goes on mechanically tearing the envelopes.

FRANCES. I heard you come upstairs about two o'clock.

TREBELL. That was to dip my head in water. Then I made an instinctive attempt to go to bed . . got my tie off even.

FRANCES. [*Her anxiety breaking out.*] If you'd tell me that you're only ill . . .

TREBELL. [*Forbiddingly commonplace.*] What's that letter? Don't fuss . . and remember that abnormal conduct is sometimes quite rational.

FRANCES *returns to her task with misty eyes*.

FRANCES. It's from somebody whose son can't get into something.

TREBELL. The third heap . . Kent's . . the preposterous. [*Talking on with steady monotony.*] But I saw it would not do to interrupt that logical train of thought which reached definition about half past six. I had then been gleaning until you came in.

FRANCES. [*Turning the neat little note in her hand.*] This is from Lord Horsham. He writes his name small at the bottom of the envelope.

TREBELL. [*Without a tremor.*] Ah . . give it me.

He opens this as he has opened the others, carefully putting the envelope to one side. FRANCES *has ceased for the moment to watch him*.

FRANCES. That's Cousin Robert's handwriting. [*She puts a square envelope at his hand.*] Is a letter marked private from the Education Office political or personal?

By this he has read HORSHAM'S *letter twice. So he tears it up and speaks very coldly.*

TREBELL. Either. It doesn't matter.

In the silence her fears return.

FRANCES. Henry, it's a foolish idea . . I suppose I have it because I hardly slept for thinking of her. Your trouble is nothing to do with Amy O'Connell, is it?

TREBELL. [*His voice strangled in his throat.*] Her child should have been my child too.

FRANCES. [*Her eyes open, the whole landscape of her mind suddenly clear.*] Oh, I . . no, I didn't think so . . but. . .

TREBELL. [*Dealing his second blow as remorselessly as dealt to him.*] Also I'm not joining the new Cabinet, my dear sister.

FRANCES. [*Her thoughts rushing now to the present--the future.*] Not! Because of . . ? Do people know? Will they . ? You didn't . . ?

As mechanically as ever he has taken up COUSIN ROBERT'S *letter and, in some sense, read it. Now he recapitulates, meaninglessly, that his voice may just deaden her pain and his own.*

TREBELL. Robert says . . that we've not been to see them for some time . . but that now I'm a greater man than ever I must be very busy. The vicarage has been painted and papered throughout and looks much fresher. Mary sends you her love and hopes you have no return of the rheumatism. And he would like to send me the proof sheets of his critical commentary on First Timothy . . for my alien eye might possibly detect some logical lapses. Need he repeat to me his thankfulness at my new attitude upon Disestablishment . . or assure me again that I have his prayers. Could we not go and stay there only for a few days? Possibly his opinion--

She has borne this cruel kindness as long as she can and she breaks out . .

FRANCES. Oh . . don't . . don't!

He falls from his seeming callousness to the very blankness of despair.

TREBELL. No, we'll leave that . . and the rest . . and everything.

Her agony passes.

FRANCES. What do you mean to do?

TREBELL. There's to be no public scandal.

FRANCES. Why has Lord Horsham thrown you over then . . or hasn't that anything to do with it?

TREBELL. It has to do with it.

FRANCES. [*Lifting her voice; some tone returning to it.*] Unconsciously . . I've known for years that this sort of thing might happen to you.

TREBELL. Why?

FRANCES. Power over men and women and contempt for them! Do you think they don't take their revenge sooner or later?

TREBELL. Much good may it do them!

FRANCES. Human nature turns against you . . by instinct . . in self-defence.

TREBELL. And my own human-nature!

FRANCES. [*Shocked into great pity, by his half articulate pain.*] Yes . . you must have loved her, Henry . . in some odd way. I'm sorry for you both.

TREBELL. I'm hating her now . . as a man can only hate his own silliest vices.

FRANCES. [*Flashing into defence.*] That's wrong of you. If you thought of her only as a pretty little fool . . Bearing your child . . all her womanly life belonged to you . . and for that time there was no other sort of life in her. So she became what you thought her.

TREBELL. That's not true.

FRANCES. It's true enough . . it's true of men towards women. You can't think of them through generations as one thing and then suddenly find them another.

TREBELL. [*Hammering at his fixed idea.*] She should have brought that child into the world.

FRANCES. You didn't love her enough!

TREBELL. I didn't love her at all.

FRANCES. Then why should she value your gift?

TREBELL. For its own sake.

FRANCES. [*Turning away.*] It's hopeless . . you don't understand.

TREBELL. [*Helpless; almost like a deserted child.*] I've been trying to . . all through the night.

FRANCES. [*Turning back enlightened a little.*] That's more the trouble then than the Cabinet question?

He shakes himself to his feet and begins to pace the room; his keenness coming back to him, his brow knitting again with the delight of thought.

TREBELL. Oh . . as to me against the world . . I'm fortified with comic courage. [*Then turning on her like any examining professor.*] Now which do you believe . . that Man is the reformer, or that the Time brings forth such men as it needs and lobster-like can grow another claw?

FRANCES. [*Watching this new mood carefully.*] I believe that you'll be missed from Lord Horsham's Cabinet.

TREBELL. The hand-made statesman and his hand-made measure! They were out of place in that pretty Tory garden. Those men are the natural growth of the time. Am I?

FRANCES. Just as much. And wasn't your bill going to be such a good piece of work? That can't be thrown away . . wasted.

TREBELL. Can one impose a clever idea upon men and women? I wonder.

FRANCES. That rather begs the question of your very existence, doesn't it?

He comes to a standstill.

TREBELL. I know.

His voice shows her that meaning in her words and beyond it a threat. She goes to him, suddenly shaking with fear.

FRANCES. Henry, I didn't mean that.

TREBELL. You think I've a mind to put an end to that same?

FRANCES. [*Belittling her fright.*] No . . for how unreasonable. . .

TREBELL. In view of my promising past. I've stood for success, Fanny; I still stand for success. I could still do more outside the Cabinet than the rest of them, inside, will do. But suddenly I've a feeling the work would be barren. [*His eyes shift beyond her; beyond the room.*] What is it in your thoughts and actions which makes them bear fruit? Something that the roughest peasant may have in common with the best of us intellectual men . . something that a dog might have. It isn't successful cleverness.

She stands . . his trouble beyond her reach.

FRANCES. Come now . . you've done very well with your life.

TREBELL. Do you know how empty I feel of all virtue at this moment?

He leaves her. She must bring him back to the plane on which she can help him.

FRANCES. We must think what's best to be done . . now . . and for the future.

TREBELL. Why, I could go on earning useless money at the Bar . . think how nice that would be. I could blackmail the next judgeship out of Horsham. I think I could even smash his Disestablishment Bill . . and perhaps get into the next Liberal Cabinet and start my own all over again, with necessary modifications. I shan't do any such things.

FRANCES. No one knows about you and poor Amy?

TREBELL. Half a dozen friends. Shall I offer to give evidence at the inquest this morning?

FRANCES. [*With a little shiver.*] They'll say bad enough things about her without your blackening her good name.

Without warning, his anger and anguish break out again.

TREBELL. All she had . . all there is left of her! She was a nothingness . . silly . . vain. And I gave her this power over me!

He is beaten, exhausted. Now she goes to him, motherlike.

FRANCES. My dear, listen to me for a little. Consider that as a sorrow and put it behind you. And think now . . whatever love there may be between us has neither hatred nor jealousy in it, has it, Henry? Since I'm not a mistress or a friend but just the likest fellow-creature to you . . perhaps.

TREBELL. [*Putting out his hand for hers.*] Yes, my sister. What I've wanted to feel for vague humanity has been what I should have felt for you . . if you'd ever made a single demand on me.

She puts her arms round him; able to speak.

FRANCES. Let's go away somewhere . . I'll make demands. I need refreshing as much as you. My joy of life has been withered in me . . oh, for a long time now. We must kiss the earth again . . take interest in common things, common people. There's so much of the world we don't know. There's air to breathe everywhere. Think of the flowers in a Tyrol valley in the early spring. One can walk for days, not hurrying, as soon as the passes are open. And the people are kind. There's Italy . . there's Russia full of simple folk. When we've learned to be friends with them we shall both feel so much better.

TREBELL. [*Shaking his head, unmoved.*] My dear sister . . I should be bored to death. The life contemplative and peripatetic would literally bore me into a living death.

FRANCES. [*Letting it be a fairy tale.*] Is your mother the Wide World nothing to you? Can't you open your heart like a child again?

TREBELL. No, neither to the beauty of Nature nor the particular human animals that are always called a part of it. I don't even see them with your eyes. I'm a son of the anger of Man at men's foolishness, and unless I've that to feed upon . . .! [*Now he looks at her, as if for the first time wanting to explain himself, and his voice changes.*] Don't you know that when a man cuts himself shaving, he swears? When he loses a seat in the Cabinet he turns inward for comfort . . and if he only finds there a spirit which should have been born, but is dead . . what's to be done then?

FRANCES. [*In a whisper.*] You mustn't think of that woman. . .

TREBELL. I've reasoned my way through life. . .

FRANCES. I see how awful it is to have the double blow fall.

TREBELL. [*The wave of his agony rising again.*] But here's something in me which no knowledge touches . . some feeling . . some power which should be the beginning of new strength. But it has been killed in me unborn before I had learnt to understand . . and that's killing me.

FRANCES. [*Crying out.*] Why . . why did no woman teach you to be gentle? Why did you never believe in any woman? Perhaps even I am to blame. . .

TREBELL. The little fool, the little fool . . why did she kill my child? What did it matter what I thought her? We were committed together to that one thing. Do you think I didn't know that I was heartless and that she was socially in the wrong? But what did Nature care for that? And Nature has broken us.

FRANCES. [*Clinging to him as he beats the air.*] Not you. She's dead, poor girl . . but not you.

TREBELL. Yes . . that's the mystery no one need believe till he has dipped in it. The man bears the child in his soul as the woman carries it in her body.

There is silence between them, till she speaks low and tonelessly, never loosing his hand.

FRANCES. Henry, I want your promise that you'll go on living till . . till . .

TREBELL. Don't cry, Fanny, that's very foolish.

FRANCES. Till you've learnt to look at all this calmly. Then I can trust you.

TREBELL *smiles, not at all grimly*.

TREBELL. But, you see, it would give Horsham and Blackborough such a shock if I shot myself . . it would make them think about things.

FRANCES. [*With one catch of wretched laughter.*] Oh, my dear, if shooting's wanted . . shoot them. Or I'll do it for you.

He sits in his chair just from weariness. She stands by him, her hand still grasping his.

TREBELL. You see, Fanny, as I said to Gilbert last night . . our lives are our own and yet not our own. We understand living for others and dying for others. The first is easy . . it's a way out of boredom. To make the second popular we had to invent a belief in personal resurrection. Do you think we shall ever understand dying in the sure and certain hope that it really doesn't matter . . that God is infinitely economical and wastes perhaps less of the power in us after our death than men do while we live?

FRANCES. I want your promise, Henry.

TREBELL. You know I never make promises . . it's taking oneself too seriously. Unless indeed one has the comic courage to break them too. I've upset you very much with my troubles. Don't you think you'd better go and finish dressing? [*She doesn't move.*] My dear . . you don't propose to hold my right hand so safely for years to come. Even so, I still could jump out of a window.

FRANCES. I'll trust you, Henry.

She looks into his eyes and he does not flinch. Then, with a final grip she leaves him. When she is at the door he speaks more gently than ever.

TREBELL. Your own life is sufficient unto itself, isn't it?

FRANCES. Oh yes. I can be pleasant to talk to and give good advice through the years that remain. [*Instinctively she rectifies some little untidiness in the room.*] What fools they are to think they can run that government without you!

TREBELL. Horsham will do his best. [*Then, as for the second time she reaches the door.*] Don't take away my razors, will you? I only use them for shaving.

FRANCES. [*Almost blushing.*] I half meant to . . I'm sorry. After all, Henry, just because they are forgetting in personal feelings what's best for the country . . it's your duty not to. You'll stand by and do what you can, won't you?

TREBELL. [*His queer smile returning, in contrast to her seriousness.*] Disestablishment. It's a very interesting problem. I must think it out.

FRANCES. [*Really puzzled.*] What do you mean?

He gets up with a quick movement of strange strength, and faces her. His smile changes into a graver gladness.

TREBELL. Something has happened . . in spite of me. My heart's clean again. I'm ready for fresh adventures.

FRANCES. [*With a nod and answering gladness.*] That's right.

So she leaves him, her mind at rest. For a minute he does not move. When his gaze narrows it falls on the heaps of letters. He carries them carefully into WALTER KENT'S *room and arranges them as*

carefully on his table. On his way out he stops for a moment; then with a sudden movement bangs the door.

Two hours later the room has been put in order. It is even more full of light and the shadows are harder than usual. The doors are open, showing you KENT'S *door still closed. At the big writing table in* TREBELL'S *chair sits* WEDGECROFT, *pale and grave, intent on finishing a letter*. FRANCES *comes to find him. For a moment she leans on the table silently, her eyes half closed. You would say a broken woman. When she speaks it is swiftly, but tonelessly.*

FRANCES. Lord Horsham is in the drawing room . . and I can't see him, I really can't. He has come to say he is sorry . . and I should tell him that it is his fault, partly. I know I should . . and I don't want to. Won't you go in? What are you writing?

WEDGECROFT, *with his physicianly pre-occupation, can attend, understand, sympathise, without looking up at her*.

WEDGECROFT. Never mind. A necessary note . . to the Coroner's office. Yes, I'll see Horsham.

FRANCES. I've managed to get the pistol out of his hand. Was that wrong . . oughtn't I to have touched it?

WEDGECROFT. Of course you oughtn't. You must stay away from the room. I'd better have locked the door.

FRANCES. [*Pitifully.*] I'm sorry . . but I couldn't bear to see the pistol in his hand. I won't go back. After all he's not there in the room, is he? But how long do you think the spirit stays near the body . . how long? When people die gently of age or weakness . . . But when the spirit and body are so strong and knit together and all alive as his . . .

WEDGECROFT. [*His hand on hers.*] Hush . . hush.

FRANCES. His face is very eager . . as if it still could speak. I know that.

MRS. FARRANT *comes through the open doorway*. FRANCES *hears her steps and turning falls into her outstretched arms to cry there*.

FRANCES. Oh, Julia!

MRS. FARRANT. Oh my dear Fanny! I came with Cyril Horsham . . I don't think Simpson even saw me.

FRANCES. I can't go in and talk to him.

MRS. FARRANT. He'll understand. But I heard you come in here . .

WEDGECROFT. I'll tell Horsham.

He has finished and addressed his letter, so he goes out with it. FRANCES *lifts her head. These two are in accord and can speak their feelings without disguise or preparation.*

FRANCES. Julia, Julia . . isn't it unbelievable?

MRS. FARRANT. I'd give . . oh, what wouldn't I give to have it undone!

FRANCES. I knew he meant to . . and yet I thought I had his promise. If he really meant to . . I couldn't have stopped it, could I?

MRS. FARRANT. Walter sent to tell me and I sent round to . . .

FRANCES. Walter came soon after, I think. Julia, I was in my room . . it was nearly breakfast time . . when I heard the shot. Oh . . don't you think it was cruel of him?

MRS. FARRANT. He had a right to. We must remember that.

FRANCES. You say that easily of my brother . . you wouldn't say it of your husband.

They are apart by this. JULIA FARRANT *goes to her gently*.

MRS. FARRANT. Fanny . . will it leave you so very lonely?

FRANCES. Yes . . lonelier than you can ever be. You have children. I'm just beginning to realise. . .

MRS. FARRANT. [*Leading her from the mere selfishness of sorrow.*] There's loneliness of the spirit, too.

FRANCES. Ah, but once you've tasted the common joys of life . . once you've proved all your rights as a man or woman . . .

MRS. FARRANT. Then there are subtler things to miss. As well be alone like you, or dead like him, without them . . I sometimes think.

FRANCES. [*Responsive, lifted from egoism, reading her friend's mind.*] You demand much.

MRS. FARRANT. I wish that he had demanded much of any woman.

FRANCES. You know how this misery began? That poor little wretch . . she's lying dead too. They're both dead together now. Do you think they've met . . ?

JULIA *grips both her hands and speaks very steadily to help her friend back to self control*.

MRS. FARRANT. George told me as soon as he was told. I tried to make him understand my opinion, but he thought I was only shocked.

FRANCES. I was sorry for her. Now I can't forgive her either.

MRS. FARRANT. [*Angry, remorseful, rebellious.*] When will men learn to know one woman from another?

FRANCES. [*With answering bitterness.*] When will all women care to be one thing rather than the other?

They are stopped by the sound of the opening of KENT'S *door*. WALTER *comes from his room, some papers from his table held listlessly in one hand. He is crying, undisguisedly, with a child's grief.*

KENT. Oh . . am I in your way . . ?

FRANCES. I didn't know you were still here, Walter.

KENT. I've been going through the letters as usual. I don't know why, I'm sure. They won't have to be answered now . . will they?

WEDGECROFT *comes back, grave and tense*.

WEDGECROFT. Horsham has gone. He thought perhaps you'd be staying with Miss Trebell for a bit.

MRS. FARRANT. Yes, I shall be.

WEDGECROFT. I must go too . . it's nearly eleven.

FRANCES. To the =other= inquest?

This stirs her two listeners to something of a shudder.

WEDGECROFT. Yes.

MRS. FARRANT. [*In a low voice.*] It will make no difference now . . I mean . . still nothing need come out? We needn't know why he . . why he did it.

WEDGECROFT. When he talked to me last night, and I didn't know what he was talking of. . .

FRANCES. He was waiting this morning for Lord Horsham's note. . .

MRS. FARRANT. [*In real alarm.*] Oh, it wasn't because of the Cabinet trouble . . you must persuade Cyril Horsham of that. You haven't told him . . he's so dreadfully upset as it is. I've been swearing it had nothing to do with that.

WEDGECROFT. [*Cutting her short, bitingly.*] Has a time ever come to you when it was easier to die than to go on living? Oh . . I told Lord Horsham just what I thought.

He leaves them, his own grief unexpressed.

FRANCES. [*Listlessly.*] Does it matter why?

MRS. FARRANT. Need there be more suffering and reproaches? It's not as if even grief would do any good. [*Suddenly with nervous caution.*] Walter, you don't know, do you?

WALTER *throws up his tear-marked face and a man's anger banishes the boyish grief.*

WALTER. No, I don't know why he did it . . and I don't care. And grief is no use. I'm angry . . just angry at the waste of a good man. Look at the work undone . . think of it! Who is to do it! Oh . . the waste . . !