

Hope Anthony

A Change of Air



Anthony Hope

A Change of Air

«Public Domain»

Hope A.

A Change of Air / A. Hope — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

"ANTHONY HOPE."	5
CHAPTER I.	7
CHAPTER II.	10
CHAPTER III.	14
CHAPTER IV.	18
CHAPTER V.	22
CHAPTER VI.	26
CHAPTER VII.	30
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	31

Anthony Hope A Change of Air

"ANTHONY HOPE."

In his speech at the annual banquet of the Royal Academy in 1894, among many other good things, Mr. Andrew Lang said:

"The thrifty plan of giving us sermons, politics, fiction, all in one stodgy sandwich, produces no permanent literature, produces but temporary 'tracts for the times.' Fortunately we have among us many novelists – young ones, luckily – who are true to the primitive and eternal, the Fijian canons of fiction. We have Oriental romance from the author of 'Plain Tales from the Hills.' We have the humor and tenderness – certainly not Fijian, I admit – which produces that masterpiece 'A Window in Thrums'; we have the adventurous fancy that gives us 'A Gentleman of France,' 'The Master of Ballantrae,' 'Micah Clarke,' 'The Raiders,' 'The Prisoner of Zenda.'"

The last of these books was by Anthony Hope Hawkins, whom Mr. Lang thus classed among potential immortals. This romance has made him within the last three months fairly famous. Walter Besant, too, has stamped it with his high approval, and the English and American press have been unusually unanimous in their praise.

Its hero is a rare and striking figure, and thoroughly represents the ideal soldier of our Anglo-Saxon race. He faces great dangers and does brave deeds, quietly and quickly. He suffers and loves deeply, but says little. In his portrayal, the possibilities of "repressed emotion" have been startlingly indicated. He appeals to Americans and English far more than the swaggering and loquacious, though more historic heroes of Dumas and his school ever can.

Much curiosity has been excited regarding "Anthony Hope."

The author's methods of composition and what may have suggested the very original plot are as yet unknown. Besides what we may get from his portrait, we are told that he is "a tall, thin, dark man, with a face that would be ascetic if it were not bubbling with humor." He is a lawyer, as other good romancers have been before him, and has chambers in the Middle Temple, a place made famous in fiction by Thackeray and on the stage by Pinero. His profession and politics are his chief concerns, and literature a diversion in his leisure hours. He is an extremely modest man, and in response to a request from his American publishers for autobiographical matter, gave the barest facts of his life. He expressed absolutely no opinion on literary canons or on his own work. There was, however, a rare sincerity and cordiality in his letters.

Anthony Hope Hawkins was born in 1863, his father being the Rev. E. C. Hawkins of St. Brides, Fleet Street, London. He was educated at Marlborough, and at Balliol College, Oxford, of which he was a scholar. At Oxford, he was a hard worker and obtained first classes in Classical Moderations and in the School of Litteræ Humaniores, commonly known as "Greats." At this university, where he attained the degree of M. A. some eight years ago, he began to show an aptitude for public life, was a striking figure among his contemporaries, and became president of the Union. In 1892 he stood as a Liberal candidate for a seat in Parliament from the southern division of Buckinghamshire, but was defeated by Viscount Curzon.

His first book, "A Man of Mark," was published in 1890, and was followed next year by "Father Stafford," an interesting study of an Anglican priest's struggles between love and sense of obligation to his vow of celibacy. The pictures of his cheerless ascetic life are marked by the sincerity conspicuous in Mr. Hawkins' later books. Some very thoughtful conversations on art and on religion are introduced.

In 1892 appeared "Mr. Witt's Widow, a Frivolous Tale" of a lady who had "harmonious contrasts," such as dark eyes and golden hair. It foreshadows the power in plot-making that characterizes our author's later works.

In the spring of 1893 appeared "Sport Royal," a collection of Mr. Hawkins' short stories, mostly from the *St. James' Gazette*.

In "Half a Hero," published last year, there are several foreshadowings of "The Prisoner of Zenda." In both stories the scene is imaginary, but given realism by characteristics respectively of New Zealand and of Germany; in both intrigues and heroism are conspicuous, though in the latter the author did not adopt the old device of giving his hero some bad qualities to make him human. "Half a Hero" contains much firm, crisp character-drawing, and a strong love interest, but has the slight taint of the "purpose novel," already noted in Father Stafford; in this case, the discussion being politics, especially the "labor" element.

Anthony Hope inherited refinement through a father in an exalted calling; he used his college advantages to the utmost, and now his interests are in living public affairs, and in his chosen calling as a lawyer, he has good opportunities to study life, and seems already to have well mastered the best elements of Anglo-Saxon character. From his work, he appears to have read widely and with a sympathetic eye for the merits of markedly diverse writers, which he seems to make his own. His style has the terseness and suggestiveness characteristic of Kipling, but without his harshness, and at times he shows a sense of beauty almost worthy of our own Hawthorne, and withal the military dash and snap of Lever. It would be strange if the foundation for the remarkably life-like colonists of "Half a Hero," and the German officers of "The Prisoner of Zenda," had had not been laid by travel and the observation of their more or less remote prototypes.

"A Change of Air," while containing much of its humor and snap, furnishes a marked contrast to "The Prisoner of Zenda," and is in a more serious vein, having a strong and tragic undercurrent, and not without an element of peril. Confining its occurrences pretty severely to the possible and generally probable, it nevertheless is highly original. Dale Bannister, the wild young poet, who commences by thoroughly scandalizing Market Denborough, is a most picturesque and uncommon character. The effect of his early principles on his later life is deftly indicated. The story moves on steadily, and while it teaches a lesson of moderation and charity, it does so entirely by the acts and thoughts of the characters without any sermonizing on the part of the author. Some good authorities that have seen this book place it even above "The Prisoner of Zenda," which we probably shall see on the stage next year, as the author has a friend busily engaged on its dramatization.

R. H.

July, 1894.

CHAPTER I.

A Mission to the Heathen

When the Great King, that mirror of a majesty whereof modern times have robbed the world, recoiled aghast from the threatened indignity of having to wait, he laid his finger with a true touch on a characteristic incident of the lot of common men, from which it was seemly that the state of God's Vicegerents should be free. It was a small matter, no doubt, a thing of manners merely, and etiquette; yet manners and etiquette are first the shadowed expression of facts and then the survival of them; the reverence once paid to power, and now accorded, in a strange mixture of chivalry and calculation, to mere place whence power has fled. The day of vicegerents is gone, and the day of officers has come; and it is not unknown that officers should have to wait, or even – such is the insolence, no longer of office, but of those who give it – should altogether go without. Yet, although everybody has now to wait, everybody has not to wait the same length of time. For example, a genius needs not wait so long for what he wants as a fool – unless, as chances now and then, he be both a genius and a fool, when probably his waiting will be utterly without end.

In a small flat in Chelsea, very high toward heaven, there sat one evening in the summer, two young men and a genius; and the younger of the young men, whose name was Arthur Angell, said discontentedly to the genius:

"The brute only sent me ten and sixpence. What did you get for yours?"

The genius blushed and murmured apologetically:

"That agent chap I've sold myself to got twenty pounds for it."

The second young man, who was not so young, being, in fact, well turned of thirty, and growing bald, took his pipe out of his mouth, and, pointing the stem first at the genius, then at Arthur Angell, and lastly, like a knife, at his own breast, said:

"Pounds – shillings – and pence. He sent me nothing at all."

A pause followed, and the genius began:

"Look here, you fellows – " But Philip Hume went on: "Ten and sixpence is a good sum of money, a comfortable sum of money, and, my dear Arthur, I should say the full value of your poem. As to Dale's poem, who knows the value of Dale's poem? By what rod shall you measure – " He broke off with a laugh at Dale's gesture of protest.

"I'm making the deuce of a lot of money," said Dale in an awestruck tone. "It's rolling in. I don't know what to do with it."

"Littlehill will swallow it," said Philip.

"You don't mean that he sticks to that idea?" exclaimed Arthur. "You don't, do you, Dale?"

"I do," answered Dale. "I'm not going permanently. I'm not going to forsake our old ways or our old life. I'm not going to turn into a rich man."

"I hope not, by Jove!" cried Arthur.

"But I want to see the country – I've not seen it for years. And I want to see country people, and – and – "

"It'll end in our losing you," prophesied Arthur gloomily.

"Nonsense!" said Dale, flushing a little. "It'll end in nothing of the sort. I've only taken the house for a year."

"A gentleman's residence," said Philip; "five sitting rooms, twelve bedrooms, offices, stabling, and three acres of grounds."

Arthur groaned.

"It sounds a villa all over," he said.

"Not at all," said Dale sharply; "it's a country house."

"Is there any difference?" asked Arthur scornfully.

"All the difference," said Philip; "as you would know if you moved in anything approaching respectable circles."

"I'm glad I don't," said Arthur. "What will respectable circles say to 'The Clarion,' eh, Dale?"

"Who cares what they say?" laughed Dale. "They seem to buy it."

Arthur looked at him with revengeful eye, and suddenly inquired.

"What about Nellie?"

"That's just the delightful part of it," answered Dale eagerly. "Nellie's been seedy ever so long, you know. She was ordered perfect rest and country air. But it didn't run to it."

"It never ran to anything here," said Philip in a tone of dispassionate acquiescence in facts, "till you became famous."

"Now I can help!" pursued Dale. "She and Mrs. Hodge are coming to pay me a long visit. Of course, Phil's going to be there permanently. You'll come too, Arthur?"

At first Arthur Angell said he would not go near a villa; he could not breath in a villa; or sleep quiet o' nights in a villa; but presently he relented.

"I can't stand it for long, though," he said. "Still, I'm glad you're going to have Nellie there. She'd have missed you awfully. When do you go?"

"Actually, to-morrow. I'm not used to it yet."

Arthur shook his head again, as he put on his hat.

"Well, good-night," said he. "I hope it's all right."

Dale waited till the door was closed behind his guest, and then laughed good-humoredly.

"I like old Arthur," he said. "He's so keen and in earnest about it. But it's all bosh. What difference can it make whether I live in London or the country? And it's only for a little while."

"He begins to include you in the well-to-do classes, and suspects you accordingly," replied Philip.

There was a knock at the door, and a pretty girl came in.

"Oh, I ran up," she said, "to ask whether this hat would do for Denshire. I don't want to disgrace you, Dale;" and she held up a hat she carried in her hand.

"It would do for Paradise," said Dale. "Besides, there isn't going to be any difference at all in Denshire. We are going to be and do and dress just as we are and do and dress here. Aren't we, Phil?"

"That is the scheme," said Philip.

"We shall care for no one's opinion," pursued Dale, warming to his subject. "We shall be absolutely independent. We shall show them that their way of living is not the only way of living. We –"

"In fact, Nellie," interrupted Philip, "we shall open their eyes considerably. So we flatter ourselves."

"It's not that at all," protested Dale.

"You can't help it, Dale," said Nellie, smiling brightly at him. "Of course they will open their eyes at the great Mr. Bannister. We all open our eyes at him, don't we, Mr. Hume? Well, then, the hat will do – as a week-day hat, I mean?"

"A week-day hat?" repeated Philip. "Dear old phrase! It recalls one's happy church-going youth. Have you also provided a Sunday hat?"

"Of course, Mr. Hume."

"And, Dale, have you a Sunday coat?"

Dale laughed.

"It's a pretty excuse for pretty things, Phil," he said. "Let Nellie have her Sunday hat. I doubt if they'll let me into the church."

Philip stretched out his hand and took up a glass of whisky and water which stood near him.

"I drink to the success of the expedition!" said he.

"To the success of our mission!" cried Dale gayly, raising his glass. "We will spread the light!"
"Here's to Dale Bannister, apostle *in partibus!*" and Philip drank the toast.

CHAPTER II.

The New Man at Littlehill

Market Denborough is not a large town. Perhaps it is none the worse for that, and, if it be, there is compensation to be found in its picturesqueness, its antiquity, and its dignity; for there has been a town where it stands from time immemorial; it makes a great figure in county histories and local guidebooks; it is an ancient corporation, an assize town, and quarter-sessions borough. It does not grow, for country towns, dependent solely on the support of the rural districts surrounding, are not given to growing much nowadays. Moreover, the Delanes do not readily allow new houses to be built, and if a man lives in Market Denborough, he must be a roofless vagrant or a tenant of Mr. Delane. It is not the place to make a fortune; but, on the other hand, unusual recklessness is necessary to the losing of one there. If the triumphs of life are on a small scale, the struggle for existence is not very fierce, and a wise man might do worse than barter the uncertain chances and precarious joys of a larger stage, to play a modest, easy, quiet part on the little boards of Market Denborough.

It must not, however, be supposed that the lion and the lamb have quite sunk their differences and lain down together at Market Denborough. There, as elsewhere, the millennium tarries, and there are not wanting fierce feuds, personal, municipal, nay, even, within the wide limits of Mr. Delane's tolerance, political. If it were not so, the Mayor would not have been happy, for the Mayor loved a fight; and Alderman Johnstone, who was a Radical, would have felt his days wasted; and the two gentlemen would not have been, as they continually were, at loggerheads concerning paving contracts and kindred subjects. There was no want of interests in life, if a man were ready to take his own part and keep a sharp eye on the doings of his neighbor. Besides, the really great events of existence happened at Market Denborough much as they do in London; people were born, and married, and died; and while that rotation is unchecked, who can be seriously at a loss for matter of thought or topic of conversation?

As Mr. James Roberts, member of the Royal College of Surgeons, a thin young man, with restless eyes and tight-shut lips, walked down High Street one hot, sunny afternoon, it never entered his head that there was not enough to think about in Market Denborough. Wife and child, rent, rates and taxes, patients and prescriptions, the relation between those old enemies, incomings and outgoings, here was food enough for any man's meditations. Enough? Ay, enough and to spare of such distasteful, insipid, narrow, soul-destroying stuff. Mr., or, to give him the brevet rank all the town gave him. Dr. Roberts, hated these sordid, imperious interests that gathered round him and hemmed him in, shutting out all else – all dreams of ambition, all dear, long-harbored schemes, all burning enthusiasms, even all chance of seeking deeper knowledge and more commanding skill. Sadly and impatiently the doctor shook his head, trying to put his visions on one side, and nail his mind down to its work. His first task was to turn three hundred pounds a year into six hundred pounds. It was hard it should be so, and he chafed against necessity, forgetting, as perhaps he pardonably might, that the need was the price he paid for wife and child. Yes, it was hard; but so it was. If only more people would be – no, but if only more people who were ill would call in Dr. Roberts! Then he could keep two horses, and not have to "pad the hoof," as he phrased it to himself, about sweltering streets or dusty lanes all the long afternoon, because his one pony was tired out with carrying him in the morning to Dirkham, a village five miles off, where he was medical officer at a salary of forty pounds by the year. That was forty, and Ethel had a hundred, and the profits from his paying patients (even if you allowed for the medicine consumed by those who did not pay) were about a hundred and fifty. But then the bills – Oh, well, he must go on. The second horse must wait, and that other dream of his, having an assistant, that must wait, too. If he had an assistant, he would

have some leisure for research, for reading, for studying the political and social questions where his real and engrossing interest lay. He could then take his part in the mighty work of rousing —

Here his meditations were interrupted. He had reached, in his progress down the street, a large plate-glass-windowed shop, the shop of a chemist, and of no less a man than Mr. James Hedger, Mayor of Market Denborough. The member of the lower branch of their common art was a richer man than he who belonged to the higher, and when Mr. Hedger was playfully charged with giving the young Doctor his medicines cheap, he never denied the accusation. Anyhow, the two were good friends, and the Mayor, who was surveying his dominions from his doorstep, broke in on Dr. Roberts' train of thought with a cheerful greeting.

"Have you heard the news?" he asked.

"No; I've no time for the news. I always look to you for it, Mr. Mayor."

"It mostly comes round to me, being a center, like," said the Mayor. "It's natural."

"Well, what is it this time?" asked the Doctor, calling up a show of interest. He did not care much for Denborough news.

"Littlehill's let," replied the Mayor.

Littlehill, the subject of Philip Hume's half-ironical description, was a good house, standing on rising ground about half a mile outside the town. It belonged, of course, to Mr. Delane, and had stood empty for more than a year. A tenant at Littlehill meant an increase of custom for the tradespeople, and perchance for the doctors. Hence the importance of the Mayor's piece of news.

"Indeed?" said Roberts. "Who's taken it?"

"Not much good — a young man, a bachelor," said the Mayor, shaking his head. Bachelors do not require, or anyhow do not take, many chemist's drugs. "Still, I hear he's well off, and p'r'aps he'll have people to stop with him."

"What's his name?"

"Some name like Bannister. He's from London."

"What's he coming here for?" asked Roberts, who, if he had been a well-to-do bachelor, would not have settled at Market Denborough.

"Why shouldn't he?" retorted the Mayor, who had never lived, or thought of living, anywhere else.

"Well, I shouldn't have thought he'd have found much to do. He wouldn't come in the summer for the hunting."

"Hunting? Not he! He's a literary gentleman — writes poetry and what not."

"Poetry? Why, it's not Dale Bannister, is it?"

"Ay, that's the name."

"Dale Bannister coming to Littlehill! That is an honor for the town!"

"An honor? What do you mean, sir?"

"Why, he's a famous man, Mr. Mayor. All London's talking of him."

"I never heard his name in my life before," said the Mayor.

"Oh, he's a genius. His poems are all the rage. You'll have to read them now."

"He's having a lot done up there," remarked the Mayor. "Johnstone's got the job. Mr. Bannister don't know as much about Johnstone as some of us."

"How should he?" said Roberts, smiling.

"Johnstone's buildin' 'im a room. It'll tumble down."

"Oh, come, Mr. Mayor, you're prejudiced."

"No man can say that of me, sir. But I knows — I know Johnstone, Doctor. That's where it is!"

"Well, I hope Johnstone's room won't fall on him. We can't spare Dale Bannister. Good-day, Mr. Mayor."

"Where are you goin'?"

"To Tom Steadman's."

"Is he bad again?" inquired the Mayor, with interest.

"Yes. He broke out last week, with the usual result."

"Broke out? Yes! He had two gallons of beer and a bottle o' gin off the 'Blue Lion' in one day, the landlord told me."

"They ought to go to prison for serving him."

"Well, well, a man drinks or he don't," said the Mayor tolerantly; "and if he does, he'll get it some'ow. Good-day, sir."

The Doctor completed his rounds, including the soothing of Tom Steadman's distempered imagination, and made his way home in quite a flutter of excitement. Hidden away in his study, underneath heavy medical works and voluminous medical journals, where the eye of patients could not reach, nor the devastations of them that tidy disturb, lay the two or three little volumes which held Dale Bannister's poems. The Doctor would not have admitted that the poems were purposely concealed, but he certainly did not display them ostentatiously, and he undoubtedly told his wife, with much decision, that he was sure they would not prove to her taste. Yet he himself almost worshiped them; all the untamed revolt, the recklessness of thought, the scorn of respectability, the scant regard to what the world called propriety, which he had nourished in his own heart in his youth, finding no expression for them, and from which the binding chains of fate seemed now forever to restrain his spirit, were in those three slim volumes. First came "The Clarion and other Poems," a very small book, published by a very small firm – published for the author, though the Doctor did not know this, and circulated at the expense of the same; then "Sluggards," from a larger firm, the source of some few guineas to Dale Bannister, of hundreds more if he had not sold his copyright; and lastly, "The Hypocrite's Heaven," quite a lengthy production, blazoning the name of the leading house of all the trade, and bearing in its train a wealth of gold, and praise, and fame for the author: yes, and of rebuke, remonstrance, blame, and hands uplifted in horror at so much vice united to so much genius. Praise and rebuke alike brought new bricks to build the pyramid of glory; and on the top of it, an object of abhorrence and of worship, stood the young poet, prodigally scattering songs, which, as one critic of position said of them, should never have been written, but being written, could never die. Certainly the coming of such a man to settle there was an event for Market Denborough; it was a glorious chance for the poet's silent, secret disciple. He would see the man; he might speak with him; if fortune willed, his name might yet be known, for no merit of his, but as that of Dale Bannister's friend.

Women have very often, and the best of women most often, a provoking sedateness of mind. Mrs. Roberts had never read the poems. True, but she had, of course, read about them, and about their author, and about their certain immortality; yet she was distinctly more interested in the tidings of Tom Steadman, a wretched dipsomaniac, than in the unparalleled news about Dale Bannister. In her heart she thought the Doctor a cleverer, as she had no doubt he was a better, man than the poet, and the nearest approach she made to grasping the real significance of the situation was when she remarked:

"It will be nice for him to find one man, at all events, who can appreciate him."

The Doctor smiled; he was pleased – who would not be? – that his wife should think first of the pleasure Dale Bannister would find in his society. It was absurd, but it was charming of her, and as she sat on the edge of his chair, he put his arm round his waist and said:

"I beat him in one thing, anyhow."

"What's that, Jim?"

"My wife. He has no wife like mine."

"Has he a wife at all?" asked Mrs. Roberts, with increased interest. A wife was another matter.

"I believe not, but if he had – "

"Don't be silly. Did you leave Tom quiet?"

"Hang Tom! he deserves it. And give me my tea."

Then came the baby, and with it an end, for the time, of Dale Bannister.

CHAPTER III.

Denborough Determines to Call

"I will awake the world," Dale Bannister had once declared in the insolence of youth and talent and the privacy of a gathering of friends. The boast was perhaps as little absurd in his mouth as it could ever be; yet it was very absurd, for the world sleeps hard, and habit has taught it to slumber peacefully through the batterings of impatient genius at its door. At the most, it turns uneasily on its side, and, with a curse at the meddlesome fellow, snores again. So Dale Bannister did not awake the world. But, within a month of his coming to Littlehill, he performed an exploit which was, though on a smaller scale, hardly less remarkable. He electrified Market Denborough, and the shock penetrated far out into the surrounding districts of Denshire – even Denshire, which, remote from villas and season-tickets, had almost preserved pristine simplicity. Men spoke with low-voiced awe and appreciative twinkling of the eye of the "doings" at Littlehill: their wives thought that they might be better employed; and their children hung about the gates to watch the young man and his guests come out. There was disappointment when no one came to church from Littlehill; yet there would have been disappointment if anyone had: it would have jarred with the fast-growing popular conception of the household. To the strictness of Denborough morality, by which no sin was leniently judged save drunkenness, Littlehill seemed a den of jovial wickedness, and its inhabitants to reck nothing of censure, human or divine.

As might be expected by all who knew him, the Mayor had no hand in this hasty and uncharitable judgment. London was no strange land to him; he went up four times a year to buy his stock; London ways were not Denshire ways, he admitted, but, for all that, they were not to be condemned offhand nor interpreted in the worst light without some pause for better knowledge.

"It takes all sorts to make a world," said he, as he drank his afternoon draught at the "Delane Arms," where the civic aristocracy was wont to gather.

"He's free enough and to spare with 'is money," said Alderman Johnstone, with satisfaction.

"You ought to know, Johnstone," remarked the Mayor significantly.

"Well, I didn't see no 'arm in him," said Mr. Maggs, the horse-dealer, a rubicund man of pleasant aspect; "and he's a rare 'un to deal with."

Interest centered on Mr. Maggs. Apparently he had spoken with Dale Bannister.

"He's half crazy, o' course," continued that gentleman, "but as pleasant-spoken, 'earty a young gent as I've seen."

"Is he crazy?" asked the girl behind the bar.

"Well, what do you say? He came down a day or two ago, 'e and 'is friend, Mr. 'Ume – "

"Hume," said the Mayor, with emphasis. The Mayor, while occasionally following the worse, saw the better way.

"Yes, 'Ume. Mr. Bannister wanted a 'orse. 'What's your figger, sir?' says I. He took no notice, but began looking at me with 'is eyes wide open, for all the world as if I'd never spoke. Then he says, 'I want a 'orse, broad-backed and fallen in the vale o' years.' Them was 'is very words."

"You don't say?" said the girl.

"I never knowed what he meant, no more than that pint-pot; but Mr. 'Ume laughed and says, 'Don't be a fool, Dale,' and told me that Mr. Bannister couldn't ride no more than a tailor – so he said – and wanted a steady, quiet 'orse. He got one from me – four-and-twenty years old, warranted not to gallop. I see 'im on her to day – and it's lucky she is quiet."

"Can't he ride?"

"No more than" – a fresh simile failed Mr. Maggs, and he concluded again – "that pint-pot. But Mr. 'Ume can. 'E's a nice set on a 'orse."

The Mayor had been meditating. He was a little jealous of Mr. Maggs' superior intimacy with the distinguished stranger, or perhaps it was merely that he was suddenly struck with a sense of remissness in his official duties.

"I think," he announced, "of callin' on him and welcomin' him to the town."

There was a chorus of approbation, broken only by a sneer from Alderman Johnstone.

"Ay, and take 'im a bottle of that cod-liver oil of yours at two-and-three. 'E can afford it."

"Not after payin' your bill, Johnstone," retorted the Mayor, with a triumphant smile. A neat repartee maketh glad the heart of the utterer.

The establishment at Littlehill and the proper course to be pursued in regard to it were also the subject of consideration in circles more genteel even than that which gathered at the "Delane Arms." At Dirkham Grange itself the topic was discussed, and Mr. Delane was torn with doubts whether his duty as landlord called upon him to make Dale Bannister's acquaintance, or his duty as custodian-general of the laws and proprieties of life in his corner of the world forbade any sanction being given to a household of which such reports were on the wing. People looked to the Squire, as he was commonly called, for guidance in social matters, and he was aware of the responsibility under which he lay. If he called at Littlehill, half the county would be likely enough to follow his example. And perhaps it might not be good for half the county to know Dale Bannister.

"I must consider the matter," he said at breakfast.

"Well, one does hear strange things," remarked Mrs. Delane. "And aren't his poems very odd, George?"

The Squire had not accorded to the works referred to a very close study, but he answered offhand:

"Yes, I hear so; not at all sound in tone. But then, my dear, poets have a standard of their own."

"Of course, there was Byron," said Mrs. Delane.

"And perhaps we mustn't be too hard on him," pursued the Squire. "He's a very young man, and no doubt has considerable ability."

"I dare say he has never met anybody."

"I'm sure, papa," interposed Miss Janet Delane, "that it would have a good effect on him to meet us."

Mr. Delane smiled at his daughter.

"Would you like to know him, Jan?" he asked.

"Of course I should! He wouldn't be dull, at all events, like most of the men about here, Tora Smith said the Colonel meant to call."

"Colonel Smith is hardly in your father's position, my dear."

"Oh, since old Smith had his row with the War Office about that pension, he'll call on anybody who's for upsetting everything. It's enough for him that a man's a Radical."

"Tora means to go, too," said Janet.

"Poor child! It's a pity she hasn't a mother," said Mrs. Delane.

"I think I shall go. We can drop him if he turns out badly."

"Very well, my dear, as you think best."

"I'll walk over on Sunday. I don't suppose he objects to Sunday calls."

"Not on the ground that he wants to go to church, at all events," remarked Mrs. Delane.

"Perhaps he goes to chapel, mamma."

"Oh, no, my dear, he doesn't do that." Mrs. Delane was determined to be just.

"Well, he was the son of a Dissenting minister, mamma. The *Critic* said so."

"I wonder what his father thinks of him," said the Squire, with a slight chuckle, not knowing that death had spared Dale's father all chance of trouble on his son's score.

"Mrs. Roberts told me," said Janet, "that her husband had been to see him, and liked him awfully."

"I think Roberts had better have waited," the Squire remarked, with a little frown. "In his position he ought to be very careful what he does."

"Oh, it will be all right if you call, papa."

"It would have been better if he had let me go first."

Mr. Delane spoke with some severity. Apart from his position of overlord of Denborough, which, indeed, he could not but feel was precarious in these innovating days, he thought he had special claims to be consulted by the Doctor. He had taken him up; his influence had gained him his appointment at Dirkham and secured him the majority of his more wealthy *clientèle*; his good will had opened to the young unknown man the doors of the Grange, and to his wife the privilege of considerable intimacy with the Grange ladies. It was certainly a little hasty in the Doctor not to wait for a lead from the Grange, before he flung himself into Dale Bannister's arms.

All these considerations were urged by Janet in her father's defense when his title to approve, disapprove, or in any way concern himself with Dr. Roberts' choice of friends and associates was vigorously questioned by Tora Smith. Colonel Smith – he had been Colonel Barrington-Smith, but he did not see now what a man wanted with two names – was, since his difference with the authorities, a very strong Radical; on principle he approved of anything of which his friends and neighbors were likely on principle to disapprove. Among other such things, he approved of Dale Bannister's views and works, and of the Doctor's indifference to Mr. Delane's opinion. And, just as Janet was more of a Tory than her father, Tora – she had been unhappily baptized in the absurd names of Victoria Regina in the loyal days before the grievance; but nothing was allowed to survive of them which could possibly be dropped – was more Radical than her father, and she ridiculed the Squire's pretensions with an extravagance which Sir Harry Fulmer, who was calling at the Smiths' when Janet came in, thought none the less charming for being very unreasonable. Sir Harry, however, suppressed his opinion on both these points – as to its being charming, because matters had not yet reached the stage when he could declare it, and as to its being unreasonable, because he was by hereditary right the head of the Liberal party in the district, and tried honestly to live up to the position by a constant sacrifice of his dearest prejudices on the altar of progress.

"I suppose," he said in reply to an appeal from Tora, "that a man has a right to please himself in such things."

"After all papa has done for him! Besides, Sir Harry, you know a doctor ought to be particularly careful."

"What is there so dreadful about Mr. Bannister?" asked Tora. "He looks very nice."

"Have you seen him, Tora?" asked Janet eagerly.

"Yes; we met him riding on such a queer old horse. He looked as if he was going to tumble off every minute; he can't ride a bit. But he's awfully handsome."

"What's he like?"

"Oh, tall, not very broad, with beautiful eyes, and a lot of waving auburn hair; he doesn't wear it clipped like a toothbrush. And he's got a long mustache, and a straight nose, and a charming smile. Hasn't he, Sir Harry?"

"I didn't notice particularly. He's not a bad-looking chap. Looks a bit soft, though."

"Soft? why, he's a tremendous genius, papa says."

"I didn't mean that; I mean flabby and out of training, you know."

"Oh, he isn't always shooting or hunting, of course," said Tora contemptuously.

"I don't suppose," remarked Janet, "that in his position of life, – well, you know, Tora, he's of quite humble birth, – he ever had the chance."

"He's none the worse for that," said Sir Harry stoutly.

"The worse? I think he's the better. Papa is going to ask him here."

"You're quite enthusiastic, Tora."

"I love to meet new people. One sees the same faces year after year in Denshire."

Sir Harry felt that this remark was a little unkind.

"I like old friends," he said, "better than new ones."

Janet rose to go.

"We must wait and hear papa's report," she said, as she took her leave.

Tora Smith escorted her to the door, kissed her, and, returning, said, with a snap of her fingers:

"I don't care that for 'papa's report.' Jan is really too absurd."

"It's nice to see her – "

"Oh, delightful. I hate dutiful people!"

"You think just as much of your father."

"We happen to agree in our opinions, but papa always tells me to use my own judgment. Are you going to see Mr. Bannister?"

"Yes, I think so. He won't hurt me, and he may subscribe to the hunt."

"No; he may even improve you."

"Do I want it so badly, Miss Smith?"

"Yes. You're a weak-kneed man."

"Oh, I say! Look here, you must help me."

"Perhaps I will, if Mr. Bannister is not too engrossing."

"Now you're trying to draw me."

"Was I? And yet you looked pleased. Perhaps you think it a compliment."

"Isn't it one? It shows you think it worth while to – "

"It shows nothing of the kind," said Tora decisively.

Thus, for one reason or another, from one direction and another, there was converging on Littlehill a number of visitors. If your neighbor excites curiosity, it is a dull imagination that finds no plausible reason for satisfying it. Probably there was more in common than at first sight appeared between Mr. Delane's sense of duty, the Mayor's idea of official courtesy, Colonel Smith's contempt for narrowness of mind, Sir Harry Fulmer's care for the interests of the hunt, and Dr. Roberts' frank and undisguised eagerness to see and speak with Dale Bannister face to face.

CHAPTER IV.

A Quiet Sunday Afternoon

To dissolve public report into its component parts is never a light task. Analysis, as a rule, reveals three constituents: truth, embroidery, and mere falsehood; but the proportions vary infinitely. Denborough, which went to bed, to a man, at ten o'clock, or so soon after as it reached home from the public house, said that the people at Littlehill sat up very late; this was truth, at least relative truth, and that is all we can expect here. It said that they habitually danced and sang the night through; this was embroidery; they had once danced and sung the night through, when Dale had a party from London. It said that orgies – if the meaning of its nods, winks, and smiles may be summarized – went on at Littlehill; this was falsehood. Dale and his friends amused themselves, and it must be allowed that their enjoyment was not marred, but rather increased, by the knowledge that they did not command the respect of Denborough. They had no friends there. Why should they care for Denborough's approval? Denborough's approval was naught, whereas Denborough's disapproval ministered to the pleasure most of us feel in giving gentle shocks to our neighbors' sense of propriety. No doubt an electric eel enjoys itself. But, after all, if the mere truth must be told, they were mild sinners at Littlehill, the leading spirits, Dale and Arthur Angell, being indeed young men whose antinomianism found a harmless issue in ink, and whose lawlessness was best expressed in meter. A cynic once married his daughter to a professed atheist, on the ground that the man could not afford to be other than an exemplary husband and father. Poets are not trammelled so tight as that, for, as Mrs. Delane remarked, there was Byron, and perhaps one or two more; yet, for the most part, she who marries a poet has nothing worse than nerves to fear. But a little lawlessness will go a long way in the right place, – for example, lawn-tennis on Sunday in the suburbs, – and the Littlehill party extorted a gratifying meed of curiosity and frowns, which were not entirely undeserved by some of their doings, and were more than deserved by what was told of their doings.

After luncheon on Sunday, Mr. Delane had a nap, as his commendable custom was. Then he took his hat and stick and set out for Littlehill. The Grange park stretches to the outskirts of the town, and borders in part on the grounds of Littlehill, so that the Squire had a pleasant walk under the cool shade of his own immemorial elms, and enjoyed the satisfaction of inspecting his own most excellent shorthorns. Reflecting on the elms and the shorthorns, and on the house, the acres, and the family that were his, he admitted that he had been born to advantages and opportunities such as fell to the lot of a few men; and, inspired to charity by the distant church-bell sounding over the meadows, he acknowledged a corresponding duty of lenient judgment in respect of the less fortunate. Thus he arrived at Littlehill in a tolerant temper, and contented himself with an indulgent shake of the head when he saw the gravel fresh marked with horses' hoofs.

"Been riding instead of going to church, the young rascals," he said to himself, as he rang the bell.

A small, shrewd-faced man opened the door and ushered Mr. Delane into the hall. Then he stopped.

"If you go straight on, sir," said he, "through that baize door, and across the passage, and through the opposite door, you will find Mr. Bannister."

Mr. Delane's face expressed surprise.

"Mr. Bannister, sir," the man explained, "don't like visitors being announced, sir. If you would be so kind as walk in –"

It was a harmless whim, and the Squire nodded assent. He passed through the baize door, crossed the passage, and paused before opening the opposite door. The sounds which came from behind it arrested his attention. To the accompaniment of a gentle drumming noise, as if of sticks or

umbrellas bumped against the floor, a voice was declaiming, or rather chanting, poetry. The voice rose and fell, and Mr. Delane could not distinguish the words, until it burst forth triumphantly with the lines:

"Love grows hate for love's sake, life takes death for guide;
Night hath none but one red star – Tyrannicide."

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Delane.

The voice dropped again for a few moments, then it hurled out:

"Down the way of Tsars awhile in vain deferred,
Bid the Second Alexander light the Third.
How for shame shall men rebuke them? how may we
Blame, whose fathers died and slew, to leave us free?"

The voice was interrupted and drowned by the crash of the pianoforte, struck with remorseless force, and another voice, the voice of a woman, cried, rising even above the crash:

"Now, one of your own, Dale."

"I think I'd better go in," thought Mr. Delane, and he knocked loudly at the door.

He was bidden to enter by the former of the two voices, and, going in, found himself in a billiard room. Five or six people sat round the wall on settees, each holding a cue, with which they were still gently strumming on the floor. A stout, elderly woman was at the piano, and a young man sat cross-legged in the middle of the billiard-table, with a book in one hand and a cigar in the other. There was a good deal of tobacco smoke in the room, and Mr. Delane did not at first distinguish the faces of the company.

The young man on the table uncoiled himself with great agility, jumped down, and came forward to meet the newcomer with outstretched hands. As he outstretched them, he dropped the book and the cigar to the ground on either side of him.

"Ah, here you are! Delightful of you to come!" he cried. "Now, let me guess you!"

"Mr. Bannister? – Have I the pleasure?"

"Yes, yes. Now let's see – don't tell me your name."

He drew back a step, surveyed Mr. Delane's portly figure, his dignified carriage, his plain solid watch-chain, his square-toed strong boots.

"The Squire!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Delane, isn't it?"

"I am Mr. Delane."

"Good! You don't mind being guessed, do you? It's so much more amusing. What will you have?"

"Thank you, I've lunched, Mr. Bannister."

"Have you? We've just breakfasted – had a ride before, you know. But I must introduce you."

He searched the floor, picked up the cigar, looked at it regretfully, and threw it out of an open window.

"This," he resumed, waving his hand toward the piano, "is Mrs. Ernest Hodge. This is Miss Fane, Mrs. Hodge's daughter – no, not by a first marriage; everybody suggests that. Professional name, you know – she sings. Hodge really wouldn't do, would it, Mrs. Hodge? This is Philip Hume. This is Arthur Angell, who writes verses – like me. This is – but I expect you know these gentlemen?"

Mr. Delane peered through the smoke which Philip Hume was producing from a long pipe, and to his amazement discerned three familiar faces: those of Dr. Roberts, the Mayor, and Alderman Johnstone. The Doctor was flushed and looked excited; the Mayor was a picture of

dignified complacency; Johnstone appeared embarrassed and uncomfortable, for his bald head was embellished with a flowery garland. Dale saw Mr. Delane's eyes rest on this article.

"We always crown anybody who adds to our knowledge," he explained. "He gets a wreath of honor. The Alderman added to our knowledge of the expense of building a room. So Miss Fane crowned him."

An appreciative chuckle from the Mayor followed this explanation; he knocked the butt of his cue against the floor, and winked at Philip Hume.

The last-named, seeing that Mr. Delane was somewhat surprised at the company, came up to him and said:

"Come and sit down; Dale never remembers that anybody wants a seat. Here's an armchair."

Mr. Delane sat down next to Miss Fane, and noticed, even in his perturbation, that his neighbor was a remarkably pretty girl, with fair hair clustering in a thick mass on the nape of her neck, and large blue eyes which left gazing on Dale Bannister when their owner turned to greet him. Mr. Delane would have enjoyed talking to her, had not his soul been vexed at the presence of the three Denborough men. One did not expect to meet the tradesmen of the town; and what business had the Doctor there? To spend Sunday in that fashion would not increase his popularity or his practice. And then that nonsense about the wreath! How undignified it was! it was even worse than yelling out Nihilistic verses by way of Sabbath amusement.

"I shall get away as soon as I can," he thought, "and I shall say a word to the Doctor."

He was called from his meditations by Miss Fane. She sat in a low chair with her feet on a stool, and now, tilting the chair back, she fixed her eyes on Mr. Delane, and asked:

"Are you shocked?"

No man likes to admit that he is shocked.

"I am not, but many people would be."

"I suppose you don't like meeting those men?"

"Hedger is an honest man in his way of life. I have no great opinion of Johnstone."

"This is your house, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"All the houses about here are yours, aren't they?"

"Most of them are, Miss Fane."

"Then you are a great man?"

The question was put so simply that Mr. Delane could not suspect a sarcastic intent.

"Only locally," he answered, smiling.

"Have you any daughters?" she asked.

"Yes; one."

"What is she like?"

"Fancy asking her father! I think Janet a beauty."

"Fair or dark?"

"Dark."

"Dale likes dark girls. Tall or short?"

"Tall."

"Good eyes?"

"I like them."

"Oh, that'll do. Dale will like her;" and Miss Fane nodded reassuringly. Mr. Delane had not the heart to intimate his indifference to Dale Bannister's opinion of his daughter.

"Do you know this country?" he asked, by way of conversation.

"We've only been here a week, but we've ridden a good deal. We hold Dale on, you know."

"You are on a visit to Mr. Bannister?"

"Oh, yes, mother and I are here."

Mr. Delane could not help wondering whether their presence was such a matter of course as her tone implied, but before he could probe the matter further, he heard Dale exclaim:

"Oh, it's a wretched thing! Read it yourself, Roberts."

"Mount him on the rostrum," cried the young man who had been presented to Mr. Delane as Arthur Angell, and who had hitherto been engaged in an animated discussion with the Doctor.

Laughing, and only half resisting, the Doctor allowing himself to be hoisted on to the billiard-table, sat down, and announced in a loud voice:

"'Blood for Blood': by Dale Bannister."

The poem which bore this alarming title was perhaps the most outrageous of the author's works. It held up to ridicule and devoted to damnation every person and every institution which the Squire respected and worshiped. And the misguided young man declaimed it with sparkling eyes and emphasizing gestures, as though every wicked word of it were gospel. And to this man's charge were committed the wives and families of the citizens of Denborough! The Squire's self-respect demanded a protest. He rose with dignity, and went up to his host.

"Good-by, Mr. Bannister."

"What? you're not going yet? What? Does this stuff bore you?"

"It does not bore me. But I must add – excuse an old-fashioned fellow – that it does something worse."

"What? Oh, you're on the other side? Of course you are!"

"Whatever side I was, I could not listen to that. As an older man, let me give you a word of advice."

Dale lifted his hands in good-humored protest.

"Sorry you don't like it," he said. "Shut up, Roberts! If I'd known, we wouldn't have had it. But it's true – true – true."

The Doctor listened with sparkling eyes.

"I must differ utterly; I must indeed. Good-by, Mr. Bannister. Hedger?"

The Mayor started.

"I am walking into the town. Come with me."

The Mayor wavered. The Squire stood and waited for him.

"I didn't think of goin' yet, Mr. Delane, sir."

Dale watched the encounter with a smile.

"Your wife will expect you," said the Squire. "Come along."

The Mayor rose, ignoring Johnstone's grin and the amusement on the faces of the company.

"I'll come and look you up," said Dale, pressing the Squire's hand warmly. "Oh, it's all right. Tastes differ. I'm not offended. I'll come some day this week."

He showed them out, and, returning, said to the Doctor, "Roberts, you'll get into trouble."

"Nonsense!" said the Doctor. "What business is it of his?"

Dale had turned to Johnstone.

"Good-by," said he abruptly. "We close at five."

"I've 'ad a pleasant afternoon, sir."

"It will be deducted from your bill," answered Dale.

After ejecting Johnstone, he stood by the table, looking moodily at the floor.

"What's the matter, Dale?" asked Miss Fane.

"I suppose he thought we were beasts or lunatics."

"Probably," said Philip Hume. "What then?"

"Well, yes," answered Dale, smiling again. "You're quite right, Phil. What then?"

CHAPTER V.

The Necessary Scapegoat

If men never told their wives anything, the condition of society would no doubt be profoundly modified, though it is not easy to forecast the precise changes. If a guess may be hazarded, it is probable that much less good would be done, and some less evil said: the loss of matter of interest for half the world may be allowed to sway the balance in favor of the present practice – a practice so universal that Mr. Delane, the Mayor, and Alderman Johnstone, one and all, followed it by telling their wives about their Sunday afternoon at Littlehill. Dr. Roberts, it is true, gave a meager account to his wife, but the narratives of the other three amply filled the gaps he left, and, as each of them naturally dwelt on the most remarkable features of their entertainment, it may be supposed that the general impression produced in Market Denborough did not fall short of the truth in vividness of color. The facts as to what occurred have been set down without extenuation and without malice: the province of Market Denborough society was to supply the inferences arising therefrom, and this task it fulfilled with no grudging hand. Before eight-and-forty hours had passed, there were reports that the Squire had discovered a full-blown Saturnalia in process at Littlehill – and that in these scandalous proceedings the Mayor, Alderman Johnstone, and Dr. Roberts were participators.

Then ensued conduct on the part of the Mayor and the Alderman deserving of unmeasured scorn. They could not deny that dreadful things had been done and said, though they had not seen the deeds nor understood the words: their denial would have had no chance of credit. They could not venture to say that Squire Delane had done anything except manfully protest. They began by accusing one another in round terms, but each found himself so vulnerable that by an unholy tacit compact they agreed to exonerate one another. The Mayor allowed that Johnstone was not conspicuous in wickedness; Johnstone admitted that the Mayor had erred, if at all, only through weakness and good-nature. Public opinion demanded a sacrifice; and the Doctor was left to satisfy it. Everybody was of one mind in holding that Dr. Roberts had disgraced himself, and nobody was surprised to hear that the Squire's phaeton had been seen standing at his door for half an hour on Wednesday morning. The Squire was within, and was understood to be giving the Doctor a piece of his mind.

The Doctor was stiff-necked.

"It is entirely a private matter," said he, "and no one has a right to dictate to me."

"My dear Roberts, I spoke merely in your own interest. It would ruin you if it became known that you held those atrocious opinions; and become known it must, if you openly ally yourself with this young man."

"I am not the servant of the people I attend. I may choose my own opinions."

"Yes, and they may choose their own doctor," retorted the Squire.

The two parted, almost quarreling. Perhaps they would have quite quarreled had not the Squire thought of Mrs. Roberts and the baby. He wondered that the Doctor did not think of them, too, but he seemed to Mr. Delane to be under such a spell that he thought of nothing but Dale Bannister. It was not as if Roberts were the only medical man in the place. There was young Doctor Spink – and he was a real M. D. – up the street, ready and eager to snap up stray patients. And Doctor Spink was a churchwarden. The Squire did not like him overmuch, but he found himself thinking whether it would not be well to send for him next time there was a case of illness at the Grange.

The Squire meditated, while others acted. On her walk the same afternoon, Ethel Roberts heard news which perturbed her. The Vicar's wife was ill and Dr. Spink had been sent for. The

Vicar was a well-to-do man. He had a large family, which yet grew. He had been a constant and a valuable client of her husband's. And now Dr. Spink was sent for.

"Jim," she said, "did you know that Mrs. Gilkison was ill?"

"Ill?" said the Doctor, looking up from "Sluggards." "No, I've heard nothing of it."

She came and leaned over his chair.

"They've sent for Dr. Spink," she said.

"What?" he exclaimed, dropping his beloved volume.

"Mrs. Hedger told me."

"Well, they can do as they like. I suppose his 'Doctor' is the attraction."

"Do you think it's that, dear?"

"What else can it be? – unless it's a mere freak."

"Well, Jim, I thought – I thought perhaps that the Vicar had heard about – about – Littlehill. Yes, I know it's very stupid and narrow, dear – but still – "

The Doctor swore under his breath.

"I can't help it if the man's an ass," he said.

Ethel smiled patiently.

"It's a pity to offend people, Jim, dear, isn't it?"

"Are you against me too, Ethel?"

"Against you? You know I never would be, but – "

"Then do let us leave Denborough gossip alone. Fancy Denborough taking on itself to disapprove of Dale Bannister! It's too rich!"

Ethel sighed. Denborough's disapproval was no doubt a matter of indifference to Dale Bannister: it meant loss of bread and butter to James Roberts and his house.

Meanwhile Dale Bannister, all unconscious of the dread determinations of the Vicar, pursued his way in cheerful unconcern. People came and went. Arthur Angell returned to his haunts rather dissatisfied with the quiet of Littlehill, but rejoicing to have found in the Doctor one thorough-going believer. Mrs. Hodge, her daughter, and Philip Hume seemed to be permanent parts of the household. Riding was their chief amusement. They would pass down High Street, Dale on his ancient mare, with Nellie and Philip by his side, laughing and talking merrily, Dale's own voice being very audible as he pointed out, with amusement a trifle too obvious to be polite, what struck him as remarkable in Denborough ways of life.

Philip, however, whom Mr. Delane had described to his wife as the only apparently sane person at Littlehill, was rather uneasy in his mind about Roberts.

"You'll get that fellow disliked, Dale," he said one morning, "if you don't take care."

"I? What have I to do with it?" asked Dale.

"They'll think him unsafe, if they see him with you."

"He needn't come unless he likes. He's not a bad fellow, only he takes everything so precious seriously."

"He thinks you do, judging by your books."

"Oh, I do by fits. By the way, I have a fit now! Behold, I will write! Nellie! Where's Nellie?"

Nellie Fane came at his call.

"Sit down just opposite me, and look at me. I am going to write. The editor of the *Cynosure* begs for twenty lines – no more; twenty lines – fifty pounds! Now, Nellie, inspire me, and you shall have a new hat out of it. No, look at me!"

Nellie sat down and gazed at him, obediently.

"Two pound ten a line; not bad for a young 'un," he pursued. "They say Byron wrote on gin and water. I write on your eyes, Nellie – much better."

"You're not writing at all – only talking nonsense."

"I'm just beginning."

"Look here, Dale, why don't you keep the Doctor – " began Philip.

"Oh, hang the Doctor! I'd just got an idea. Look at me, Nellie!"

Philip shrugged his shoulders, and Dr. Roberts dropped out of discussion.

The twenty lines were written, though they were never considered one of his masterpieces, then Dale rose with a sigh of relief.

"Now for lunch, and then I'm going to return Mr. Delane's call."

"I thought we were to ride," said Nellie disappointedly.

"Well, won't you come?"

"Don't be absurd!"

"Mightn't she come, Phil?"

"Mrs. Delane has not called, has she?" inquired Philip, as though for information.

"Of course I shan't go, Dale. You must go alone."

"What a nuisance! I shall have to walk. I daren't trust myself to that animal alone."

After luncheon he started, walking by the same way by which Mr. Delane had come.

He reached the lodge of the Grange; a courtesying child held open the gate, and he passed along under the immemorial elms, returning a cheery good-day to the gardeners, who paused in their work to touch their hats with friendly deference. The deference was wrong, of course, but the friendliness pleased him, and even the deference seemed somehow in keeping with the elms and with the sturdy old red-brick mansion, with its coat of arms and defiant Norman motto over the principal door. Littlehill was a pleasant house, but it had none of the ancient dignity of Dirkham, and Dale's quick brain was suddenly struck with a new understanding of how such places bred the men they did. He had had a fancy for a stay in the country; it would amuse him, he thought, to study country life; that was the meaning of his coming to Littlehill. Well, Dirkham summed up one side of country life, and he would be glad to study it.

Mr. Delane was not at home – he had gone to Petty Sessions; and Dale, with regret, for he wanted to see the inside of the house, left his name – as usual he had forgotten to bring a card – and turned away. As he turned, a pony carriage drew up and a girl jumped out. Dale drew back to let her pass, raising his hat. The servant said a word to her, and when he had gone some ten or fifteen yards, he heard his name called.

"Oh, Mr. Bannister, do come in! I expect papa back every minute, and he will be so sorry to miss you. Mamma is up in London; but I hope you'll come in."

Dale had no idea of refusing the invitation given so cordially. He had been sorry to go away before, and the sight of Janet Delane made him more reluctant still. He followed her into the oak-paneled hall, hung with pictures of dead Delanes and furnished with couches and easy-chairs.

"Well," she said, after tea was brought, "and what do you think of us?"

"I have not seen very much of you yet."

"As far as you have gone? And be candid."

"You are very restless."

She made a little grimace.

"You mean very slow?"

"Indeed I don't! I think you very interesting."

"You find us interesting, but slow. Yes, you meant that, Mr. Bannister, and it's not kind."

"Have your revenge by telling me what you think of me."

"Oh, we find you interesting, too. We're all talking about you."

"And slow?"

"No, certainly not slow," she said, with a smile and a glance: the glance should be described, if it were describable, but it was not.

Dale, however, understood it, for he replied, laughing:

"They've been prejudicing you against me."

"I don't despair of you. I think you may be reformed. But I'm afraid you're very bad just now."

"Why do you think that? From what your father said?"

"Partly. Partly also because Colonel Smith and Tora – do you know them? – are so enthusiastic about you."

"Is that a bad sign?"

"Terrible. They are quite revolutionary. So are you, aren't you?"

"Not in private life."

"But of course," she asked, with serious eyes, "you believe what you write?"

"Well, I do; but you pay writers a compliment by saying 'of course.'"

"Oh, I hope not! Anything is better than insincerity."

"Even my opinions?"

"Yes. Opinions may be changed, but not natures, you know."

She was still looking at him with serious, inquiring eyes. The eyes were very fine eyes. Perhaps that was the reason why Dale thought the last remark so excellent. He said nothing, and she went on:

"People who are clever and – and great, you know, ought to be so careful that they are right, oughtn't they?"

"Oh, a rhymer rhymes as the fit takes him," answered he, with affected modesty.

"I wouldn't believe that of you. You wouldn't misuse your powers like that."

"You have read my poetry?"

"Some of it." She paused and added, with a little blush for her companion: "There was some papa would not let me read."

A man may not unreasonably write what a young girl's father may very reasonably not like her to read. Nevertheless, Dale Bannister felt rather uncomfortable.

"Those were the shocking political ones, I suppose?" he asked.

"No; I read most of those. These were against religion and –"

"Well?"

"Morality, papa said," she answered, with the same grave look of inquiry.

Dale rose and held out his hand, saying petulantly:

"Good-by, Miss Delane. You evidently don't think me fit to enter your house."

"Oh, now I have made you angry. I have no right to speak about it, and, of course, I know nothing about it. Only –"

"Only what?"

"Some things are right and some are wrong, aren't they?"

"Oh, granted – if we could only agree which were which."

"As to some we have been told. And I don't think that about you at all – I really don't. Do wait till papa comes."

Dale sat down again. He had had his lecture; experience told him that a lecture from such lecturers is tolerably often followed by a petting, and the pettings were worth the lectures. In this instance he was disappointed. Janet did not pet him, though she displayed much friendliness, and he took his leave (for the Squire did not appear) feeling somewhat put out.

Approbation and applause were dear to this man, who seemed to spend his energies in courting blame and distrust; whatever people thought of his writings, he wished them to be fascinated by him. He was not sure that he had fascinated Miss Delane.

"I should like to see more of her," he thought. "She's rather an odd girl."

CHAPTER VI.

Littlehill Goes into Society

Mr. Delane's late return from his public duties was attributable simply to Colonel Smith's obstinacy. He and the Colonel sat together on the bench, and very grievously did they quarrel over the case of a man who had been caught in the possession of the body of a fresh-killed hare. They differed first as to the policy of the law, secondly as to its application, thirdly as to its vindication; and when the Vicar of Denborough, who was a county justice and present with them, sided with the Squire on all these points, the Colonel angrily denounced the reverend gentleman as a disgrace, not only to the judicial bench, but even to his own cloth. All this took time, as did also the Colonel's cross-examination of the constable in charge of the case, and it was evening before the dispute was ended, and a fine imposed. The Colonel paid the fine, and thus everyone, including the law and the prisoner, was in the end satisfied.

Mr. Delane and the Colonel, widely and fiercely as they differed on every subject under the sun, were very good friends, and they rode home together in the dusk of a September evening, for their roads lay the same way for some distance. Presently they fell in with Sir Harry Fulmer, who had been to see Dale Bannister, and, in his absence, had spent the afternoon with Nellie Fane and Philip Hume.

"Hume's quite a good fellow," he declared; "quiet, you know, and rather sarcastic, but quite a gentleman. And Miss Fane – I say, have you seen her, Colonel?"

"By the way, who is Miss Fane?" asked the Squire.

"Oh, she acts, or sings, or something. Awfully jolly girl, and uncommon pretty. Don't you think so, Squire?"

"Yes, I did, Harry. But why is she staying there?"

"Really, Delane," said the Colonel, "what possible business is that of yours?"

"I've called on Bannister, and he's going to return my call. I think it's a good deal of business of mine."

"Well!" exclaimed the Colonel; "for sheer uncharitableness and the thinking of all evil, give me a respectable Christian man like yourself, Delane."

"Oh, it's all right," said Sir Harry cheerfully. "The old lady, Mrs. What's-her-name, is there."

"I hope it is," said the Squire. "Bannister has himself to thank for any suspicions which may be aroused."

"Suspicious? Bosh!" said the Colonel. "They are all coming to dine with me to-morrow. I met Bannister and asked him. He said he had friends, and I told him to bring the lot. Will you and Mrs. Delane come, Squire?"

"My wife's away, thanks."

"Then bring Janet."

"Hum! I think I'll wait."

"Oh, as you please. You'll come, Harry?"

Sir Harry was delighted to come.

"Tora was most anxious to know them," the Colonel continued, "and I hate ceremonious ways. There'll be nobody else, except the Doctor and his wife."

"You haven't asked Hedger and Johnstone, have you?" inquired the Squire. "They're friends of Bannister's. I met them at his house."

"I haven't, but I don't know why I shouldn't."

"Still you won't," said Sir Harry, with a laugh.

The Colonel knew that he would not, and changed the subject.

"This is a great occasion," said Philip Hume at afternoon tea next day. "To-night we are to be received into county society."

"Is Colonel Smith 'county society'?" asked Nellie.

"Yes. The Mayor told me so. The Colonel is a Radical, and a bad one at that, but the poor man comes of good family and is within the toils."

"I expect he really likes it," said Nellie, "I should."

"Are you nervous?" inquired Philip.

Nellie laughed and colored.

"I really am a little. I hope I shall behave properly. Mother is in a dreadful state."

"Where is Mrs. Hodge?"

"Putting some new lace on her gown."

"And Dale?"

"He's writing. Mr. Hume, has he told you anything about his visit yesterday?"

"Yes. He says he met an angel."

"Oh, that accounts for the title."

"What title?"

"Why, I went and looked over his shoulder, and saw he was beginning some verses, headed, 'To a Pretty Saint.' I always look, you know, but this time he snatched the paper away."

"'To a Pretty Saint'? Dear, dear! Perhaps he meant you, Nellie."

Miss Fane shook her head.

"He meant Miss Delane, I'm sure," she said dolefully. "I hope Miss Smith is just exactly a county young lady – you know what I mean. I want to see one."

"Do you contemplate remodeling yourself?"

"I'm sure Dale will like that sort of girl."

Philip looked at her sideways. He thought of telling her that "county young ladies" did not proclaim all their thoughts. But then he reflected that he would not.

The Littlehill party arrived at Mount Pleasant, the Colonel's residence, in the nick of time; and Mrs. Hodge sailed in to dinner on her host's arm in high good humor. Dale, as the great man and the stranger, escorted Tora, Philip Hume Mrs. Roberts, and Sir Harry fell to Nellie's lot.

Mrs. Hodge was an amusing companion. She did not dally at the outworks of acquaintance, but closed at once into intimacy, and before half an hour was gone, she found herself trying hard not to call the Colonel "my dear," and to remember to employ the usual prefixes to the names of the company. The Colonel was delighted; was he at last escaping from the stifling prison of conventionality and breathing a freer air?

Unhappily, just in proportion as good cheer and good fellowship put Mrs. Hodge at her ease, and made her more and more to the Colonel's taste, her daughter's smothered uneasiness grew more intense. Nellie had borne herself with an impossible dignity and distance of manner toward Sir Harry, in the fear lest Sir Harry should find her wanting in the characteristics of good society, and her frigidity was increased by her careful watch on her mother's conduct. Sir Harry was disappointed. As he could not sit by Tora Smith, he had consoled himself with the prospect of some fun with "little Miss Fane." And little Miss Fane held him at arms'-length. He determined to try to break down her guard.

"How did you manage to shock the Squire so?" he asked.

"Was he shocked? I didn't know."

"You were there, weren't you?"

"Oh, yes. Well, I suppose it was Mr. Bannister's poetry."

"Why should that shock him?" asked Sir Harry, who knew very well. "By Jove, I wish I could write some like it!"

She turned to him with sudden interest.

"Do you admire Dale's writings?"

"Awfully," said Sir Harry. "Don't you?"

"Of course *I* do, but I didn't know whether you would. Do you know Miss Delane?"

"Yes, very well."

"Do you like her?"

"Oh, yes. I have known her all my life, and I like her. She frightens me a little, you know."

"Does she? How?"

"She expects such a lot of a fellow. Have you met her?"

"No. D – Mr. Bannister has. He likes her."

"I expect she blew him up, didn't she?"

"Oh, I shouldn't think so. Dale wouldn't like that."

"Depends how it's done," observed Sir Harry. "Don't you ever blow him up?"

"Of course not. I'm much too – I look up to him too much."

They were interrupted by the Colonel's voice. He was saying, with much energy:

"Ability we don't expect in a Government office, but honesty one might hope for."

"Just what Hodge used to say of old Pratt," said Mrs. Hodge.

"I beg pardon?" said the Colonel.

"Pratt was his manager, you know – my husband's."

"Oh, yes, of course."

"Nellie, you remember your father throwing down that two pound ten on the table, and saying, 'Well, I'm –'"

"No, mother, I don't. Do you think I could learn to hunt, Sir Harry?"

"Of course you could, in no time."

"Does Miss Delane?"

"And Pratt said that if Hodge couldn't play the king at two pound ten a week, – though that's hard living, my dear, – I beg pardon – Colonel –"

The Colonel bowed courteously. Nellie grew very red.

"Why, bantam-cocks had risen since his day, and that was all about it." And Mrs. Hodge emptied her glass and beamed pleasantly on the company.

Suddenly Dale Bannister began to laugh gently. Tora Smith turned an inquiring look in his direction.

"What is it, Mr. Bannister?"

"I saw your father's butler looking at my friend Mrs. Hodge."

"What nonsense! Simmons is not allowed to look at anyone."

"Isn't he? Why not?"

"No good servant does."

Dale smiled.

"I know what you mean," Tora continued; "but surely while they're actually waiting, Mr. Bannister, we can't treat them quite like ourselves? At any other time, of course –"

"You'd take a walk with them?"

"They'd be horribly uncomfortable if I did," she answered, laughing.

"That's the worst of it," said he.

"Do you think us great shams?"

"I have come to learn, not to criticise."

"We want a leader," said Tora, with pretty earnestness.

"Haven't you one?"

"Sir Harry Fulmer is our leader, but we're not contented with him. He's a very mild Radical. Won't you come to our help?"

"I expect I should be too extreme the other way."

"Oh, I love people who are extreme – in my direction, I mean."

"Well, then, try the Doctor."

"Mr. Roberts? Oh, he's hardly prominent enough; we must have somebody of position. Now, what are you laughing at, Mr. Bannister?"

The gentleman to whom they referred sat looking on at them with no great pleasure, though they found one another entertaining enough to prevent them noticing him. Dale Bannister said that his new friend took life seriously, and the charge was too true for the Doctor's happiness. Dale Bannister had taken hold of his imagination. He expected Dale to do all he would give his life to see done, but could not do himself. The effect of Dale was to be instantaneous, enormous, transforming Denborough and its inhabitants. He regarded the poet much as a man might look upon a benevolent volcano, did such a thing exist in the order of nature. His function was, in the Doctor's eyes, to pour forth the burning lava of truth and justice, wherewith the ignorance, prejudice, and cruelty of the present order should be consumed and smothered; let the flood be copious, scorching, and unceasing! The Doctor could do little more than hail the blessed shower and declare its virtues; but that he was ready to do at any cost. And the volcano would not act! The eruptions were sadly intermittent. The hero, instead of going forth to war, was capering nimbly in a lady's chamber, to the lascivious pleasing of a lute; that is to say, he was talking trifles to Tora Smith, with apparent enjoyment, forgetful of his mission, ignoring the powers of darkness around. No light-spreading saying, no swordflash had come from him all the evening. He was fiddling while Rome was – waiting for the burning it needed so badly.

Perhaps it was a woebegone look about the Doctor that made Philip Hume take the chair next him after dinner, while Dale was, still as if in play, emitting anarchist sparks for the Colonel's entertainment.

"Is it possible," asked the Doctor in low, half-angry tones, "that he thinks these people are any good – that they are sincere or thorough in the matter? He's wasting his time."

"Well, well, my dear fellow, we must all dine, whatever our opinions."

"Oh, yes; we must dine, while the world starves."

"The bow can't be always stretched," said Philip, with a slight smile.

"You don't think, Hume, do you, that he's getting any less – less in earnest, you know?"

"Oh, he wrote a scorcher this very morning."

"Did he? That's good news. Where is it to appear?"

"I don't know. He didn't write it on commission."

"His poems have such magnificent restlessness, haven't they? I can't bear to see him idle."

"Poor Dale! You must give him some holidays. He likes pleasure like the rest of us."

The Doctor sighed impatiently, and Philip looking at him anxiously, laid a hand on his arm.

"Roberts," he said, "there is no need that you should be ground to powder."

"I don't understand."

"I hope you never will. Your wife doesn't look very strong. Why don't you give her a change?"

"A change? How am I to afford a change? Besides, who wants a change? What change do most workers get?"

"Hang most workers! Your wife wants a change."

"I haven't got the money, anyhow."

"Then there's an end of it."

The Colonel rose, and they made for the drawing room.

Philip detained his companion for a moment.

"Well?" said the Doctor, feeling the touch on his arm.

"For God's sake, old fellow, go slow," said Philip, pressing his arm, and looking at him with an appealing smile.

CHAPTER VII.

"To a Pretty Saint."

When Mrs. Delane came back from London, she was met with a question of the precise kind on which she felt herself to be no mean authority. It was a problem of propriety, of etiquette, and of the usages of society, and Mrs. Delane attacked it with a due sense of its importance and with the pleasure of an expert. It arose out of Dale Bannister's call at the Grange. Dale had been accustomed, when a lady found favor in his eyes, to inform her of the gratifying news through the medium of a set of verses, more or less enthusiastic and rhapsodic in their nature. The impulse to follow his usual practice was strong on him after meeting Janet Delane, and issued in the composition of that poem called "To a Pretty Saint," the title of which Nellie had seen. He copied it out fair, and was about to put it in the post when a thought suddenly struck him. Miss Delane was not quite like most of his acquaintances. It was perhaps possible that she might think his action premature, or even impertinent, and that she might deem it incumbent on her to resent being called either a saint or pretty by a friend of one interview's standing. Dale was divided between his newborn doubt of his own instinct of what was permissible and his great reluctance to doom his work to suppression. He decided to consult Philip Hume, who was, as he knew, more habituated to the social atmosphere of places like Denshire.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.