THE
MELBOURNIANS
FRANCIS ADAMS
THE MELBOURNIANS
BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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TO

SIR THOMAS M'ILWRAITH,

GREAT AND GENEROUS AS A POLITICIAN,
AS A MAN WARM-HEARTED
AND SINCERE.
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PART I.

MORNING.
CHAPTER I.

THE MACGHIES GO "HOME."

The MacGhies all recognised that their trip to Europe had been a failure.

Mrs MacGhie never said so to either Elizabeth or Susie, nor yet had the two girls said so to her, nor yet had they said so even to themselves. But they were all well aware that they all knew it.

This troubled Mrs MacGhie, not on her own account so much (though she
had a vague uneasiness at the amount
of money they had somehow managed
to spend), but because she saw it
troubled the girls, and especially Susie.

Elizabeth took after her mother, being
placid and inclined to stoutness, but she
also had always a considerable amount
of sympathy at hand for her younger
sister, and it was manifest to her that
Susie was hard hit.

Not that this courageous damsel showed
it in any outward shape of melancholy
or dejection.

Her Melbourne friends saw little differ-
ence in her, except that she was quieter
and more mature than when, radiant
with youth, high spirits, and expectation,
she said good-bye to them all before
setting out to fulfil the one great desire of her later years—a visit to "home," to England, to London.

Some of the feminine among these friends, however, had tender and charitable remarks to make.

The MacGhie girls had gone "home" to get married, and they hadn't "brought it off."

Also, they had found that they couldn't get into London "society." They had received some frightful snubs. Mrs MacGhie had even been publicly humiliated. She had been refused the privilege of "presenting" herself at the Queen's Drawing-Room. Sir James Pettigrew, the Agent-General, had had to inform her that, though in Melbourne
her late husband's position had at last secured for her a reception by "society," here in London it was different.

Also, that almost all of Mr MacGhie's English and Scotch relations had turned their backs upon them. Lady MacGhie (the wife of his cousin the Scotch baronet, and head of the family) had actually gone so far as to invite the girls up to Sir Michael's place in Scotland, passing over poor, dear, good Mrs MacGhie, who had entreated them on her knees, with tears in her eyes, not to mind her but go.

There was a certain amount of truth in all this, but a larger amount of falsehood.

Mrs MacGhie was without a spark of social ambition. All she had ever done socially had been for the sake of her
husband and children, two of whom she admired (to wit, her husband and her youngest child), and all of whom she loved.

Her eldest daughter Annie was married to Mr Weedon, the vicar of a Melbourne suburban church, and had removed from the home life the one element that was discordant. For as to Mrs MacGhie herself she felt no particular shame for what Annie had once bitterly called the "dark shadow that hung over the house."

A simple and ignorant English middle-class girl, sent out to Victoria by her friends in the old days when cooks and servant maids (not to say the rarer article of nursery governesses)
still had a chance of good marriages there, she had met her misfortune in a voluble Irish auctioneer, who persuaded her to become his wife.

The man was a coarse, drunken brute, and presently took to ill-treating her.

Her patient submissiveness only made him savage; and at last in a drunken fit of fury he one night tied her up to the bedpost and lashed her with a whip.

At this point enter from next door Robert MacGhie, a high-strung, wiry young Scotchman, who incontinently knocked the auctioneer out in two rounds, undid the young woman, wrapped her up in a sheet (she being in her nightgown), and tenderly carried her in to his landlady.
The miserable story dragged itself out a little longer.

Annie returned to nurse her child, after having inspired MacGhie with the first passion of his life. There was more ill-treatment; the child died, and then MacGhie, half crazy with pity and wrath, got at her one afternoon in her husband's absence and persuaded her to run away with him.

The auctioneer had a characteristic revenge. He refused to get a divorce, and the scandal was in a little while ruthlessly manipulated to ruin MacGhie's budding political career. The young man had just put up as a candidate for Assembly in the Radical interest, and he soon owed bitter and powerful foes
to his extreme and vehement oratory. He saved himself by the desperate course of laying bare to all the true facts of the case, and he never forgot that it was at (what he from the first obstinately called) his wife's entreaty, to whom he had made the position clear, that he had done this.

For eight years they had to continue their embarrassing position, during which period two of their surviving children, Annie and Elizabeth, were born.

Then the auctioneer died of a cheerful complication of sunstroke and delirium tremens, in a december hot wind by the dusty St Kilda roadside, and MacGhie and his Annie were quietly married.

Public sympathy had slowly come
round to their side, and Mrs Medwin, the acknowledged leader of the Melbourne social life, showed her appreciation of the hardness of the case, even though it had to do with the wife of a "horrid Radical," by publicly receiving and making much of her.

Government House followed, and "society" was vanquished.

From first to last Mrs MacGhie had been her simple, kindly, modest self, grateful for any exhibition of kindred qualities in other people, and astonishingly tolerant of innuendo or insult, the greater part of which she failed to comprehend.

Her feeling towards her husband can be justly compared to that of an intelli-
The Melbournians.

gent and faithful dog to the master from whom it has experienced nothing but kindness.

His political ambition, however, was not to be achieved.

He had just taken office for the first time as Minister for Public Instruction, and stood on the threshold of success, when he was suddenly struck down.

Issuing late one night from a stormy debate in the House, hot and excited with his crowning speech, which had been his first great and decisive triumph, he took a severe chill.

He neglected and struggled against it.

It developed into congestion of the lungs, and, enfeebled by recent hard
work in his department and in his place in the House, he had not the strength to rally.

In his last moments of consciousness, crushing down by a supreme effort his vehement resentment against his unworthy fate, he drew his wife to him, looked into her great round apprehensive eyes, recalled all the simple tenderness of the baby beauty of face and form that had won his love, felt all the dumb devotion of years, when that beauty had grown somewhat coarser and commoner than he had always liked, put his arm round her neck, and with a sweet, peaceful rapture, whispering, "My Nanny, Nanny," smilingly died.

Six months later Annie, the eldest
daughter, the tyrant of her mother and Elizabeth, the would-be tyrant of her father and Susie—Annie, the tall, white, staid, and moral girl, whose talk was embellished with much scriptural, proverbial, and "good book" philosophy, met a magnanimous young parson who appreciated her powers, respected her good qualities, and pitied her great natal misfortune (the "dark shadow" aforesaid).

They were married, to the intense relief of her mother and sisters, and having plenty to do, for some time saw very little of the MacGhie home life.

MacGhie had left his moderate fortune in such a way that his wife held the largely preponderating portion, unless
she should marry again, when she received an equal share with each of her daughters.

The idea of marriage never, however, so much as entered her head.

Susie, the pet of her father, mother, and sister Elizabeth, the show child of the family, was expected to make a brilliant match, and possibly Elizabeth would marry sooner or later, but to Mrs MacGhie her old home at Wrynton was none the less secure that she looked forward to one of her younger daughters living there with a husband and family.

Three years passed, and then, a piece of their property having been sold at an unexpectedly high figure, and Annie having suddenly developed a habit of
intimacy, whose most striking feature was a series of "lectures," which had ended in some severe encounters between the grave, be-capped parson's wife and impetuous Susie, Mrs MacGhie made up her mind to gratify her youngest daughter's extremest desire and go for a trip "home."

It would have been hard to have found a more charming type of Australian girlhood than Susie, as she stood on the deck of the Orient steamer that was to take her to the land of her dreams and aspirations.

Medium sized, with the lovely lines of budding womanhood somewhat more marked than twenty years give to her English sister, yet clean-limbed and full
of vigour, clear-skinned, clear-eyed, frank, healthy-minded, courageous—as able to take care of herself in town as in country—loving saddle and waxed dancing floor with an impartial passion, quick-tempered and resolute, with the tinge of youth and the flush of genius on her cheeks: who with half an eye could not have recognised a feminine jewel of perhaps the purest water?

She had all the restlessness and dumb craving of the younger generation of her country.

The meagreness of the callow national life did not satisfy her.

She wanted something broader, deeper, richer.

She had read a good deal, in an un-
methodical, miscellaneous style, with a persistent and intelligent voracity, but the result had always been to whet her appetite for what her own land could not give her.

She loved Melbourne and the up-country life genuinely, even strongly. But the vision of London and English country houses troubled her love, and ended with souring her content.

She said once to Elizabeth (whom no one had ever thought of calling Lizzie, but whom Susie, with endearing satire, had nick-named Loppie, from an alleged resemblance to the habit of mind and ruminative pose of a certain ancient and obese donkey of their early short-skirted days)—Susie once suddenly broke a sisterly tête-à-tête silence by exclaiming,
"Oh, Loppie, I do so want to sow my wild oats."

She wanted to see London and English "society"—to shine there—to have her day—to drink her fill of ball and "At Home" and garden party, where richer colour and scent pervaded the air.

Two years ago Government House hospitalities had been delicious. Now, a pretty little feminine Ecclesiastes, she paced through them forlornly, mournfully realising that it was all vanity and vexation of spirit.

Thus they arrived in London, and Miss Discontent fell asleep in the wan dawn hours for the first time to the strange subdued roar of the streets of the metropolis of the world.
Early in the morning the sickly sunlight, struggling through the panoply of smoke and mist, awakened her, and in five minutes she had jumped out of bed, skipped over to where Loppie, with her mouth half open, was snoring in a subdued rapture of peace, gently compressed those blameless extended nostrils, causing a confused and disagreeable awakening, slipped in beside her, and began the eager narration of what she called her "plan of campaign."

But, alas! the difficulties in the way of realising it were enormous.

They knew no one.

Their letters of introduction all turned out failures. For Susie recognised at a glance that these people they went to see
were only hangers on to the great institution of London "society," who lived in the jaded light and air of the outskirts.

She had not, she felt, come sixteen thousand miles to assist at the social agonies of tenth-rate suburban coteries.

The colonial colony was little if any better. Even the resident London MacGhies struck her as not very different from the resident Melbourne Browns, Joneses or Robinsons.

The weeks changed into months.

Winter passed into spring, the magic "season" began, and still the MacGhies paraded up and down in the mournful atmosphere of the social purlieus. And even here they were not a success.
Desperate colonial mediocrities with an assured "pile" had spent years in the same struggle, and, clinging on by their eyelids to insecure and keen-edged social escarpments, ruthlessly kicked and struck at their competitors beside or below them.

Then the "dark shadow" was conjured up.

The girls found that they could not be presented to their Sovereign beside their mother, and on the top of this came Lady MacGhie's celebrated invitation.

Mrs MacGhie handed it at once to Susie, taking it for granted that it would be accepted, but Susie rose with flaming cheeks, and bursting into a tirade of scorn and contempt, tore it to pieces.
and rushed to her bedroom, where she fell on her face on the bed and burst into a passion of bitter tears.

Her mother and Loppie came after her at once, entreating and consoling, alleging that it was "a real chance," and that it must be accepted.

Susie sat up with tear-stained face, clenched teeth, and angry eyes till the two had had their say.

Then she began to speak.

"Never, mamma! never, Loppie!" she said. "I would die first! I hate and despise her! I do not want to hear her name again! Never mention it to me again! And if she comes to see us, we will not see her, and we will not answer her letters or take any notice
of her, but treat her with silent contempt!"

There was more to the same purpose, and of course Susie had her own way. But she never had the chance of annihilating Lady MacGhie's self-esteem by a rebuff, for that lady neither wrote to them any more nor called on them when she arrived in London with her daughters for a few weeks during June.

Mrs MacGhie meantime took furnished rooms in a fairly fashionable part of Kensington, on the first storey over a pastrycook's, where she paid a ruinous rent, and "the plan of campaign" was continued, but for long with no results whatever.

Then suddenly a "real chance" came.
In a rather left-handed manner the three received an invitation to a dance at Lady Netzler's.

Lady Netzler was the wife of an alleged man of science, knighted for his overseeship of a large Government enterprise, and the Netzlers were rather "smart" people, living in a fine house in Kensington, and moving in a better circle than any our Australians had yet been able to reach to.

Susie had by now moderated her ambition far enough to be glad to have the invitation accepted, and Lady Netzler had said she would call presently.

She had not called before the day of her "At Home" and dance, which irritated Susie somewhat; but the poor girl
swallowed her dignity, and the three went off in their hired dingy brougham, all more or less excited and anticipant.

Susie entered the dancing-room radiant and flushed.

Everything was indeed on a higher plane than she had yet reached.

The men and women around her almost all bore the hallmark of fashion. She anticipated a delightful evening. She had learned the new waltz step and felt confident of herself.

She let her eyes rest on several of the men, and admitted to her throbbing little heart that to be married to a man of this type, and to enjoy life of this type, would be indeed very pleasant.

Then the three were welcomed by
The MacGhies go 'Home.'

the hostess and her daughters, found places in chairs against the wall, and programmes were given to them.

But no expectant partners arrived, and Susie had time to look about her a little and recognise a few astonishing facts.

Almost all the women were married, and they had a sort of easy secure look about them, as if certain of their partners, that ended with irritating her.

Here along the wall sat dowagers, with a sprinkling of young girls, of whom the dancers took not the least notice in the world.

Occasionally, as if moved by a sense of pity, Lady Netzler, or one of the two Miss Netzlers, who were dancing
The Melbournians.

every dance, would seize on some awkward youth standing in the doorways or the passages and carry him off over to the girls, who thus obtained a stray partner or two.

Half an hour after she had been sitting thus, Susie and Loppie received the first inscriptions on their programmes.

In the other houses, the outskirt houses, they had at least had the refusal of would-be dancers.

Here they had to take what they could get, and the angry spot began to flame on Susie's cheek and the angry tears to well up in her eyes.

She danced five out of the thirty-five dances, that overflowed in the shape of extras from the twenty-eight on the
programme, and only one of these, the last, was with a presentable partner.

Susie, whose lower lip was sore with biting, could no longer contain herself, and with suppressed wrath aired her grievance to him.

In Melbourne the married women did not go monopolising all the men in that way, leaving the girls out in the cold! In Melbourne guests weren't left to themselves to make acquaintance with supercilious strangers.

Her friend good-humouredly explained.

"You see," he said, "the Netzlers are a regular dancing set. They dance like dervishes, and they wouldn't run the chance of getting a poor partner for anything, you know."
Susie thanked him for the compliment.

"Oh, no," he said; "you can dance all right, if only they happened to know it and you got in with one of the set. Then besides, you know, married women are all the go now everywhere. The men wouldn't turn up at all if they had to talk and dance with girls."

"Are your English girls as stupid as all that?"

"Well, they are waking up a bit now. They've got to, I suppose. They talk ever so much more freely than they used to do. A few years ago you'd have been surprised at the difference. I saw a girl just now sitting on the stairs with a fellow
The MacGhies go 'Home.'

who was feeding her with a spoon, and another one at the end of the conservatory was smoking a cigarette. It's all the rage now for them—cigarette smoking. I think it's more amusing than it used to be.”

“And I think,” said Susie, “that it is quite disgusting!” And she went back to Mrs MacGhie.

Lady Netzler's ball crowned their disappointment and defeat.

Susie would have no more of it.

She proposed to her mother to go home at once, and, after a little discussion of ways and means, they took their tickets.

At the last moment, however, the young Melbournite received a small measure of consolation.
They had had but one letter of introduction to anyone in the *grand monde*, and this was to Lady Gildea, Mrs Medwin’s niece.

The name of Gildea was national.

Sir Horace was the new bright particular star of politics, and it had been a keen source of annoyance to Susie to learn that just at that moment the Gildeas were abroad.

The "society" and even the daily papers faithfully chronicled their movements, and Susie read of interviews with emperors and great foreign statesmen.

She had seen Miss Medwin once several years ago in Melbourne at her aunt’s, and had hoped much from her.
The MacGhies go 'Home.'

The Gildeas had now returned, and Lady Gildea found Mrs Medwin's letter and the MacGhies' cards, which had been sent unadvisedly months ago, waiting her.

She at once wrote to Mrs MacGhie with much cordiality, and then she came to see them, and they went to see her.

Susie was quite charmed with her, and with Sir Horace too, and proposed to Mrs MacGhie to postpone their departure.

But Goodwood had been run, and the "season" was almost over, while the MacGhie exchequer was running low.

The fatality of things was too strong for them, and our disconsolate trio once more set out for home.
Thus Susie found herself again in her old haunts, a sadder and a wiser woman, as she said, looking out upon life in general, and parties and dances in particular, with a great air of disillusionment.

For several weeks the MacGhies did not entertain at all; but at last, exasperated by Annie’s triumphantly lugubrious “lectures” on their recent “conduct,” Susie roused herself once more, and declared that they must celebrate their return with a big dance.
CHAPTER II.

"SUSIE'S HERSELF AGAIN!"

Winter was passing away rapidly.

Mount Macedon had lost his coverlet of white a month ago, and the cold north wind had forgotten his stinging touch, and came mildly from the sunny expanses beyond the hills, where the bare fruit-boughs—almond, peach, apple, and pear—were leaping into sudden fairy colour and all the wildflowers were stirring.

When Susie woke up that morning

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and saw the long dusky beam of sunlight that struck in past one side of the window-blind, distilling the radiance of the blue, bright morning, the joyous note of spring was aroused in her.

She got up humming to herself, and drew the blind, and, as she washed and dressed there in the sunny room, her sister heard her for the first time since their return blithely singing a quick waltz tune.

It was a busy day for them, and Susie opened it by a sharp walk, for certain purposes of her own, and her quest was not, as she said to herself, without adventures.

The girls always took an active part
on festal occasions, Susie's especial office being the arrangement of the flowers in all the rooms.

She had a quick, instinctive taste, quite unconscious of itself, but in its way almost infallible.

The dining-room table was presently littered with vases and glass dishes, and heaped with flowers on trays, the plunder of the florists' and of the gardens. There Susie, with short, close-fitting sleeves, worked with a sort of artistic fury all through the morning and into the afternoon, disdaining lunch, munching biscuits and drinking a cup of tea in the female fashion.

The work flushed and excited her.

All the audacities of her little
vehement soul flung themselves into this material, and the combinations and arrangements of hues which she fixed in her vases and dishes were full of character.

She had a sense of colour that was often keen and almost always present as an influence in her.

The blue and gold of the peerless Austral heavens struck the keynote of this sense, and almost all the rest lay in her love of the brilliant, pungent native wildflowers, dating from her free, vagabond childhood with Loppie in the country.

And now she had come back to her native land again, and the sap of spring that was rising in tree, shrub, and plant touched her with a passionate sympathy.
What is like spring in this beloved south-eastern corner of the island continent?

Here there is a winter worth calling one, and from out its frost-locked grave the delicate flowers shoot up with a clear intensity of colour and perfume denied to the more turbid and luxuriant north.

Melbourne breaks out into her great hippic carnival in November, the month of flowers and sparkling rain showers, and her daughtership of the soil was strong on Susie now.

About two o'clock Loppie came in from her labours in the kitchen with the pastries and jellies and contemplated her sister's work.
"How you do love colour, Suse!" she said, putting her hands on her hips, with her benignant expression vivified by a pleased smile.

"Why, certainly!" said Susie. "I think bright colours are the most beautiful things in the world."

"Yes, the dull days do make you dreadfully low-spirited."

"Look at this fan I got this morning. It was at Delpratt's, imagine! They didn't know how they'd got it. It must be Chinese or Japanese. Isn't it splendid? Red, blue, silver and gold: then crimson flowers with yellow centres and dark brown leaves right across. And so harmonious! It was like a chord of music. Sixpence!"
‘Susie's Herself again!’

"Isn't it rather gaudy, Suse?" queried the, elder, somewhat dubiously.

"Gaudy? It's rich, it's splendid! Loppie, you never will understand colour! You're English right through. Those horrid London fogs never made you want to take Rough on Rats."

"They weren't nice, though. No one could call them nice. Your eyes and nose got soot all into them, and it was frightful on collars and cuffs."

"Look!" said Susie, pointing to a finger glass.

"Heath! Your favourite! I didn't think there were any out yet."

"You don't know where to look! I got them this morning. I do so love that flower. If I'd been a flower, I'd
like to have been a spray of heath. And who do you think I met? Guess.”

"Flossie Piggin?"

"Oh, no, a—hem—a gentleman."

"I can't guess."

"Oh, yes, you can. Try. Someone we used to nourish a sort of—what shall I say?—a sort of cupboard affection for?"

"Alec Frossard?" suggested Loppie.

"The same, and he went with me, and we had a long confidential chat about Somebody. The question is, is Somebody completely spoiled by the company of the dukes, earls, marquises, and what not, that Somebody has been consorting with in London? I opined not entirely."

"When did he come back?"
"Only two days ago, and he'd have come over to see us before; but he's got an old friend of his with him. I said, of course they were both to appear at the dance, with Mrs Frossard and Mary? And that was all. I had adventures, you see, in my twenty minutes' trot—heath, Japanesse fan, and Alec Frossard."

"Indeed you had, Susc."

"His friend's name is Stuart, and they were at Sydney University together. Alec is the only New South Welshman I ever liked, and I expect this Stuart of his will be horrid. But I didn't tell him so. Have you done?"

"Almost. The jellies are setting beautifully. And is Alec changed much?"
"He's fatter—that's all. He is so lazy. Are you going upstairs to take a spell?"

"Yes. I feel quite tired."

"Well, and so will I, as soon as I've placed all the vases. Where's mamma?"

"In the kitchen."

And Loppie went out.

Left to herself again, Susie contemplated her handiwork with a certain satisfaction, and then proceeded to the distribution of it about the several rooms.

The drawing-room in front, a double room thrown into one, denuded of all furniture but a few chairs, and the piano in one corner, the floor covered with a glazy, silvery drugget, which
Susie's Herself again!

(in her own phrase) fitted like a glove, was to serve for the dancers.

And therein Susie, having placed her vases on the mantelpiece and the brackets, executed a solemn pirouette, and then sat down, opened the grand piano and played the opening part of her old favourite waltz, the Larrikiness' chorus from Les Boulevards.

The dining-room was to serve for supper, and the three rooms on the other side of the house for a tea and coffee room, a cloak room, and "sitting out" room respectively.

The last of these was always alluded to by Susie and Loppie as "our room," or by Mrs MacGhie as "the girls' room," and here Susie had let her ideas on
“colour,” modified elsewhere by the meek but unmistakable prejudices of the two others, have full swing.

Crimson and blue and gold flowers in the dark setting of green leaves made of it a bower after her heart.

It was like a selected corner from her favourite haunt at the bottom of the garden, where the gulley struck into the stream, gushing and dreaming through shallow and pool on its way to the creek.

Truly the anti-English reaction was in full flood, and Susie was going to show her Melbourne friends that she had not broken her heart or her spirits in “perfidious Albion.”

The afternoon passed away and tea-
time came, a merry meal, where the laughing mother and sister listened to her quizzing forecast of incidents in the dance, and then they all went up to dress.

Susie was done first, and passed singing into Loppie's room, which was next to hers.

But Loppie was in front of the pier-glass in her mother's room, calmly undergoing final maternal attentions, Margaret (the maid) standing contemplatively by, and there Susie came in upon them.

She stood smilingly inspective.

"Well, Loppie," she declared, "you really look quite matronly! One would think you were a widow, or the mother
of at least four children, you have such an air! I told you that black and gold dress would do it. You've quite a look of the Princess Beatrice, and your so English, you know!"

"Do you think so, Suse?" queried Loppie mildly. "You said you thought it would suit me."

"Take no notice of her, Miss Loppie," said Margaret; "she's for tormenting everyone to-day."

They all laughed, Susie the longest and loudest.

She was exhilarated, a slight flush on her cheeks, and her eyes sparkling, quite like the old Susie they were so prone to worship, with all her pretty tyrannies and arch, perpetual mockery.
Then the three went downstairs together into the drawing-room, just as the clock on the mantelpiece was chiming eight, where they found the musicians—a fiddle, clarionet, and pianist—all ready, and sat about waiting for the guests to arrive.

The first knock and ring came in a few moments.

"It's the Frossards," said Susie, jumping up. "I told them to be sure and come exactly at eight."

Then, hearing Mary Frossard's voice, she went out into the hall, followed by Loppie and Mrs MacGhie, where there were greetings all round, the women embracing.

Susie had almost forgotten Alec D
The Melbournians.

Frossard's friend, but Mary, with the camaraderie air of a "nice" girl introducing a "nice" man to another "nice" girl (and all above any small notions of jealousy or monopolisation), brought Susie and Stuart face to face and introduced them.

They looked one another straight in the eyes as they shook hands, and were pleased with one another, a slight smile breaking upon their lips.

Both of them were in an hour of expansion, and Stuart recognised in her, with something like a thrill, a curious resemblance, faint but none the less real, to a woman who had played an abnormal and entrancing part in his past life.
‘Susie’s Herself again!’

Then she turned away, and hurried with Mary upstairs, intent on a rapid talk while her friend arranged her toilet.

Mrs Frossard, tall, apathetic, and still somewhat fine-looking, passed with Mrs MacGhie and Loppie into the ladies’ cloak-room.

Frossard and Stuart hung their coats and hats up in the hall, and declining the maid’s invitation to a cup of tea or coffee, strolled into the drawing-room.

As they went together up to the open door-windows at the front, beyond which was the cool dark verandah with its thick-twined creepers, Frossard said,—
"Well, and what do you think of Susie? You seem struck."

Stuart smiled a little.

"She seems to have some force," he said, "and a pretty girl always has a soul before the footlights."

He was analysing her face, figure, and air, trying to make out wherein this petite tartine had anything which should recall a woman whose beauty and powers should have given her one among the world's loud names.

The differences, the overwhelming superiorities of the elder, were so obvious, the resemblance so faint.

And yet it certainly existed, and he could not deny it.

Up in Susie's bedroom Mary was put-
ting her hair and dress straight, and vigorously singing the praises of her friend below.

He was everything that was charming! Mother was quite in love with him! He and Alec were regular mates.

And then came the final item, which was communicated in a confidential tone.

"It was Mr Stuart, you know, who was poor dear Mrs Brown's great friend—Maddy Brown, you remember. His evidence was in all the papers, and he wrote all those terrible articles in the *Age*. He is a journalist, and wonderfully clever, but as unaffected about it all as anything."

At this point the bell was again heard ringing, and the two hurried down.
Stuart and Frossard had turned and were talking with Mrs Frossard, Mrs MacGhie, and Loppie, as the girls entered by the back door, Susie carrying a little basket of programmes, caught up on the way; but Stuart's raised face encountered hers, and once more their eyes met.

The reason why nine women out of ten feel an added interest in a man who has been concerned in a love affair with another woman (and the more notorious the love affair the greater the interest) has not yet been satisfactorily explained by the champions of the sex.

None the less the fact remains that your Don Juan causes a flutter in the breast of your discreet Angelina no less than in that of your frolicsome Lady Adeline.
'Susie's Herself again!'

Susie's notions on the relations of the sexes were somewhat crude, although it seems permissible to declare of her, as of most healthy and pure-minded Australian girls, who see no reason to blush at the mention of things that convey no prurient innuendo to their direct and unsophisticated judgments, that she was aware of Cupid being a god with devious and delicious ways of his own.

But the glamour of the divine beauty of the unhappy actress who had witched her, in company with the large bulk of the pretty girls of the Melbourne of the hour, was reflected in the person of this serene, good-looking, clever young man, regarded by "everyone" as Madeline Brown's lover.
The idea was incorrect, but that did not diminish its effect on Susie, and when Stuart received a programme from out of her little be-ribboned basket, and at once asked if he might put her down for some dances, she laughed and blushed a little as she assented.

"How many may I take?" he asked.

"Well, you know, I have to dance with as many people as I can. It's my duty."

"Not more than five?"

"Why, there are only twenty-four altogether."

"And extras—say thirty. Shall we put it at four?"

"Don't you think two would do?"

"Let us split the difference and say three."
"Very well, three."

And he wrote his initials, "D. S.," opposite three waltzes and a polka, right down her programme, and handed it her back with a smile.

At that moment some more arrivals were announced—Mr and Mrs Broomfield, a young newly-married couple, of whom the bride, in her latter maiden days as Minnie Gentle, had been a particular friend of Susie's.

She turned to meet them, scarcely catching Stuart's remark that he trusted she looked leniently on pious frauds, while he went delicately to Mary Frossard to put down five dances on her programme, and felt that surely the bitterness of saltatorial dissolution was past.
The knocks and rings now began to come ever more quickly, and the room filled.

They were all, technically speaking, strangers to Stuart, and he stood leaning against the wall beside Mary's chair, listening to her account of them as they came in.

"Do you see anybody you want to be introduced to?" she asked, looking up at him.

Mary was a tall girl, inclined to thinness, with rich rolling brown hair, and something about her face and figure that recalled the models artists like to dress out in velvets and satins of deep neutral tints and paint as vaguely seventeenth or eighteenth century ladies.

Only, the Australian climate and manner of life had dried her beauty somewhat,
'Susie's Herself again!' 59

and she was addicted to the demurer forms of "quizzing."

"Well, no," said Stuart; "Who is that just entering?"

"Oh, don't you know? That is Jessie Medwin, Sydney Medwin's wife, and that's Sydney Medwin behind her."

Stuart laughed.

Sydney Medwin's resemblance, as he stood there resigned and stupid, to a big, drenched, and sleepy mouse suddenly struck him and seemed ludicrous.

"That is Mr Medwin behind him," the girl went on, "but I wonder where Mrs Medwin is? And who on earth is that beautiful creature who has come with them?"

Medwin, big, black, and burly, as Stuart in one of his synopses of the Parlia-
mentary debates had called the Minister for Mines, was shaking hands with Mrs MacGhie and expressing his regret that Mrs Medwin could not come. She was ill—quite laid up.

Then, as Mrs MacGhie and Mrs Sydney Medwin met, he clumsily introduced the stranger to her hostess—Miss Jackson, a friend of his wife's.

Everyone in the circle was looking with interest and admiration at the extraordinary beauty of the stranger, and when Mrs Medwin, after a few condolences with Loppie over the serious illness of her mother-in-law, passed on to Susie, Susie at once whispered to her,—

"Who is she, Jessie? Where on earth did you find her? Why, she's like a
coloured statue! What an extraordinary girl! What’s her name?”

“Alice Jackson. She’s English. She’s stopping with us at Mount Gordon. Mrs Medwin is quite mad about her. So are we all. She was a governess up the bush. Hush!”

“Well,” said Mary to Stuart, “and wouldn’t you like to be introduced to her?” bending her head in the direction of Miss Jackson, who was standing, calm and stately, by the door, alone, though encircled with appreciative attendants.

“No,” said Stuart; “I think she is nicest to watch from here.”

Then the band struck up, and the dancers began to move to their places for the first lancers.
CHAPTER III.

HERO AND LEANDER ON THE POLITICAL SITUATION.

The first dance was emphatically that of the elders, and it was a great sight to see Mr Medwin and Mrs MacGhie, faced by Mrs Thistlethwayte, the wife of the senior Member for the big Radical suburban constituency, with Mr M‘Naughton, the Member for one of the squatter pocket boroughs, leading off at the top of the room.

There were several other politicians or
ex-politicians there, for MacGhie had gone in for a good deal of social entertainment, and his widow, thanks to the incitement of her youngest daughter, had kept up the connection, so that her house had come to be looked upon by the tribe of M. L. A.’s as a safe and pleasant place of general meeting.

These were the meridian hours of the Coalition, when Conservatives, Liberals, and Radicals worked side by side, and the young journalist, who did not indulge in square dances, stood still leaning against the wall and watching the saltatory antics of the Members and ex-Members of Assembly whom he knew so well in other spheres.

The spectacle amused him.
The greatest and best thing in Australia is its Press, which, without anyone being aware of it, does most of the ruling of the country: knows everything, and having so far been satisfied with its large and legitimate profits as an universal benefaction, has remained pure, while every other form of public life is tainted with jobbery and greed.

Stuart, a tried and trusted member of a powerful newspaper office, had not much to learn about the political persons he saw here so earnestly engaged in the amenities of self-relaxation, and he enjoyed the sense of knowledge the more that none of them were aware of his possession of it.

Perhaps there was not one of them
who recognised him, while his pockets were crammed with potential bombs, which would have wrought terrible havoc at a moment's notice had he so pleased.

After the lancers came a waltz, and there was a regular irruption of the young people, who packed the room with a mass of swaying and coloured shapes, driving the elders and non-dancers out into the passages and on to the verandah.

Stuart and Mary thoroughly understood each other's style and step, and moved round easily, pausing in the crush, and marking time while he listened, with a smile, to the quiet, satirical talk she kept up in his ear.

Once or twice they passed Susie, swinging along with Sydney Medwin,
dancing too quickly for him, with an impatient, distant look in her eyes and a flush on her cheeks which made Mary laugh.

Then the two stopped by the open garden-window, by the piano and the musicians, and went out onto the verandah, where the gaslight from the supper-room mingled with the moonlight among the dark shadows.

Here they sat out the next dance, in two delicious easy-chairs, looking across the lawn and trees and the garden, down to the woody stream where the horizon stars shone, caught in the gently moving branches, and all the heaven was pure with the evening breeze.

Mary was a completely frank, proud,
and modest girl, and though she would have been pleased enough if Stuart had seen fit to pass the boundary line of obvious friendship, she would not cross that line by so much as an inch herself.

He sat and talked to her with his unfailing simple geniality, but that was all, and it began to occur to her now for the first time that in all probability that would always be all.

What sort of girl would the girl be with whom it would not always be all?

Ah, that was a question she could not solve!

He had been in love once, desperately in love, and would he ever be in love again?

Mary envied the girl, whoever she
was, just as she envied that other one; but perhaps, after all, he might end with making up his mind to marry somebody who loved him, and to whom he could give a friendship made tender by trust and the perception of sympathy and comprehension.

Stuart's first dance with Susie was the next on the programme, and as Mary was also engaged for it they went back together into the dancing-room.

"Well," he said to Susie, as he led her away on his arm, "and have you found out my pious fraud yet?"

"No. What was it?"

"I put my name down for four dances."

"That was not a right thing to do."
Their hands locked and they began dancing.

"It was not," he said. "But absolution follows on confession, and I confessed at once. Shall I be punished also?"

"I expect so."

"Or will you keep No. 12 for a rest, and allow me to superintend it? You are dancing every dance. You will be tired."

She almost retorted,—

"Not at this rate."

For Stuart was making her waltz the polka, whirling her round slowly, and doing it, as she admitted, beautifully; but her vehemence was still upon her, and she wanted to rattle about and ease it.
Round they went, he guiding her deftly.

"You waltz all your polkas?" she asked.

"Yes. It is too much trouble to polk."

"You are lazy."

"No, not lazy. Only, it seems better to keep one's force for other things besides polkas!"

The tone of the reply impressed her.

It conjured up memories of "force" wasted on trifles. It made her think of the difference between this nature of his and of her own.

Their next dance together was No. 12, and he came to her not quite certain whether she would deny it him, but she
took his arm at once, seeming quiet and a little tired, as he had prophesied.

"Well," he said, "shall we sit it out?"

She agreed, adding,—

"Let us go on to the verandah."

And he led her to the nook which he and Mary had discovered.

Susie was, to a certain extent, accustomed to a political atmosphere, her real friendship with her father and her own desire to understand things and to shine in their discussion having made her familiar with something more than the day's political commonplaces.

She had gone occasionally into the Ladies' Gallery, especially, of course, for the functions, and knew most of the
leading politicians by sight, and this gave her a more vivid and personal view of it all.

MacGhie, too, was a man who read a certain amount of miscellaneous literature, and especially that which had to do with theology (he was a great friend of Judge Parker, the once militant Liberal lawyer politician, who had solaced the ease and dignity of his retirement to the bench by religious polemics), and thus she had acquired a smattering acquaintance with social and religious problems, and though her novel reading and dreams about life in England had eclipsed this side of her, it only wanted touching on in her present humour to bring it out.
Stuart touched on it by accident, and presently he was listening to a pretty decisive enunciation of the actual aspect of the political situation.

The ideas were not much more than her father's, caught up and tricked out fantasticaly from her intelligent, hasty, young girl's point of view, but they were in the main Stuart's own, and he gave her more credit for their being hers than they deserved.

"Yes," he said, "you're right. We've no political life at all here just at present. Conservatives, Liberals, and Radicals are all loving one another like brothers over a policy of parochialism, tempered by the flesh-pots. They're better off even in New South Wales,
for, though they have anarchy and jobbery rampant there, they have vigour, and I can see the nucleus of a young Australian party. It is the unorganised extremities which are just now teaching the organised centres. Queensland and South Australia are far more progressive than New South Wales and Victoria. They are beginning to talk 'disloyalty' in Brisbane, and I am told Sir John Cochrane threatens to lead the next elections with the cry of Australia for the Australians."

"Oh, I would talk any amount of disloyalty!" said Susie. "You don't know how I detest England. It is so wretchedly old and corrupt, and all its ways disgust me. We should sever from
it, or be able to treat with it equally, and not as—as inferiors.”

“And so that is what you made up your mind about when you were in London?”

She flushed, sitting up straight in the easy-chair, where the gaslight fell upon her.

“Yes, and if I were only a man I would go out and make people feel this too. I don’t see why Australians shouldn’t be proud of being Australians, and not to be ashamed of owning it, as they are in England. One woman asked me once if I wasn’t a Kaw-lonia, just as if you’d be asked if you weren’t a Haw-tentot or an Esquim-maw. I said no; I was an Aw-stralian.”
Stuart with difficulty prevented himself from laughing outright.

He sat back in the shade, smilingly contemplating her over his knuckles, touched and even thrilled by her unexpected outburst, and considerably diverted by her wrathful sarcasm and the way she drawled out the accented words.

The whole scene came up before him: the staid English drawing-room (as he imagined such)—the staid English lady, stout and over-dressed—the lithe, hot-cheeked, pretty Australian girl, accustomed to say what came into her mind with the words that came to her tongue—the condescending interrogation—the fiery response—the tableau—the "exeunt severally."
It was quite delicious!

"And why," she said, "don't you go into Parliament and say all that?"

He felt he could laugh now without offending her, and laughed.

"All in due season," he said. "Perhaps some day I may, or may try to. Politics are an affair of compromise. If you go too quick you find yourself alone, and what can you effect alone? You brace yourself up for the hour which you see is coming, and you wait patiently till the iron is hot—red hot—white hot if possible—and then you strike. You ought to hate bungling as you do sin.—And there is the next dance begun, and I must take you back again."
They rose, and he led her into the drawing-room, and as they went she looked at him and thought what a fine face he had, so radiant and quiet and strong and what lovely lips!

For Susie had not yet learned to view things in the abstract; but the person who spoke weighed with her as a rule considerably more than the opinions he expressed.

The dance had every appearance of being a success.

An unaffected air of enjoyment sat upon all things, and the vigour and the enthusiasm of the votaries of Terpsichore were quite unabated.

Alec Frossard and Loppie, perfectly happy in their youthful maturity, un-
flawed health, mildly genial natures, and a tacit assumption of mutual proprietorship, sailed round together with leisurely ease in dance after dance.

Minnie Broomfield and Jessie Medwin had laughingly "swapped" husbands, and were tyrannising archly over the swapped ones.

From time to time both of these juvenile matrons could be seen shaking with suppressed laughter at their own remarks and those of their partners, whom they relentlessly despatched to the succour of all (or almost all) maidens in distress.

Medwin, looking bigger, blacker, and burlier than ever, went through the lancers with much serious vigour and
precision as the vis-à-vis of "the beautiful Miss Jackson," who declined all round dances, declaring she could not waltz.

"Tell me," said Minnie, floating about under the somewhat exiguous guidance of Sydney Medwin, "is Mrs Medwin really very ill? or is it that she's not fond of coming here more than once a year?"

"Mamma? Oh, she's bad—she's in bed, you know. I suppose she'll die one of these times. She's sick of living, anyway."

"Ah! she is a great sufferer. And that good-for-nothing scamp her son and heir has been one of the chief causes of it."

"Oh, it isn't me! She's given me up long ago. It's Stephe. Stephe's kicking over the traces like mad. The boss had to take a stock whip to
him the other day up at Lathong. He wants to marry a barmaid in Geelong. The only thing that would do any good would be for Jessie to have . . . . You know, mamma believes in Jess.”

“Well . . . . and why not?”

“Well, you know it’s not my fault!”

“Hush, you wretched man, you are making me blush all over! Your father seems to admire Miss Jackson very much.”

“I daresay she’ll be my stepmother some day.”

“How horridly you talk! Now take me to the verandah, and go over there and ask Miss Perkins to give you two dances—two, mind! . . . .”

“Lord Morecamb? Oh, yes,” murmured Jessie, at the other end of the room,
happy with Charlie Broomfield, one of her favourite partners, and the best waltzer in Melbourne, "I met him at Lady Lindsay's last reception. He's stopping at Government House, isn't he? He is a friend of theirs. He's just come from Sydney, hasn't he? I liked him very much."

"He's a very decent shot, I know, for an Englishman, and he can ride too—sticks on."

"Isn't he going to marry anyone? It's the duty of our girls to marry all the really nice Englishmen who come out."

"There's no one in his style left now Jessie Vorley is married."

"And Minnie Gentle, you ungallant wretch!"

"And Kate Robinson."
"Oh no! Kate was too unconventional for him. Poor, dear, beautiful, erratic Kate! She would have made his hair jump off his head six times a day."

"I'm not so sure. Young Englishmen like that sort of thing now more than they used to, I fancy."

"What about the beautiful Miss Jackson?"

"Isn't she already bespoke?"

There was a silence, Jessie being genuinely astonished.

The idea had evidently never struck her before.

"I don't think," said Susie reflectively to Stuart, as their next waltz was drawing to a close, "I've ever... ."

"Ever what?"
She flushed.

"I was thinking to myself," she said, "thinking aloud. I was going to say, that I didn't think I'd ever enjoyed a dance more than to-night's."

She had substituted the whole for a part, the dance for that one waltz, and Stuart divined it.

"Not even when you were in London?" he said.

"Oh no! They were nearly all miserable affairs. Once or twice I could have really almost cried over them."

"The extras begin after this, don't they?"

"Yes."

"Well, of course, I take you into supper—and are all your extras filled?"
"I think so, all—all but one."

"Then that is mine?"

"If you want it."

He smiled, and gently, so gently as to be almost imperceptibly, pressed her with his arm and hand.

And when they went in to supper together, and got one of the small tables up by the verandah, she had a strangely thrilled and exultant feeling which gave a lovely flushed light to her eyes and all her face.

The supper-room was the scene of Susie's chief floral efforts, and now, crowded with the brilliant dresses of the women and the bending black shapes of the men attending to their partners, and merry with the sound of talk,
laughter, clinking silver and glass, and the mimic explosions of the champagne and aerated waters, but cool and fresh from the evening breeze that poured in through the large garden-windows, it was a genuine social revel.

Some went out onto the verandah, and the men brought dainty comestibles to girls in low, easy-chairs, looking up with jewelled eyes in the dangerous fascination of starlight and faint moonlight.

Then some of the enthusiasts started dancing again, and the passionate strains of the "Polka de la Reine" rose and fell fitfully on the breeze and the quieter noise of the dwindling revellers.

Mr Medwin congratulated Mrs MacGhie on the success of the dance.
“Yes,” said Mrs MacGhie, “the young people do seem to be enjoying themselves nicely.”

“Let me congratulate you, Miss MacGhie,” said Stuart to Loppie, meeting her by the door, “on your supper-room.”

“Thank you,” said Loppie, looking at Susie on his arm and wondering a little.

Susie had evidently told him of her sister’s struggle with the jellies, and Loppie was impressed by their obviously mutual comprehension and that look on the young girl’s face.

It quite reminded her of Alec and herself.

The same fact had struck someone else, divined in whatever manner, beside Loppie.
As the Frossards and Stuart were leaving, Mary and Susie were for a moment together and somewhat apart from the others.

The friends embraced, and Susie said,—
"Good-night, Mary."

Mary answered in a whisper,—
"Good-night, Mrs Stuart."

And turning, went quickly up the hall before Susie had recovered herself.

Later on, when they were all gone, when the home trio had refreshed themselves with a second supper, and had gone up to their rooms to bed, Susie, standing quite still in the grey dawn-light opposite the mirror, looked right into her own eyes and whispered to herself,—
"Mrs Stuart."
PART II.

N O O N.
CHAPTER I.

MRS MEDWIN'S GARDEN PARTY.

Mrs Medwin recovered from her illness with unexpected rapidity, and feeling better than she had felt for years, readily acquiesced in her daughter-in-law's idea of giving a large garden party just before the Cup.

The MacGhies arrived early, and found Mrs Medwin seated under a huge and lofty Chinese umbrella of red and black, fixed at the end of the lawn, with the tea-table beside her.
She was in the middle of a little group of her guests, most of whom could find room under the capacious shade.

The lawn was surrounded by tall gum trees, for which Mrs Medwin had always had a liking, and the long low structure of the house, with its flower-beds and shrubberies, was backed with more trees behind.

One of the two lawn tennis courts was already occupied by four players, and their movements gave vitality to the scene, while a pleasant breeze blew from off the bay, bringing with it every now and then the sound of the dashing and churning breakers.

The MacGhies knew most of the people present, and when Mrs MacGhie had had a chair drawn for her beside Mrs
Mrs Medwin's Garden Party.

Medwin, the two girls were soon sitting in the shaded parts of the lawn, drinking tea and talking with their friends.

Susie was somewhat stirred with the idea of meeting Stuart, who she was sure would come with the Frossards, but the party had not yet arrived, and she looked round, examining the others in a rather nervous, absent-minded way, paying little heed to the talk of the young man standing by her chair.

Charlie Broomfield and his wife were playing on opposite sides in the lawn tennis.

Miss Jackson, more superbly statuesque than ever, stood erect and motionless, the centre of a small group at the left corner of the court.
She was dressed in a magnificent toilet of purple and black, and seemed quite unconscious or disregardful of the attention she excited.

Once she turned a little, her eyes met Mrs Medwin's, and they both smiled.

Mrs Medwin was for once in a way looking almost happy.

The expression of pain which habitually sat on that obstinately severe face was entirely absent.

Something youthful played upon it, and as her husband came across the grass towards her, escorting Angus, the Premier, and his daughter, her quiet gaze rested on him with a sweet and clear affection.

Angus moved along with his quiet step
Mrs Medwin's Garden Party.

and wizened self-possession, courtly and even conciliatory up to the point of the satisfactory assertion of his personality, a man of infinite tact, and who had done more to make the Coalition the prodigious success it was than anyone else.

By a coincidence Ridler, the Treasurer, with his wife and two sons and three daughters, a terrible brood of vulgar and hopelessly stupid persons, had just got down out of their carriage, and stepped on to the lawn as Angus and Miss Angus reached their hostess.

Ridler paced slowly and deliberately a little in front of his party, who trooped together round the fat, over-dressed mother like chickens about an old hen.

He was a man of genuine ability, on
certain lines, and had once had a streak of political genius.

Full faced, but pale almost to whiteness, above the medium size, with a loose moustache and beard, he carried quiescence to the pitch of cynicism, secure in his power, dominating even the organised extremist vote which had made him the equal of Hellicar, the Conservative leader and Minister for Lands, and which he had in turn almost coerced into following him on his new development of conciliation and compromise with the established social and political fact.

Since MacGhie's death he had been the dictator of his party.

No one trusted him. No one believed in his sincerity.
Mrs Medwin's Garden Party.  97.

But his party had an infatuate faith in his ability to do what they wanted, and he knew that, if ever a crisis came, he had only to step to the helm again to the sound of their ringing cheers.

Mrs Medwin cordially detested him, and as he and his family came up to her a polite but chill constraint fell upon the circle round her, which was not even relieved by the sound of the band as it began playing a waltz.

To Susie, however, he stood for her father's chief colleague and friend, and this man, who found his own female folk so tiresome and oppressive, had taken quite a fancy to the pretty, bright, intelligent girl, whose keen, impulsive personal criticisms mildly amused him.
More than once he had come up into the Ladies' Gallery to her, and sat talking with her for half an hour at a time about the Members below and their ideas and affairs.

She was looking straight at him now, and thinking of a definition Stuart had given of him—"the white-washed larrikin of Victorian politics"—a clever definition.

His eyes met hers; he smiled slightly and bowed.

She almost started at hearing Jessie Medwin's voice beside her.

"My dear Susie, I want to introduce you to Lord Morecamb."

She glanced up, and took in a swift impression of a tall young man, admirably dressed and posed, standing bare-headed, as Jessie presented them to each
other, and then, with a remark on the pleasantness of the sea breeze, passed on to another group.

Susie's unheeded interlocutor, who had brought himself a chair, now with ostentatious nonchalance left it, and Lord Morecamb sat down.

She had recognised at once the sort of man he was.

He was the modern English aristocrat.

He was the same type as Sir Horace Gildea.

He had just the same perfect physical preservation, the simple, unaffected self-possession and ease, the calm and faultless manner of speech, gesture, and attitude, which somehow gave you the impression of his having been everywhere and seen everything and exhausted all keen emotion.
And all this was utterly ingrained in him, seeing that his ancestors for two or three hundred years had gone through precisely the same experience with precisely the same result.

His face, colourless and regular, with a clearness and cleanness of flesh that was attractive in itself, as all manifestations of true health are, impressed her quite singularly.

"Ah!" he said, with a faint smile in his eyes, looking up at the flowers in the breast of her white dress from the blossoms which she held in her fingers. "Epacris? Is not that epacris? I have never seen it except in hothouses in Europe."

"We call it heath here—at least we children used to among ourselves."
She spoke rhythmically, feeling the band music stirring her.

"I remember quite well when I saw it first," he said, "and what an impression it made upon me. No one could tell us what it was, and we had to send for the head gardener, who said it was an Australian wildflower."

She drew out the little bouquet and held it to him.

"It is my favourite flower."

He took it and looked at it, and as his eyelids were lowered she could observe his face and the faint smile that still played upon it.

"Now," she said, "you must tell me where you first saw our heath."

He thanked her, giving back the bouquet.
"Well," he said, "it was in a castle in midwinter in a Hungarian forest. I was up there as one of a shooting party with Prince Esterhazy, and one morning it was snowing too heavily to go out and we went into the hothouses. Somehow somebody managed to knock a pot over and break it, and that was the heath—the epacris. I daresay I should never have noticed it if it had not been for that."

"And how did the heath get into a hothouse in a castle in the Hungarian bush, do you think?"

"It seems that one of Prince Esterhazy's naturalists came out to Australia some years ago, and he probably brought back the epacris in some shape or other."

"And do princes in Europe still keep
naturalists and astronomers and analysts
and people like that, just as we keep
magpies or tame emus?"

"Some still do; but the temper of the
time is against it, and I fancy the Ester-
hazy girls will never have another
Schubert to give them music lessons."

"Oh, yes, I remember. It was a
Prince Esterhazy who took him away
as music master up into a castle in
Hungary, where he fell in love with one
of the daughters—Caroline her name was,
I think—and had to go back to Vienna
again. Was that your prince's castle?"

"No, that castle is at Zelesz, and it
belonged to a count, not a prince, and
I am afraid the love story is held to
be rather mythical, isn't it?"
The Melbournians.

"I don't know, but I hope not. I was reading about it only the other day, and I am fonder of Schubert's songs than any other music but Schumann's."

They talked on pleasantly for some time, she growing more and more eager to draw from him accounts of the historic places and people he had seen in Europe.

The tempered richness of this life, the final fruit of ancient aristocratic communities, absorbed her.

It was the realm of her dreams again.

And now for the first time she understood, too, the attitude assumed by the best and most intelligent members of these communities, the tender and pathetic feeling they had for all this venerable
and consecrated beauty which they saw was doomed.

"But, you know," said Susie, "I'm a radical, I'm a democrat, and I don't believe in all this wealth and ease being in the hands of a few princes and princesses, and counts and dukes, and Ladies This and That. I think the common people have their rights as well."

"If you will only say powers instead of rights, I will agree at once. I can't see that anyone has any rights. We all struggle and do what we can to stand, and the beauty which the old aristocracies have brought into existence is perishing with them. The middle class has not spared it, the democracy will not spare it."
"What do you think of our Australian cities? What do you think of Melbourne?"

"Am I to tell you the truth?" he asked with a fine smile.

"Oh, of course."

"Then I think it would be dreadful to have to live in them. They are almost worse than the American cities. It is interesting to see them. But I understood an English girl who said to me the other day that, if she could not go back to England, she would die."

"What was it hurt her so?"

"The narrowness and dryness of things here, she said. No pictures, no music, no social life, no shade even! I assure you I pitied her. Yet it amused me."
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"I don't think London is any better. It is a horrible place! There is no sun there, and that's worse still. And the people struck me as weak-minded and petty in the extreme."

"There are plenty of such people, and England as a whole is getting more and more unendurable every year. But for all that, you can still meet plenty of charming men and women in society there, and we have still lovely places to go to in the country."

Susie sighed a little impatiently.

"You see," she said, "I never had the chance of meeting these people, and if I had, I daresay they would have made me even more angry than those I did meet, for the servility of the ordinary
English and the superiority of their aristocrats is dreadful to me. You see, I am a plebeian, a democrat, and you are an aristocrat."

"Oh, no, I am not an aristocrat. We have no aristocrats in England, or only a very few, who don't count for much. The English nobility is only the sublimated middle class, and that is what has made it so strong. My grandfather's grandfather was what is called now a Government contractor, and, I fancy, a rather disreputable one, for he bought his title from James I."

"And what did he do in the time of Charles I. and Cromwell?"

"He died before the Civil War, and his son managed in the cleverest way not
only to keep out of trouble all round, but to profit by both the Protectorate and the Restoration. My progenitors were all excessively prudent. They never went in for the wrong side. They were for the Protestant succession right through."

"And did none of them ever do anything reckless and picturesque?"

"One or two of the younger ones were adventurous, and in 1745 the head of the house, who was quite young and had married one of the beautiful Lovans, showed signs of taking up with the Jacobite cause, which gave great uneasiness to his brother and the family generally, and then he died very suddenly—of a seizure."

"Do you mean he was poisoned?"
"It is hard to say. His portrait is in the gallery at Morecamb, with that of his wife, and they always fascinated me. She married again soon afterwards—one of the Ratcliffs, who years later took the title of Lovan, and she was distinctly like the present Lord Lovan, whom you may have heard of, and who has disappeared so strangely."

By this time the lawn was almost crowded, all the guests having arrived.

Hellicar was there, tall, gaunt, and well dressed, an English gentleman of the old type, but nervously vigorous and alert, quite as struck with Miss Jackson's singular beauty as his wife was.

Mrs Hellicar, the daughter of an officer who had come out to Australia in one
of the regiments in the old days, and married a native heiress and settled down, was already a grandmother, but had not for all that yet resigned her pretensions to being considered a pretty woman.

She and her husband were the only two Melbourne people who were thoroughly in accord with Mrs Medwin.

The two stood talking to Miss Jackson, who replied serenely, while Alcock, the new Minister for Railways, discussing a political phase in a rather loud voice with the new Bishop, Maddock's successor, every now and then cast quick sidelong glances at the beautiful Englishwoman.

"Do you know," said Stuart to Mary Frossard, after a rather protracted silence, as they were sitting together under the
trees at the far side of the tennis courts, "I never realised so clearly before that a real change has begun in the political world. The old Coalition is passing. The stagnant tank is in motion. Someone has cut a hole in the embankment. I prophesy wonders in the future. There will be a premature effort forward, a sharp reaction, and then the new development will quietly become an established fact. The Coalition must expand, or it is doomed."

She looked at him.

He was more than ordinarily stirred, and she judged correctly that some of this emotion was due to that close and interested tête-à-tête on the other side of the lawn.
She had the impulse of the tender-hearted woman to draw the flushed face into her comforting breast and soothe the weary brow with the cool and gentle hand of loving pity.

He had gone back to town a few days ago, and last night had been up till very late attending a debate in the House and writing about it, having arranged to meet the Frossard party at the St Kilda station and drive with them to Mount Gordon.

"In that new development," she said softly, "will lie your chance."

He nodded silently.

Jessie Medwin was passing by Alec and Loppie, who also had found a nice coign of vantage for two, and stopped to exchange a few words.
"Isn't mamma looking well?" she said.

"She is indeed," said Loppie. "I don't think I've seen her looking so well for years."

"I tell her she's quite girlish," laughed Jessie, passing on.

Hellicar had come to talk with Mrs Medwin.

"When"—he said in a low tone, bending over her with the old-fashioned, graceful and gallant air he had with women—"when one looks round and sees a gathering like this, one realises something of what Mrs Medwin has done for the Party and the true good of Victoria."

She smiled faintly, her face still happy and serene but a little weary.

"You have made the impossible pos-
sible for us. Victoria is worthy of the august name it bears. We are still loyal, and every year sees the elevation in tone and style of our social life. Mount Gordon is the Delphi of the Coalition, and Mrs Medwin is its Ægeria."

At that moment Ridler was crossing an open space in the lawn, having broken away at last from a dull group of friends, and made up his mind to go and talk with Susie.

Mrs Medwin's eyes rested on him, and Hellicar's, following hers, also rested on him.

His fine lips wreathed into a smile.

"A lion with his teeth drawn," he whispered gently. "The lopped off head of the defunct radical hydra."
Ridler came up to Susie and they shook hands.

Lord Morecamb rose as if to offer his place, and Ridler was about to sit down in it, when a woman's voice was heard saying in a low, startled tone,—

"What is the matter?"

All the three instinctively turned, as everyone about them was turning, to the big red and black Chinese umbrella where Mrs Medwin was seated.

There was a peculiar contractive movement going on in the people round it.

Susie rose, and, prompted by an impulse that connected the vague alarm she felt with her mother and Loppie, went swiftly across the lawn.

As she reached the outskirts of the
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gathering group round the umbrella, a sudden opening in it revealed the situation at a glance.

Mrs Medwin was leaning back in her easy-chair, her head resting on the cushion, her eyes half closed, her mouth a little open.

A ray of light from the declining sun played upon her face and made her lips seem almost to smile.

Erect above her, tall, gaunt, panic-struck, was Hellicar, gazing at her fixedly.

There was a general silence, and the sound of the sea breeze in the tree tops, mingled with the floating strains of the band and the occasional calls of the lawn tennis players, seemed to recede into
the distance for a moment, and then to flow back again in a delicious gust of melody and vitality.

Susie put out her hand and caught a proffered arm.

It was Morecamb's.

"Oh, oh," she said in a whisper, "she's dead."

And she clung to him without thought, frightened but fascinated at her first view of the inevitable human end.

He drew her arm by the hand through his, and was leading her quietly away, when her raised eyes suddenly became fixed on two eyes and a pallid face directly opposite her own.

It was Stuart.

He turned at once, and she, who
had first flushed and then gone pale, stopped short.

Then a sort of helpless feeling overwhelmed her, and she said in a low voice,—

"Let us go right out. I want to go right out."

The guests dispersed rapidly, trooping off hushed and awed through the garden gate, while the family party, which included the Hellicars and Miss Jackson, gathered round the dead woman.

Sydney stood a little apart, staring dejectedly at that lifeless face, whose smooth ivory brow he had so often caused to contract with annoyance and anger.

Dr Marks, the fashionable young doctor, small, clean, neat, sympathetic, had hap-
The Melbournians.

pened to be there, and was upon the spot in a moment.

He saw at a glance that there was nothing to be done, and said so, but he had already given out his orders, and would do all that he could when this one short moment of grief-stricken observa- 
vation was over.

Mary was passing through the gates on Stuart's arm, leaning close to him.

She realised what the distressing event meant in its hurrying effect on "the new development," and as she looked at his face, she saw a stern, set look on it which she could read aright.

In that new development he intended to have a place.
CHAPTER II.

AUSTRALIA VICTRIX.

When she came to think about it that night in bed, Susie felt pretty certain that she had made what is called an impression on Lord Morecamb.

She had not, she knew, seen the last of him.

He had asked leave of Mrs MacGhie, as he had led her away through the gardens from that tragic figure under the big Chinese umbrella, for permission to call, and Susie thought
that he would soon take advantage of its having been at once granted.

A girl knows well enough when a man's talk is stimulated by her presence and tacitly addressed to her emotions.

There are many ways of making love, and four bright eyes fixed on one another, while four red lips are discussing the differential calculus or the last book of African exploration, can bring spirit into relation with spirit in a manner middle-aged persons, who are now professional papas and mammas, seem to comprehend but dimly.

Morecamb's talk with Susie had the true personal ring about it, and entailed an amount of active contemplation of
his interlocutor's countenance which under ordinary circumstances was scarcely justifiable.

Susie had been a little stirred to start with, and his talk was wine to her.

Nevertheless she realised now with a quite remarkable clearness that, so far as he went himself, she was not much interested by him.

He had profited by the love-emotion aroused by another man, and speaking there as the interpreter of the cultured civilisation she had so longed for, had been invested by the ideality of that life, not by the magic spell of her fluttering heart.

But here her powers of discernment failed her, and in admitting to herself
that she would like to see him again, she felt that she somehow did a wrong to Stuart.

And her intuition was a true one as regarded herself, at anyrate as she was then.

She was playing with fire, and was not strong enough to refrain from the entrancing danger.

A few days later, Frossard rode over with an invitation to make up a picnic and shooting party to Volcano Peak and "The Springs."

The Broomfields were coming.

Acceptance was a foregone conclusion, and Susie did her portion of the preparations for the next morning's early setting out with rather troubled feelings.
It ended in her working up a nice little mental grievance against Stuart.

She had a perfect right to talk with anyone she pleased, and he had not the least right in the world to resent it, and she intended to make this view manifest to all men.

When, therefore, the party arrived in the buggy at Tara (the Frossards' station and home), Susie, who was driving, had quite an air of defiant vivacity about her which led Mary to suppose that there had been a little family "row" over something or other on the way—perhaps about Alec and Loppie, though for nothing within reasonable comprehension.

Stuart was there with Frossard, Broom-
field, and Connolly the boundary-rider, to help in looking after the horses, but Susie managed not to see him in the general movement and the crowd of the three buggies, and the women all went into the house together.

The men presently rejoined them in the dining-room, where the arrangement of the parties in the buggies was being discussed with animation by Mrs Broomfield and Susie, Loppie and Mary assisting more quietly.

The difficulties of a satisfactory settlement were obvious.

Mrs MacGhie and Mrs Frossard would go in the big Frossard buggy with Loppie and Alec to drive.

The Broomfields' buggy only held two,
and it was against all social law, human and divine, to let them go in it themselves, considering that they were now a regular married couple, and as such supposititiously quite sick of each other.

"I think," said Mrs Broomfield to Susie, "that Charlie ought to go in your buggy, with Mary and you, and Mr Stuart will look after me in ours. And, as Connolly will be going with you, I shall be able to reflect that you will all behave yourselves as well as can be expected!"

"Well," said Susie, "if we drive on ahead and open all the gates, we're not going to wait to see you through and shut them!"
This arrangement was finally adopted, and the procession set out, the MacGhies' buggy, with Broomfield, Mary, Susie and Connolly, leading.

It was a cloudless day, the true Australian gold and blue, with a pure cool breeze coming in from the sea over the green and flowering plains.

As they got out into the paddocks, the ubiquitous rabbit began to become a prominent feature in things, the dogs giving generally ineffectual chase.

The Broomfields' buggy, on which fell the onus of shutting the gates, soon fell behind.

"I will drive, if you like," said Mrs Broomfield, "and you can shoot. Jock will stand fire—only, don't fire forward as it makes him deaf and foolish."
Stuart disclaimed any desire for pro-
miscuous rabbit potting, but at the
next gate they changed places and she
kept the reins.

That every pretty woman expects,
and every sort of one hopes, to be made
love to in some shape or other was one
of his mild social dogmas, and, in his
present deliciously serene humour, which
gave in its adherence to the theory
that one pretty woman is about as
good as another, the two worked up a
quite artistic flirtation.

The general topic of talk all along
the line was inevitably concerning Mrs
Medwin, and with these two it took a
piquantly anecdotal turn.

"Charlie," under the usual vow of
conjugal secrecy, had imparted to her quite a considerable bulk of information regarding the habits, domestic and otherwise, of the whole genus Medwin, to which Jessie, under the equally usual vow of the taciturnity of the bosom friend, had not too sparingly added, and Stuart unscrupulously took his amusement out of his companion’s chattering and flattered indiscretions.

When they drove up under the trees, by the succession of small oval water-holes which gave their name to the place as “The Springs,” Mary received them with mild chaff, which was taken up by Broomfield and Frossard, and spiritedly replied to by the alleged guilty couple.
Susie was now a little out of temper with the unexpectedly easy manner in which Stuart was behaving, and when the lunch cloth was laid under the trees, and he stretched himself out beside her and smilingly opened talk, she was distant, and feigned interest elsewhere.

But Stuart was in the sovereign and victorious mood, and intended to manipulate her.

She proved more refractory than he expected, and he was surprised to find how the process of persuasion stirred him.

Then, at last, when she rendered up her perversity and their eyes began to speak their inner feelings, he was thrilled to his finger tips, and owned her spell
to be a higher and deeper one than he had before conceived of.

After the lunch they split up into little parties, the men shouldering their guns, and a general rendezvous was given for the top of the peak for five o'clock, and then down together for tea and the drive home by moonlight.

Stuart and Susie were soon solitary companions, climbing the rocky spurs, inhaling the wattle perfume in gusts, while every now and then the crack of a gun leaped out on to the wind and was hurried away, pursued by the small cloud of smoke that showed where Broomfield or Frossard were diversifying flirtation with sport.

Susie had enough intelligence for an
appreciation of the fact that the manifestations of this faculty in the man she was to love was the finest thing about him.

Her little dream of marriage did not imply either the absorption of herself in her husband or the effeminate nest of the lover's purely circumscribed existence.

They were to stand side by side, and look out on life as a scope for united effort and ambition.

Certainly she felt Stuart's physical charm, his clear, pure magnetism, and as they went on up, side by side, with firm, elastic step and exhilarated breath, she relished to the full the pride of her perfect health and strength, and took a
real pleasure in his clean-limbed, vigorous case; but what seemed to bind her to him most was the future, the career which seemed to strike upon his face like a dawnlight.

"You know," she said slowly, her words a part of the rhythmic toil of their climb, "I have been thinking about what you were saying to me at our dance—the politics, you remember?—and the patient waiting till the iron is white hot, and hating bungling like sin. And I think you were quite right, and I was quite wrong. But all the same, I can't believe it is best to be as dreadfully patient about it as Ridler is."

"Ridler," said Stuart, "is a scaramouch in a state of torpor. While you
wait, you move yourself and strive
to move others. Ridler keeps still,
digesting and chewing the cud, and
everybody leaves him alone.”

“I don’t think that Ridler believes
in anything at all, or he couldn’t be
so nonchalant. My father was never
like that. He believed in an Australian
Nation.”

“He did, and were he alive now,
he would realise that the dawn is slowly
breaking—not in the east but in the
north. The political soul of Victoria
at the present moment seems dead, and
they have wrapped up the body in the
winding-sheet of the big Melbourne news-
papers, and written over it: ‘Its end
was peace and the Coalition.’ But every-
where there are signs among the younger generation of a sombre discontent, and the man who becomes its mouthpiece will speak to the political future.”

“And so you think we have stirring times coming?”

“Stirring times—possibly. It is hard to tell. Protection may give us our nationality without a struggle. England may not consider it worth her while to try and keep us if we have gradually blocked out all her trade, especially if the American market is opened to her. There are so many eventualities. But it will be strange if Pallas Athenê is born without armour and a war cry.”

“And so one ought to keep one’s force for something better than polkas?”
He laughed, and she laughed too as she added,—

"And rabbit shooting. Look there!"

Unintentionally they had driven fifteen or twenty rabbits into a species of cul-de-sac.

Two tall grey columns of rock, socketed in the delicious green of the light grass and the darker clustering ferns, stood away on a large triangular platform from the solid mass of the peak.

A wall of boulders cut off retreat at the back.

"Let me shoot," she whispered.

His gun was a beautiful, light weapon taking a 20 cartridge, with scarcely any recoil, and killing at about thirty yards.

He gave it to her.

The way she took it showed him that
she had handled a gun before, and in any case she was not likely to do herself much more harm than perhaps a blow in the shoulder from holding it too loosely.

The rabbits were running in upon the barrier from both sides, compelled by the wall of rock and the edge of the platform.

The white tufts of their tails bobbed rapidly as they scurried to the boulders.

Stepping quite calmly, with her gun held firmly and easily, pointing down, her body poised on her well-placed feet, her gaze fixed on the game, the girl brought herself facing right through the two columns.

Then she rapidly raised her gun, and fired first the one barrel and then the other.

Both told; but only taking her eyes away for one downward glance, she shot
open the breach, drew out the cartridges, held out her hand for two more, loaded and fired both barrels again.

As she loaded the second time, one solitary rabbit still remained scaling the boulders.

She watched him for a few seconds, and then, just as he reached the top and was making his first bound away, suddenly fired.

They paced up the platform together, and he counted the rabbits that lay dead or kicking convulsively in the last agony.

There were six.

"Bravo, bravo!" cried a voice overhead, and there was a clapping of hands.

Broomfield, his wife, and Mary were standing on the rock above, laughing and applauding.
"You should say bra-vò," said Mary, turning away.

"But the one on the top," said Susie, "I think I hit him."

Stuart climbed up, and after looking about a little, found the rabbit bundled up dead in a bush, and taking it by the ears, flung it down on to the grass by Susie, who still stood with her gun at easy rest, a thin trail of smoke oozing up from the muzzle.

She looked very fine like that, he thought, calm and suppressed, though the blood seemed to come and go eagerly on her cheeks, and her dilating nostrils showed crimson, while a keen and even cruel light played in her eyes and upon her firm, fixed lips.

He came down almost laughing.
"Australia Victrix!" he said. "They are seven."

The idea had indeed flashed over him for the moment as he stood above her there that she was the very type of her land—the free, virginal land—fair, intelligent and fierce.

Perhaps, if the need were, she might shoot other things than rabbits, and stand with that lovely and defiant courage in other places than the platforms of her native hills.

"I was afraid," she said, "that I had quite forgotten how to use a gun."

The two parties united scaled the peak and waited there till Frossard and Loppie, accompanied by the dogs, arrived with leisurely innocence and were hailed with
a pelting fire of chaff. However, they bore a hare, the only product of the shooting, and that, as Mrs Broomfield declared, was accounted unto them for righteousness.

Then they all went down together to "The Springs" again, where Connolly, young, spare, alert, and self-sufficing, had got the kettle boiling over the fire, and under the direction of Mrs Frossard and Mrs MacGhie had spread the tablecloths for tea.

It was a merry meal, and they dawdled over it, waiting for the moon to rise.

At last she was perceived emerging, a great globe of gold, from behind the sombre, bristling, eastern ridges, sailing up in the tangled mass of the tree boughs, and was saluted with a general pæan.

Broomfield started a chorus from an
opera bouffe, which was taken up by them all, and ended in a wild fit of mirth as some laughing jackasses, startled from their slumber close at hand, broke out into a discordant and alarmed protest.

There was to be a change round in the buggy parties.

Stuart and Mary took the places of Frossard and Loppie with Mrs Frossard and Mrs MacGhie, while Broomfield and Loppie went together, and Mrs Broomfield, Susie, Frossard and Connolly made the second quartette.

The last trio led off, chaunting a waltz tune, which presently changed into the passionate strains of the "Polka de la Reine," which had been the chief musical success of the dance.
At first Mary was very gentle and subdued, but even Stuart, before whose mental vision that bright-faced, eager little figure, with the smoking gun, kept rising with a haunting vividness, remarked to himself how beautiful she looked.

And presently, when she seemed to recover herself from the reactionary fatigue of the late exertions, she began talking to him with her usual quiet, clever drollery he was at once soothed, amused, and even gently stimulated by it.

And yet, he thought to himself, she is wanting in just that one touch of permeating fire which makes a woman a thing to be desired—a thing which we never feel quite sure of, like some
brilliant, restless bird which is never thoroughly tamed.

Genius is the capacity for the unexpected, and he, whose own genius had been brought to a sudden birth by the revelation of it in its superbest shape in a woman like Madeline Brown, could never fool himself to weigh the loveliest and most perfect talent in the same scale with this final gift of the gods.

It struck him as a little singular that this train of thought should have fallen upon him now, for, much as he liked Mary, and spontaneous and unrestrained as was their intercourse, he had never once looked upon her, that he was aware of, in the light of a possible wife.

The moon had lost every trace of her
borrowed surgent gold, and was bathing all things in the mild floods of her true and palely silvery radiance, when the MacGhies drove up to their own home, that seemed so silent and deserted in that deathly light.

There was a lamp burning in one of the rooms, however, and Margaret’s footsteps were heard along the hall before they rung the bell.

As they were coming in, she told them that Lord Morecamb had called in the afternoon, and had said he was very sorry to have missed them, and he had left his card.

Susie was tired and drowsy, although her face felt fevered with the sun that had been pouring upon it all day.
The little white oblong card on the edge of the hall table, which she saw as she passed on first into the dining-room, impressed her with a fantastic over-importance, like some object in a dream.

And when, after drinking some water and nibbling at a biscuit with the other two, amid disjointed fragments of talk, she declared she was half asleep and would go off to bed, and kissed them both good-night, and came out into the hall on her way up to her room, she looked at the little white oblong card on the edge of the hall table, in the partial light of her candle, and was impressed by it as before.

She mounted the stairs slowly, stupidly wondering about things.
CHAPTER III.

SLIPS 'TWIXT CUPS AND LIPS.

Lord Morecamb's next visit was more successful.

Mrs MacGhie was out, but the two girls were at home, and they all had afternoon tea together in the drawing-room, and then they went out into the garden.

There could be no doubt as to the pleasure they both took in talking with him.

Loppie's interest in the inhabitants of the English social Olympus was a very genuine one.

She had little or no thought of ever
entering that Olympus herself, especially after the disastrous experiences in London, but she was firmly convinced that, if Susie had only had the chance, she would have taken her place among them as a goddess in her own right, and then Loppie, in her quiet, placid way, would have been able to sit and contemplate the divine hierarchy to her heart’s content.

They both plied Lord Morecamb with questions, quite simply and directly, Loppie with a mild and naïf excitement that struck her sister as curious and unexpected.

He had met everybody.

Oh, yes; he knew the Gildeas—Sir Horace and Lady Gildea (who was Mrs Medwin’s niece, they remarked, and was
out here a few years ago), and he told them all about Sir Horace's brilliant rise as a politician, and what a perfectly charming woman his wife was.

The two girls had a whole string of names—great ladies, actresses, painters, singers to ask him about, listening and questioning with sustained interest.

He was quite amused.

It was all so spontaneous and, at least as regarded Susie, so intelligent.

Susie had been completely captivated with Clara Noessel, the great French actress, whom she had seen in the *Dame aux Camélias* acting with her husband, and Morecamb gave a sketch of her celebrated hotel in Paris.

Thus they went down by the gully,
with its chain of little clear pools, and green with ferns and the foliage of the trees, to the stream that ran along the bottom of the garden, and there Loppie had a chance at last to produce her great personal preoccupation.

It was *Mr Gladstone*. Did he know *Mr Gladstone*?

And she looked at him, heaving a sigh.

He was ready to laugh, it seemed so droll, the stout, comely Australian girl’s sentimental infatuation for the old English politician.

Well, yes, he knew Mr Gladstone—that is to say, he had been presented to him, and talked with him a little on two or three occasions.

Loppie insisted on particulars, disregard-
ing Susie’s antagonistic attitude with regard to the eloquent and unpicturesque rival of the author of *Lothair* and *Endymion*.

“Disraeli,” said Susie a little loftily, “was a man of genius. Of course all the shopkeepers believe in Gladstone, and all the people who go to church twice on Sundays, but I can see nothing interesting in his speeches, and his books and articles are quite dull and stupid.”

Then Loppie was called away by the appearance of Margaret, intent on some household arrangement, and Morecamb and Susie were left alone.

The style of their talk changed immediately.

Susie’s curiosity about the European
men and women of note went down into the effort to discover their significance.

Morecamb found himself roused by her to a quite extraordinary degree.

She stirred the springs of thought and even action in him, making him at last feel as if he would like to be up and doing.

He did not realise what he was to attempt to do.

He only underwent the spell of her energy and craving for a life of broader issues and a personal stake.

When he left them an hour later, and was being driven away quickly in his cab, he seemed to himself to be ten years younger, and the old incoherent ambitions of his youth returned to him and made him feel fevered and discontent.
The only son of his mother, and she a widow, he had been subtly enervated as much by her whole-souled devotion to him as by the tender subservience of all those around him at the Castle and on the immense hereditary estate, nay, in the whole country-side.

The heir of a great name and a great fortune, he was watched over with an unsleeping care by experienced eyes, and even when he left his home for the first time and went to Oxford, that solicitude, ambushed in the pleasant social intercourse of the discreetly dowered, ante-episcopalis-ing "don" who presided over his college, was not for a moment relaxed.

All, however, was going well.

His genuine and kindly nature had saved him from being made either peevishly
selfish or effeminately silly, and the young man began to nourish vague dreams of the devotion of himself to some career of conscientious usefulness.

At this point, one eventful morning during "Commem," he met Lady Templeton.

Twelve years older than himself, still lovely, with every charm of a gentle disposition and a cultivated mind, she had not been soured by the melancholy experiences of her youth and early womanhood, but, enjoying the sympathy and respect of a delightful circle of friends, she lived with tender dignity in a most trying position.

Morecamb passed through every stage, from respectful diffidence to desperate longing for her, before she realised how much her own heart was touched by this amour
The Melbournians.

de collégien, as she once laughingly called it.

He followed her to London, and there at last, sick to death with her forlorn and unnatural self-combat, she surrendered herself to his honour with a burst of passionate tears.

The sudden death of his mother called him away from her to face the first real trouble of his life, but it was to her that he returned, and with her that he at once sought and found consolation.

He left Oxford without taking his degree, and then began the seemingly perilous course of their love.

Marriage was impossible.

For years and years, a deserted wife, she had had to endure the ceaseless notoriety of Lord Templeton's reckless and profligate career.
He spurned even the most rudimentary decencies of social life, placarding his name with those of every blackguard and wanton of the hour in the European and American capitals. But he had spared her the one outrage of personal cruelty, and her freedom was denied her by the wicked marriage laws of her country.

It was more than five years since he had seen his wife, and the higher society, which had for so long admired and pitied one of its most charming members, was prepared to look on the most discreet and tender of irregular relations with considerable indulgence.

Lady Templeton was a woman of the most consummate tact.

She realised to the full the intrinsic
beauty of the soul which was virtually committed to her keeping by her lover.

Pure, unselfish, enlightened, she strove to make him worthy of his best potentialities.

He had the most complete liberty.

There were long separations, during which they wrote to each other regularly, but, as she insisted, not too often.

Then meetings, and then secret travels together in remote parts of the Continent — Spain, Austria, Russia — the happiest seasons imaginable.

The one sacrifice she tacitly demanded of him was his devotion to a public career.

That was more than she could endure—that focussing of the coarse and common light onto their sacred attachment.

She did much to make him a thought-
ful, cultured, and accomplished man, and as he came, after a long and desperate journey, and stood and looked at her, lying pale and cold, but infinitely lovely and serene, struck down with a sudden and unexpected dart of death, it seemed to him that he was gazing like some dry-eyed yearning spirit on the image of his own life.

The usual irony of things wound up the story.

A month later Templeton blew out his brains, or had them blown out for him, in the bed-chamber of a disreputable woman in Madrid, and Morecamb started on his travels with the reflection that his companion might now have been his wife.

He thought his life was ended, but at thirty years, with unimpaired health
and energies, there are few blows one
does not ultimately recover from.

Morecamb went from place to place
in America, and he found that the
society of women, and especially of
girls, had a new attraction for him.

This first struck him in Boston, and it
is true that he never met any American
girls whom he thought comparable to
those of the ex-Puritan metropolis.

They, it seemed to him, had souls,
while the others had only shrill-piping
ghosts, swathed in a most exiguous and
spasmodic temerity of manner.

He crossed from San Francisco to
Japan, where the gentle, dark-eyed
courtesy of the naïf race charmed him
into almost a year's residence.
Slips 'twixt Cups and Lips. 161

Thence he passed down the Chinese coast, visiting the crowding, variegated, malodorous, narrow-galleried ant-hills of the great Mongolian cities, repelled and disgusted by their hopeless materialism.

Thence, skirting the Malay Archipelago, he went by Sumatra and Java along the north Australian coast, and through the golden, pale-blue Coral Sea to Brisbane, the dusty, wooden-piled city of ridges and gullies, and to Sydney, dreaming in her tender firmament and filthy coal smoke.

There, too, he had met one or two girls with souls—one indeed clothed in the most genuine personal beauty—and his preoccupation with these had not failed to occur to him.

He did not realise that in love also
there is action and reaction which are equal and opposite.

It was youth, not maturity, that had the heart's spell for him now; the flash of passion and genius, not the clear, unflickering light of the tender and delicate spirit.

But he had so long and so thoroughly assimilated the riper charm that it was impossible for him to long continue a serious consideration of any one who was totally wanting in it.

Standing for a moment alone on the lawn at Mount Gordon, on the day of Mrs Medwin's fatal garden party, he had caught sight of Susie, seated with bright face and absent, enigmatic eyes, and been strongly and strangely impressed.

Their talk and the subsequent episode,
with its lightning revelations of character, had drawn him close to her.

He who had been looked after all his life, studied like the soil of a field from which we would draw its utmost, enriched with a loving insight and care by mother as boy and by mistress as man, until he was the final fruit of spiritual and social culture, found a delicious new sense of gratification in his attitude to this inexperienced, eager girl, with courage and curiosity flushing her cheeks and sparkling in her eyes.

It was turning the soul's tables.

It was for him to study and enrich now.

He seemed to himself to understand her so completely, and to view her possible developments so clearly, while, for her part, the new force of her energies
and ambitions struck a note in him which thrilled almost painfully.

That note had long been unused, untouched.

Its early vibrant music had been lulled away by the magic jugglery of an exceedingly clever woman in love, and he thought the cord of it was snapped, cut out, and gone.

He had not yet reflected about this new relation.

It had not yet passed the stage of delicious if somewhat troubled feeling.

The presence of Susie was already, however, growing to be a need to him, and her converse a pleasure and a stimulation.

And this was the more so from the fact that, after all, she partook here in her sur-
roundings of the nature of an oasis, though it did not occur to him that he might be quite needlessly enduring the surroundings for the special sake of the oasis.

It was manifest that the MacGhies all liked him, and he took advantage of that liking to the full.

For the next week or so Stuart was too busily engaged with his work to see anything of them, and thus Morecamb had the chance of installing himself as the cavalier of the household.

The intimacy grew with remarkable rapidity, and culminated in the acceptance of his offer to take them to the Cup, leaving to Mrs MacGhie in title and to Susie in reality the organisation of the party of his guests.
It was in his company that the astonished young journalist met both Susie and Mary Frossard on the lawn at Flemmington.

The meeting was for him a most unfortunate one.

It aroused in him a sense of resentment and pride, and filled all his mind with paralysing doubts.

The footing assumed by Morecomb with the MacGhies was obvious.

Its meaning was held to be equally obvious.

There, in the face of gathered Australia, one of the richest of the English nobles, the most brilliant match of the hour, was unmistakably affirming his devotion to a little Australian girl.

It created quite an excitement.
Wherever he went, Stuart heard it talked of.

Even the sporting fraternity was interested, and for the second time in his life he listened to rank lips discussing the final intimacies of the woman he loved, while money was staked on her chances of matrimonial success or failure.

The newspapers, especially the lighter order of them, had been busy with Morecamb from the first.

Stuart shivered, turning hot and cold, as he thought of what it would be now.

The thing was reaching the pitch of a *furore*.

The MacGhies were in danger of being mobbed by vulgarised inquisitiveness.

Mrs MacGhie and Loppie were hope-
lessly bewildered and confused by it all, but Susie, at last aware of something of what was happening, flushed with angry pride, resolutely out-faced and ignored the curious glances and smothered remarks.

Morecamb was almost unconscious.

The abominable bad taste of such a thing, coupled with his non-perception of the size with which his own figure loomed on the social horizon of this colonial capital, prevented him from grasping the wild, exaggerated significance of the situation.

The pick of the talkers had plenty of material that cloudless breezy day in the thronged seats and walks of the central oval of the Australian Olympia.

It was reported that a party of the Medwins—Mr Medwin, his two sons and
his daughter-in-law—had been seen on the course in the earlier part of the afternoon, accompanied by "the beautiful Miss Jackson," and the scandal was terrible.

The Hellicars were alleged to have remonstrated so forcibly that, when Angus suddenly appeared (doubtless he had been sent for) and backed them up, the Medwins had been compelled to withdraw.

The scene did not take place on the lawn, but outside, where the Medwins were walking about in the common crowd, so as to escape observation.

All this, dressed up with obviously apocryphal additions, Stuart heard also, and it provoked him to a grim mirth.

Other people, then, besides Susie MacGhie liked to take a sponge and wipe out
with one swift unscrupulous thrust the truest and holiest incidents of their past.

He would not go up to the party and pay his respects as he ought to do. It was more than he could endure. He should say something rude. He felt he would like to strike Morecamb in the face.

Underneath your serene nature there lie possibilities of nervous and even frenzied action which entail a loss of self-control far more intense and protracted than befalls the hasty-tempered man.

The trend towards violence takes a great deal both to arouse and to quieten it.

Stuart was quite upset.

He had borne trials that seemed as sudden as and perhaps more severe than this, but in reality it was not so.
He loved the girl with all his heart and soul, and the idea of her sale of herself to this insipid, irreproachable, male marionette of an Englishman hovered round him like the swinging thong of the Furies.

He did what he had never done before, he deliberately made up his mind to drug his anguish.

He went to the buffet and drank a whole bottle of champagne, glass after glass of the villainous stuff retailed for careless and excited bibbers, and then stalked out flushed, his hat thrust backwards, his brows gathered and teeth clenched.

He almost immediately ran upon Ferguson, a fellow-pressman and one of his most intimate friends.
A few weeks ago, a vacancy having occurred in the boarding-house in the Punt Hill Road where Stuart and two of his friends resided, Ferguson had been invited to take it, and now formed one of a cordially united trio.

Ferguson was astonished by the appearance of the other, whom he promptly stopped.

"Hallo, old man," he said, "have you been betting?"

"Yes—and lost. I was ass enough to back a mare."

"Susannah?"

Stuart threw up his face and gave one loud laugh, showing his white teeth, with a vicious snarl.

"Yes," he said, "Susannah."
Susannah, the first favourite for the Kensington Stakes, had just come in a bad fourth.

"There were two letters for you," said Ferguson; "I got them just as I was starting and brought them along. Here they are."

Stuart glanced at them.

One was from New South Wales and one from Queensland—his uncle and his friend Randal.

"Thanks," he said; "So long!"

He went off quickly, ripping open the envelopes.

Randal's letter was the first, and he glanced down it.

It was a political diagnosis.

Randal was of opinion that the
The Melbournians.

approaching elections in Queensland would be something startling.

He had been having interviews with Sir John Cochrane, who intended going "flat-footed" for Nationalism and Protection.

The country had been worked up over the rejection of the Naval Tribute to England and the continued humiliating subservience of the Government to the Colonial Office, and even to the little local "Imperial Service" bigwigs who commanded the naval and military defence forces.

Cochrane felt he was about to make a bold, almost a reckless bid to the future, and he had to rely on the crisis giving him new men, should it
turn out, as he thought, that the country was with him.

But if the men on his own side were effete, this was much more so on the Government side, and then, in addition, they were foolish enough not to see it.

In any case it was a splendid effort—the first enunciation of the Anti-English sentiment—the travail and bringing to birth of a new people—the flashing premonition of Australian Nationality!

Randal waxed enthusiastic over Cochran— the one "big" man he had met in Australia, with a massive, vehement force, that made him think again and again of Gambetta and the old Parisian days.

He ended with a suggestion that his
friend might think it worth his while to come up.

There might be a chance of a constituency for him. It was probable that Cochrane would back him. He had only to prove his capacity.

Cochrane had said as much when Randal put it to him.

Stuart's eyes gleamed as he read.

He thrust the letter into his breastcoat pocket and ripped up the second envelope.

All round him there was beginning that restless, concentrated hush which precedes the great race.

People were moving about sparsely behind the gathering masses that had taken their final places of observation.
He stood there almost isolated in the bright sunshine, reading the second letter, his flushed face growing pale.

Four of the MacGhie party were pacing slowly along the lawn towards him.

Morecamb was walking first with Susie, and behind them Broomfield with Mary Frossard.

They were taking a last turn before going to their places on the Grand Stand.

The meeting was unavoidable, and Mary felt herself grown suddenly nervous and excited at the prospect of it.

To her eyes, as Stuart thrust the second letter into his pocket and looked up, flushed once more, he seemed hand-
some with a power and splendour that completely seized and fascinated her.

He met Morecamb's eyes first, and she saw her friend's clear-cut nostrils inflate as he slowly turned his gaze to Susie.

The scorn and contempt of that level and deliberate stare, as he slowly raised his hat and bowed, made the girl stop dead for a moment, turning her white, before, bending her head slightly in reply to it, and then raising it with proud defiance, she stepped along beside her puzzled companion, who perceived that the meeting had been a trial, but could not make out why.

Stuart came straight to Mary and greeted her, shaking hands with her and nodding to Broomfield.
There was something so marked and pressing in his manner that Broomfield, with instantaneous tact, saw that the two should be left to speak with one another by themselves.

Stuart was talking rapidly and rather loudly, and Mary was looking at him astonished, a little repelled, yet overcome.

The first of the horses had now come out, and went whirling past, black, sheeny and muscular, for the preliminary canter, the jockey standing half-bent in his stirrups, and a short, sharp exclamation like a sudden sigh went up from the more attentive onlookers.

Broomfield was a little ahead.

"Come with me," said Stuart, "I have something to tell you. Damn the others!"
She obeyed him without demur, like a girl in love, swept off her feet by the rising tide of passion.

They threaded the outskirts of the packing crowd along the barrier and turned away to the right, losing Broomfield as well as Morecamb and Susie.

It was all done in a few moments, and as the stream of horses began, now one and now another, rushing down to the starting-post, in the deep, low, but rapidly growing murmur of the swarming lines, he told her with a feverish strength of what had happened.

It had all come in a heap! Death was everywhere. His mother—she was dead.

It was not quite unexpected. She had
been ill for long, but no one thought the end was so near.

He had his grief—his true grief—but he realised what this meant.

It meant his freedom to enter upon the career of politics.

He spoke of Randal and Cochrane and the chance offered him in Queensland.

"You see," he said, "I must be off at once to catch the Sydney mail. I must go straight home. I shall not see you for weeks—perhaps months. I shall probably go from there to Queensland. The elections will not begin till late in April. That is why I must speak to you now.

The horses were gathering to the post, the starter deftly coaxing them into line, good-humoured but firm, standing
there stout and sturdy, resolute on a perfect get off for the great event.

A restless movement like a shiver ran over the thick black masses.

Little false alarms of "They're off!" rose here and there, the eager bulk only silently and steadily wedging itself more forward.

"I never spoke before," he said, "because I was not sure. It might be years before I had the chance. It might be never, for the chance might pass. But now I can tell you of what is in my mind."

Right down there, along the green and sunny parallel, where the horses chafed, fidgeted, and swerved—hark! a sudden call—the flash of a flag—the
swift flicker of a rapid transformation of shapes and colours, and the cry goes up, sustained and tremendous,—

"They're off! they're off!"

"Oh, you know!" he said. "Why need I put it into words? Mary, will you marry me? Will you be my wife?"

Stretched out to the full, all in a ruck, a coloured phantasmagoria of movement and thudding sound, a ground whirlwind of animated flesh and spirit, with the trailing funnel of spurned dust behind it, man and beast one incarnate insanity of effort, the Racers swept on over the grass in the blue and breezy sunlight to the oceanic roar of the multitudinous voices.

He held her hand now, looking into
her face with a delirious, intense gaze, believing this was the woman he loved and not the other one—the liar—the wanton—the courtesan!

He was ready to clasp and kiss her, and kneel with his face in her lap and weep, owning her high and noble charm for all his desires and woes.

Chance, courage and skill, and the mad contest!

Victory to the brain and heart and arm that, favoured by the gods, can strike the white-hot iron, moulding from the flying shower of sparks the weapon of fortune and fame!

And after that, rest, calm, peace—the delicious dreamlessness of the sleep of death!
PART III.

IGHT.
CHAPTER I.

TEMPTATIONS IN THE WILDERNESS.

Mary was quite alone.

Her mother was a very shadowy personage—the stately and still attractive remains of a woman whose beauty had been her spiritual and intellectual curse, in that it had always seemed to her to dispense with all necessity to regard anything but her own picturesque presence and amiable vacuous personality.

From her early childhood it had been borne in upon her that she was a favourite of the gods.
With her regular features, splendid brown thick waving hair, delicate complexion, and deep hazel eyes, liquid with a self-love and self-pity which deceived everyone into a belief in her capacity for incommensurable tenderness, she was thoroughly spoiled by her parents and brothers and sisters, and indeed by everyone she had to deal with.

As girl and woman, as wife and mother, it was just the same.

Absolutely without character, even her selfishness undeveloped to any unpleasant degree, she "existed beautifully," her life fallen in pleasant places, quite removed from the sphere of passion and vexation, the incarnation of a lovely nullity.

Two of her children had died, and
then her husband had died, but it had in reality affected her in no way.

Everyone was deferential and thoughtful for her—her son Alec quietly taking his father's place as manager of the family's worldly affairs, while Mary succeeded the housekeeper, who used to save Mrs Frossard the trouble of doing anything but read, lie, and sit about, practise pretty needlework, and play on the piano in her desultory fashion of contentedly idling away the unheeded time.

Mary, in whom circumstances had developed a strain of reflectiveness and irony, was equally estranged from her brother, whose fleshly good-humour resembled their father's to a quite astonishing extent.
Quite as a little child she had perceived that her father and brother were limited in their comprehension of things, especially of herself, and she had come to the not unnatural conclusion that obtuseness of spiritual vision was a characteristic of the sex.

On the other hand, she had never deluded herself about her mother.

She knew her mother loved no one, not excluding her own self, and this beautiful, apathetic simulacrum of life and love had never impressed her as anything very admirable.

The extreme loneliness of the girl's life had not been oppressive to her.

She looked upon it as her natural condition.
Turning on to everything her gentle, doubting, and inquiring gaze, she had arrived at ripe conclusions about the chief relations of life.

She had had no friendships.

Indeed she knew and cared to know few people.

Susie, in whose society she took real pleasure, and who drew out in her the average side of her sex and age in a pleasant and stimulating manner, was actually quite in the dark about her, and in no way necessary to her happiness.

In Stuart she had met the first person who struck her as possessing what More-camb called a soul—a genuine spiritual life of his own.
She would often feel positively child-like beside him.

He was only a few years older than she, and sometimes he seemed to her to be equal, while occasionally she felt he was younger.

But again at other times she recognised in him great gulfs of experience and resolution which were beyond her ken, and he had an affirmative intellectual power that attracted and spelled her.

Truly he was her first friend, and the passage of friendship into love had been so smooth that she could not say when it had begun.

Then, swiftly but without any shock, she had awakened to it.

Out walking with him and her brother
—her brother at the moment being some little way off—she put her foot into a rabbit hole, and fell with a sprained ankle.

He promptly caught hold of her, and raised her with care and tenderness.

When she lay alone on the sofa in the drawing-room a little later, and reflected on the strange sensations that had come over her in the midst of her pain, as she felt his arms round her and his breath on her neck and cheek, she recognised to herself with a delicious dread that something of which she had read much and pondered much had at last come to her.

That something was Love.

She loved a man.
It had altered their relations very little.

She was resolute about that.

She was acutely aware of the fact that he did not love her, and she was dubious whether he ever would.

When she saw him with Susie at the dance, it flashed upon her that it was another type of girl to Mary Frossard for which he would or could feel love, but the extraordinary perversity which had prompted her to say good-night to Susie as "Mrs Stuart" sprang from motives for which she was quite unable to account to herself.

It seemed to her afterwards an act at once of insanity, pettiness, and bad taste.
On the day of the picnic to "The Springs" she became perfectly certain that not only did Stuart love Susie but Susie loved Stuart—that is to say, they had to one another the same feeling which she had towards him.

The scene at the racecourse had, she saw, no justification whatever in Susie's attitude towards Lord Morecamb, however little it might have in his towards her.

Not but what Mary was of opinion that Susie was pressing rather dangerously with the Englishman upon the limit of loyalty to her heart's true master, but there were plenty of excuses for dalliance with so flattering a social homage.

Mary herself would not, she thought,
have done this, but then it was likely enough that Susie had not yet grown to realise her true feelings for Stuart and their exclusive nature, and that made all the difference.

The odiousness of her friend's position had appealed to her sympathy very strongly.

She was ready to do anything she could to help to amend it, but the other's pride would not allow this.

Nevertheless, when things took the extraordinary turn they had done with Stuart, she had been unable to resist the overwhelming force of the situation, and she went away back to the Mac-Ghies on the drag in a state of complete spiritual and mental confusion.
Temptations in the Wilderness.

It was terrible! Nay, it was wrong!

But his kiss was tingling on her lips, and she sat there the ecstatic companion of his future—his bride, his wife to be.

For all that night and most of the next day, she could not free herself from the charm of her hypnotised, golden trance.

Not only her power and resolution, but her desire to face and think it all out, failed her.

It was the first actual love-dream of her life.

Why should she herself wake herself?

The waking would come only too soon in the fatal evolution of things.

And it did. Before that very day was done, after hours of feverish thought
in her bedroom, she had resolved to go over the next morning and see Susie.

The girl nourished a desperate hope.

She knew her friend's longings for the European social life.

Might not these longings prove too strong for Susie's love?

Perhaps that love was not what Mary imagined it.

With an inner trembling she confessed to herself her wish that her friend might succumb to the temptation, reassuring her conscience by her determination in no wise—no, in no single word or act, no single repression or implication—to increase the force of that temptation; nay, rather to do her best, up to a certain justifiable point, to help Susie to overcome it.
Temptations in the Wilderness. 199

If Susie married Lord Morecamb, why should not she herself marry Stuart?

What struck her as the cruelest thing of all was her conviction that, if she only had the chance, she could win Stuart's love.

She realised Susie's force and brilliance, her imperious ardour and charm.

She herself had little enough of this, but she had a power of thought and patience, a depth of clear, unwavering passion and attachment, of which her vehement, unsteady friend was largely ignorant.

"If he marries either of us," she said to herself, "he will not be altogether happy. I cannot give him her fire, her vivacity, her inspired and picturesque moments. Sometimes I should seem to
him monotonous and tame. But she has a frivolity and superficiality in her that will prevent her from ever thoroughly and sanely comprehending either his work or him, and in the end he will feel this. And then she has no tact; she will never study him. She cannot repress herself and her humours in the least. Oh, I know I could help him more, and come at last to be more to him!"

It was with this cry on her lips, seated on her horse, with a feverish, lovely face that reflected her protracted agony of reflection, a rose in the breast of her brown riding-habit, and a flawless courage in the heart that beat so quickly beneath it, that she rode over from Wrynton in the forenoon.
The MacGhies were alone, and she had lunch with them, not a word being exchanged about the incident on the race-course.

Afterwards, however, the three girls sitting in the little room downstairs and discoursing on the average feminine topics, Loppie, who knew instinctively that the two wished to be alone, arose soon and left them.

Mary had recognised something of suspicion and jealousy in her friend’s eye when they first met, and she had now once more by frankness and tact to dispel it.

Susie responded quickly to the more generous tone, and was soon describing what had happened.
Lord Morecamb had behaved beautifully.

He came and called yesterday just as if there had been nothing disagreeable at all, completely ignoring it, not presuming in the very slightest degree on the horrid way in which he and she had been publicly thrust upon one another, but behaving simply and courteously like the perfect gentleman he was, and that was the end of the matter!

Mary realised at once in her own mind what it all meant, and her heart quailed and sank.

Nevertheless, seeing that Susie expected from her a similar narration of what had passed between herself and Stuart, she resolutely faced her obvious duty.

Quite calmly she did it.
Mr Stuart had been dreadfully annoyed by the behaviour of the people on the lawn, especially as someone (she did not know who) had gone and told him that Susie's engagement to Lord Morecamb had just been made public.

Perhaps he had taken it up rather too strongly, but he had been upset by losing a lot of money on a race, and he had suddenly received the news of his mother's death.

That was why he drew Mary aside.

He had to leave at once for his home —right up in New South Wales—and he wanted her to explain it all to them.

"And what," asked Susie, "did you tell him about—about Lord Morecamb?"
“Of course I told him that it was all a mistake: I was sure it was all a mistake.”

They talked the matter over at some length, and Mary did her best to make her friend’s mind easy, but, she saw, with only partial success.

Susie felt sure that something more than what she had learned had passed between Stuart and Mary, and she resented their confidences together about herself.

She took the trouble, therefore, to assert her absolute freedom with regard to him, but Mary could have no more doubt of how things really stood.

The girl loved him, so far as she conceived of loving, and, since the converse was true also, there was but one course open to an honourable woman.
Mary rode home in the light of the westering sun, growing more and more enfeebled by the hard trial of her afternoon, until at last it seemed to be in danger of crushing her.

Once or twice she had to cling to her saddle to avoid falling.

She had eaten little yesterday, and nothing to-day. She was quite worn out.

Stuart received a letter from her just as, having set things in order at home and arranged the sale of the station to his uncle, he was about to set off to Sydney.

It ran thus:—

"My dear Mr Stuart,—You are my honoured and very dear friend, and
The Melbournians.

I would do much to make you happy, but not marry you—not throw my life in with yours irrevocably for always, for every day, every week, every year, 'till death do us part.' Do not be offended at this. Indeed I know you will not. You will understand. You will realise that I am only trying in my blundering, stupid way to do what seems to me right and best. I do not think that we, either of us, were quite aware of what we were doing the other afternoon at Flemington. It was all so sudden and unexpected that it overwhelmed us. We had no time to consider. I admit freely that I like you exceedingly. As I have said, you are my honoured and very dear friend. But you do not need
me to tell you that friendship is not the same thing as love. It seems to me, too, that your feeling towards me is in reality, when you come to look at it steadfastly, rather that of a friend than of a lover. It is possible that this may change. I cannot tell. But surely we should be committing a dreadful mistake to definitely bind ourselves to one another in such a case as this is. No, my friend, let us act more truly and wisely. Let us look upon the events of that afternoon—as regards you and me at least—as not having occurred. It was an impulse—a coup de tête. There must not be the slightest constraint between us. That would pain and distress me more than I can say. I value your friendship
immensely. Indeed, it is just because I value it so much, and feel so keenly that it was due to a simple, true and spontaneous intercourse on the part of us both, that I cannot doubt but that its continuance depends on the same thing. I am certain that you will not misunderstand me in any way, and that is why I am trying to do what is very difficult and distressing, but what I cannot but believe to be right. I want to repair a fault which I made in an unguarded moment, and which might entail much wretchedness on us both, and I am asking you to help me.—Yours always most truly, MARY FROSSARD.”

The letter surprised him a little,
though when he came to analyse his feeling he found he could not.

Certainly, he thought, it was admirable, and its truth was not to be gainsaid.

It made him realise, in a way he had never done before, the beautiful and sincere soul of the girl, and being still sore over Susie's apostacy, which had quite recently been brought home to him again by one of the chance blows sardonic Fortune loves to give us by innocent and often friendly hands, his oblivious care for Mary received a sudden vitalising impulse.

Was he to lose her also?

How perfect a faculty for spiritual thought she had! She would indeed be the companion of the man she loved.
She would help him to be his best and truest self.

At the same time why was it that this lovely woman, with her grace and charm, her tenderness and quiet mirth, had no inspiration of passion to him—no, not a jot or tittle of it?

She seemed a sort of moon, with pure and benignant light, and we all remember that the moon is the heavenly Diana whose one little amorous weakness was for a shepherd boy who slept (and perchance even snored a little) through all the discreet infliction of her kisses.

Stuart's one kiss had been on Mary's lips, but the real sentiment he felt for her was typified rather by the knight's respectful greeting on his lady's hand,
and he did not not see that even the mildest of modern girls votes a protracted course of this sort of thing exceedingly monotonous and even rather stupid on the part of the gentleman.

The extraordinary pressure of his relations with Madeline Brown had held the element of personal passion in him in abeyance, and the end of it all had come with lightning-like rapidity; but this was the hour of his heart's reaction, though he was not aware of it, and he positively imagined Mary as somewhat cold!

Nevertheless he wrote to her, asking for the confirmation of their engagement.

He admitted the truth of their mutual want of "love, in the more intense sense of the word," but what of that?
Love in its wilder and more tremulous forms was an illusion, which experience inevitably demonstrated to be such, and hence half the failures of married life. The lovers could not accommodate themselves to the too base reality of their own silly, idealising souls.

It seemed to him that she and he had a far greater chance of happiness, entering upon their life together with a mutual friendship and esteem, than if they looked upon one another as little Avatars of earth-trammelled goddess and god.

He ended with telling her that, after all, he could not make up his mind to go to Queensland and follow up Cochrane's offer of a shot at a political career.
There were several reasons for this.

The first was that he did not care to go in for permanent settlement in so trying a climate, and it was no good going up there merely to talk and caper for a session or two.

Then he had already made some little impression in Melbourne, and spent a great deal of time and trouble in thinking out the political and social problem there, and the ways and means for him to attempt to play a part in it.

After all, too, it was in Melbourne and Sydney that the great battle of Australian destiny would have to be fought out, and skirmishes and outpost engagements, however interesting and animating, were at best only outpost engagements and skirmishes.
He had sorely tried the patience of his employers of late, and though he was now able to dispense with them as providers of the wherewithal to put into the domestic stew-pot, still he did not think it would be wise to throw up his journalism.

He had a lot of business to transact in Sydney, and he gave her an address there at which to write to him, but in three weeks or so he expected to be back in Melbourne again, and then he would come and see her at once.

The three weeks had almost expired before he received a reply.

Mary began by apologising for her remissness in not having written before, but she had been too busy to get the
time to think over his letter, and she did not care to answer it in a hurry.

Her mother had been very ill, and required continuous nursing. There had been a series of dreadful hot winds and changes which had tried them all exceedingly, and now it was decided that the two of them had better go and spend the summer in Tasmania with some Hobart friends of theirs.

They would be starting in about a fortnight.

She could not change her opinion as to his relations to her and hers to him.

Indeed the more she thought of it, the more she felt sure that she was right.

There must be nothing like an engage-
ment between them. They must both remain absolutely free.

Her tone struck him as almost hard, it was so decisive.

The truth was that, immediately after receiving his letter, she had again been to see Susie, and despite some strange and puzzling contradictions in the girl, was compelled, with a terrible renewal of suppressed anguish, to recognise that Stuart was the lodestar of both their hearts.

Suffering like this she would not and could not endure any more.

Her mother’s illness, coming on the top of it, with all the childish pettishness and egotisms of the pampered self-pitying invalid, taxed her strength to
the utmost, and she was thankful when she found herself in the green and breeze-blown island, rapidly nearing a friendly welcome and the prospects of refreshment and repose.

At Hobart she received Stuart's next letter, which had been forwarded on from Tara.

He frankly, if somewhat regretfully, accepted her definition of their future intercourse.

She had taken the letter out into the garden, into a little arbour that looked out over the broad deep-blue winding river, under the tender, deep-blue sky, where great masses of cloud, sunny and radiant, formed and dissolved slowly but perpetually.
And there, in that place of shadowy quiet, where the chirpings of the birds in the delicious murmuring breeze seemed but the melodious under-toned expression of the longed-for peace, the tears came to her, and bending over the little table, she wept her full, and had, at last, real ease and comfort of her grief.

For some days she felt almost happy, and as they grew into weeks, and the weeks into months, and the hours of trouble and distress returned, she found that she could bear them now without that dreadful aching sense of hidden pain which had been the pang of the deep and broken-off arrow-head of her desperate hope.

The summer passed away, and autumn,
mellow and serene, came gently but gorgeously upon the favoured and fruitful island of the south.

Stuart wrote to her from time to time, and his letters were very pleasant, despite her feeling that he indeed now spoke merely as a friend; but still it was as to one cordially liked and valued.

Then one morning all her hard-won serenity was suddenly shattered.

She was glancing through a Melbourne society paper when her eye caught a paragraph which announced the “arrangement of a match between the Earl of Morecamb and Miss Susan MacGhie, the younger daughter of the late Hon. Robert MacGhie, Minister for Education in the first Coalition Ministry.”
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A later paragraph announced that the marriage would probably take place early in May.

It went to her heart like a knife. It seemed like a deathblow to her, whereas it meant the kindling into new life of all her wild desires.

She could not endure the agony of the suspense a moment longer than was necessary.

She wrote, therefore, at once to Susie, asking if the announcement were true?

The letter had given her much trouble to compose, and it dissatisfied her, seeming cold, and even a little cruel, but she could do it no better, she felt, if she tried a thousand times.

She had a week's torment to endure before she received the reply.
She took it up into her room to read it by herself.

It was short and decisive.

"My dear Mary," it ran,—"I am so glad to hear Mrs Frossard is better, and that you are enjoying yourself in Hobart so much. It is dreadfully hot here, and we are all looking like wrung-out linen waiting to be mangled, and so lazy that we can do nothing but bathe and eat ices. That paragraph was true, though I can’t imagine how on earth it got into the papers. I am engaged to Lord Morecamb, and we are to be married in May, and go to England with Loppie soon after. Anyway, it (the paragraph) has saved me breaking the news to my
friends, and that is something. Of course I expect you, if you can manage it, to show your friendship by being one of the bridesmaids, though the wedding will be very quiet. You must excuse more just at present. I am quite driven with letters, everybody fussing and 'congratulating' and all that, till I am quite full up of it.—Your affect. friend, "Susie M'G."

Mary dropped the letter on to the table, and going to the window, with long spasmodic strides, leant out among the rustling leaves and flowers of the creeper, drawing deep breaths, gazing ecstatically before her, smiling like a girl who is wooed by her lover in a golden and hypnotised trance.
CHAPTER II.

MORECAMB'S "COLONIAL EXPERIENCE."

It had come very gradually, and with infinitely delicate precautions on his part.

He had not one unworthy thought of the girl.

If he had imagined her open to bribery, she would have lost her chiefest charm to him.

The man was pure in every way.

He had come to his first love virginal in heart, soul, and all.

He came now to his second love with nothing on him but the sanctifying
aureole of his entire loyalty and devotion to the dead darling.

Furthermore, he had been a stranger to all the baser aspects of our social life.

He had remarked this or that feature in it as repulsive or degrading, but nothing of it all had had any personal hold on him.

Imaginative experience leaves no fester, if it grants no crown.

He had no conception of his title and wealth being a positive bait to this little colonial girl, who was at least accustomed to breathe the vitiated atmosphere of tenth-rate plutocratic cliques, essentially vulgar and servile, ready to give anything for the gratification of their one great sordid ambition.
None the less, feeling instinctively the insecurity of his hold on her, he realised that, in the promise of the higher European life which he had to offer her, he possessed a mild allurement.

He had soon noticed that she was going through something of a combat.

She had sudden changes towards him—coldnesses, hours of ceremonious withdrawal, and even rejection.

Then he would put forth every resource of his nature and his consummate social tact to soothe and reconquer her.

He had not been the subject and object of ten years' patient, passionate, and exquisitely personal study at the hands of a woman like Lady Templeton.
with no result on his own powers of spiritual *finesse*.

The eagerness of pursuit, the instinct of the hunter on the trail, seized upon him.

It had been held in abeyance all his life, never permitted to go beyond a mild and regretful curiosity, and now, for the first time enjoying the full liberty of his individualism, he became positively vehement in his cravings.

None the less his keen perception of the wildness of the game held him from neglecting the very slightest opportunities, and he held himself persistently ambushed to windward, following every movement of the quarry with unwinking eye.
He did not think that Susie loved him.

He was of opinion that she was still too much under the bounding sway of her untamed youth, having the true Amazonian virginity that scorns and yet dreads effeminate and languorous Aphrodite.

She was one of Diana's nymphs, and he would close his eyes with a faint, ecstatic smile at the thought of the dawn and noontide of love in a heart so proud and pure.

He astonished and almost terrified himself by the accesses of longing he had sometimes for her in his lonely hours.

His old insomnia, which he had lost in
the blue buoyancy of the Pacific, on the league-long way from America to Japan, and down thence through the pallid Chinese seas and the thundrous ultramarine of the Malay Archipelago to the old dreamy magic of the Pacific again, returned to him with a renewed force.

But it was not the lovely and serene face of the dead darling—those sweet, sad eyes filled with infinite tenderness—that haunted and tormented him now.

The pale, delicate cheeks had become dark, touched with bronze and tinctured with the red swiftly-coursing blood; the brown eyes flashed and sparkled into an iridescent steely grey; the long, thin, quiet coral lips were full and crimson and restless; the graceful presence was
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a smaller and more concentrated essence of ardent youth.

It was Susie, not Helena, who possessed his visions now.

With a swift stroke of intuition he had recognised in Loppie his natural and most valuable ally.

Mrs MacGhie, he saw, was a benignant nonentity, with an inevitable myopæa and a pronounced tendency to falling asleep, and as such could be of little or no practical help to him.

As week grew into week and he still found himself utterly uncertain of success, he came to look on the neglect of certain intimacies he had with the good sister as really quite too stupid.

The pressure of circumstances, keen
desire or cut-throat competition, will by Christmas Day compel even young men with the very loftiest ideas of reticence into confidences and compacts which they would have shuddered at and repelled as impossible at Eastertide.

Morecamb ended with making a clean breast of it to Loppie.

He told her his love for Susie, expatiating on her charms and powers and the infinite need they had of a richer soil for their development.

He even went so far as to season the dish for the coarser palate for which it was destined.

He saw Loppie's deep, instinctive affection for her sister, and felt kindly to her for it.
He saw, too, Loppie's ambition for her sister, and appreciated it.

But he saw yet again that the one thing wanting to give the requisite energy and initiative to the plea of his ally in his behalf was her own simple, greedy longing for that wonderful world of lords and ladies into which she had never entered, unless in her rarest and boldest dreams.

The alliance worked admirably: so admirably that he soon owned to a distinct affection on his own part for this unsophisticated, tender-hearted girl whose sympathy he could enlist so easily.

One afternoon, after a long conversation with her alone, in which they were very close to one another, he told her in veiled
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terms the story of his love with Helena, and looking up, saw her gazing at him with quivering lips and eyes full of tears.

He was quite stirred.

He took her hand and kissed it, and the pressure she gave back to his assured him of her undivided support.

The move was a masterly one, whether intentional or not.

Loppie went upstairs to her bedroom to ease herself by a "good cry," where she was presently discovered by Susie returning from her walk and calls, and it ended in the repetition, from the feminine and Loppian point of view, of the whole story about the lovely and unhappy dead lady.

This second story led to the first one,
and the two girls wept in one another's arms, and comforted and reassured one another.

But Susie still seemed troubled.

Her sister saw this, and divined what the trouble was, admitting to herself that Mr Stuart was a very nice fellow, and, if there were no Lord Morecamb in the case, he would have done very well.

But, as it was, would it not be an immense pity if Susie neglected such a chance of happiness as life in England with a man like Lord Morecamb?

Perhaps Stuart was only a fancy that would pass.

She herself had had her fancies before she met Alec.
There was Teddy Dimple, the parson's son, who went to sea, and in the still more remote past she recalled a romantic attachment to a buxom young butcher, with black curly hair, who rode recklessly round with his meat-basket on a shaggy brown mustang, and caused her several quiet "cries" by presently espousing the distinctly middle-aged and stout widow of his former employer.

Well, these fancies had passed, so why not Susie's for Mr Stuart?

Mr Stuart, too, was not behaving at all well, never coming near them or writing for weeks and months, and he had been dreadfully scornful and rude to Susie on the lawn at Flemington it appeared.
All this Loppie had the tact not to express to her sister except in the most guarded and indirect way. She was perfectly ready to accept whoever Susie distinctly declared for, but meantime her sympathies were all with the charming, interesting, noble, rich and young Englishman.

On arriving the next afternoon and finding her waiting for him in the drawing-room, Morecamb was quickly but discreetly advised to adventure himself at once, and on Susie's entry Loppie presently, ignoring her sister's commanding look, adroitly left them alone.

Then he drew towards her, with a pale face, and began to try to plead his cause.

He gained more assurance after
a little, and deployed all his powers, handling her with the deepest respect and skill, his suppressed ardour vigilant and impressive.

But she was not to be conquered so.

She admitted much, refusing, however, to give him a definite answer, saying that she must think it all out, and she would write to him to-morrow.

And with this he was forced to be content.

They had a very quiet but pleasant tea together, and Loppie of her own accord volunteered to play on the piano, a thing of rare occurrence, and which marked a spiritual crisis.

She knew two pieces off by heart—the Ghost Melody in the Corsican
Brothers and a little tinkling tune called "The Mill-Wheel," and these, together with portions of a few hymns and waltzes, were the means whereby she was wont to secure expression for her moments of unusual exaltation or depression, or in her own words, when she felt either "exercised" or "low-spirited."

The lively time to which on this occasion the Mill-Wheel whirled round, and to which even the shade of the unhappy Louis rattled up before the footlights, inspired them all with considerable good humour, and Morecamb went away with something like a certain hope.

The next evening he received a note of a few lines, one phrase of which started out fire-lined before his eyes and
sang like shrill music in his ears, making all things spin and shiver around him: "I shall be proud and happy to be your wife."

He astonished himself by the nervous impatience which possessed him to go to her at once—to stride out from among all these vacuous, orderly, ornate people with whom he was, jump into a cab, and tell the man to drive for his life to the abode of his lady love.

However, he had all that evening and night and some of the next morning to go through with the crowding, petty social duties of his surroundings, before he could get away.

He found her alone in the drawing-room, seated, ready for him.
She looked pale and ill, with black circles round her eyes, and he at once checked his eager step, coming to her with the utmost deference and tenderness.

She rose, gazing at him apprehensively, and he took her cold hands with his and raised them to his lips.

"Dearest and sweetest," he said, "I can never be grateful enough."

She answered nothing, and he drew her to the sofa and sat beside her, speaking slowly in a low voice of her letter.

"I understand," he said, "completely what a sacrifice you make in marrying me"—her left hand, which he was holding, contracted in his—"and what you
dread. But, believe me, you shall never feel for one moment that you have acted wrongly in trusting me. I reverence your social and political ideas just as much as if they were your religion. Nay, I see that to you they are your religion. You shall never be asked to go back upon your democracy, and Australia shall always be within your reach."

It was thus that he conceived of the meaning of another phrase in that letter: "And this is my choice."

She was singularly quiet, and even passive throughout it all, and this continued for several weeks, until Loppie began to be rather afraid of "something happening"—she scarcely knew what.

At Susie's particular wish the engage-
ment was for the present kept to themselves, and both her mother and sister were full of doubt as to the way in which she would take that sudden and utterly unexpected announcement of it in one of the "society" papers.

To their surprise and delight Susie accepted the situation with a vivacity whose feverishness was for long concealed by its vigour.

All hopes of peace were now over.

The match was the question of the moment, and the young couple were seized upon by an irresistible irruption of Melbourne "society" resolute to give them an ovation.

Morecamb submitted with good-humoured serenity, seeing that his lady
love was not altogether displeased by all this noisy adulation.

It occurred to him, too, that she looked at him occasionally in the midst of it with a tender, reflective gaze that implied a sort of gratified pride in her little world's appreciation of the man she loved, and this was a thought that was sweet music to his soul.

But for all that he had his troubles.

Incidents kept arising that provoked looks, gestures, and even words from her that banished his sense of security, and once or twice he imagined she felt something like repulsion for him.

Then he would speak about her democracy again, and how she must never think for a moment that it would come
between them, and slowly restore the pressure of his hold on her.

On one of these occasions when he spoke in this way, she had a small outburst of affection that stirred him to the depths.

After listening to and watching him in a peculiar manner which he could not quite understand, she suddenly put her hand on his and pressed it, saying,—

"You are so good and kind to me!"

And when he looked in her eyes he saw the tears in them, and quivering with love and a proud pity, took her in his arms, and soothed and comforted her like a child.

The next day Mary came over from Tara with her brother. She was looking
lovely — her face radiant, her spirits buoyant, with a sort of bloomy expansiveness upon her like a parched flower after a day's rain.

Even Morecamb, who was there when she arrived, was impressed with the extraordinary good effects of her "change."

She sat high up on her horse in her new blue riding-habit, her complexion quite vivid in its brilliant, delicate hues, her figure lithe and full, a veritable queen.

They were astonished at her.

Then they all had a cup of tea together, and the girls drew her into their little study for an intimate chat on things peculiar to feminine juvenility, Morecamb, with his usual tact, having departed.
He had vague, uneasy dreams.

He felt he had seen her somewhere before—this woman with the bright and tender gaze and the lips laughing with love.

She was like the glorious phantom of his early youth, some vision of his first ideal of a mistress, in the days before he had gone to Oxford and met Helena.

Then her image passed away from his mind, and wondering a little to himself at such an aberration, he took to thinking again of his own incomparable Psyche.

Stuart had been to see Mary several times, and he had confessed his love for Susie, telling it like a history of the dead, quite without bitterness or resent-
ment, simply accepting her marriage as a foregone conclusion that had become a fact.

He had passed from this to other subjects without the least pause or embarrassment.

The campaign in Queensland was progressing admirably.

Randal was up in Brisbane as representative of the Sydney *Despatch*, working furiously in it and every paper on which he could get a hold, venting (as he said) his hatred and contempt of England and her "commercial and Christianised Imperialism" in invective and ridicule, raising the hue and cry against the local Liberal Junto, brandishing the banner of "Nationalism and Protection," helping to precipitate the hour of the birth-pangs of
the naked and helpless babe of Australian nationality.

Was it all going to end in failure and defeat?

New South Wales and Sydney were astir. South Australia and Adelaide wanted to know if they were to have an effete and impoverished English nobleman thrust on to them for a Governor, and talked of blankly refusing the personage the cablegrams had announced as their fate.

Victoria alone remained profoundly quiet, the huge system of political rule by loaves and fishes for the constituencies, and sops to the Democratic Cerberus when he grew cross and growled and showed his teeth, still working triumphantly.

Thus wrote Randal, with fine and enthusiastic extravagance.
Then Stuart added an item on his own account:—

Miss MacGhie's engagement with Lord Morecamb was about to have an equally sensational companion.

Mr Medwin was going to marry Miss Jackson, resign his portfolio, and disappear with her to Europe, but whether permanently or not could not be told.

Mary spoke of this to the two girls and of the events in Queensland, and what that day would decide at the polls.

Susie sat silent, listening to her friend's animated talk, and watching every change in her face, and made no more comment on the announcement of Miss Jackson's and Medwin's escapade than a pair of elevated eyebrows and a slight shrug.
But Loppie, careless of politics, presently exclaimed against it as *horrid*! Why, poor dear Mrs Medwin was only dead a few months! Scarcely cold in her coffin.

"Oh, well," said Susie, "months sometimes mean more than years."

As Mary and she shook hands and said good-bye, they looked into one another's eyes, and Susie divined that her friend believed that one day she would be Stuart's wife.

The Frossards had scarcely left them before Annie and her husband appeared on one of their occasional visits.

They never came, Susie declared, without Annie wanted to vent her virtuous bile about something, and as she had already more than once given
her opinion on the subject of "the More-camb match," her mother and sisters all thought she had had a reasonable satisfaction of her claims as family censor morum.

The clergyman's wife, however, thought otherwise, and had scarcely taken her seat before, with her most official manner, she opened out on a new phase.

She had, it appeared, got hold of a rumour to the effect that Susie had had very intimate relations with a young man who wrote on the Age (she closed her eyes and raised her head with a sort of shiver as she mentioned that radical and secular newspaper), a very dissipated, profligate, and unprincipled young man.

Susie waited for no more.

Jumping up to her feet, she poured out
such a torrent of scornful and angry words upon her sister that Annie was for a time stuck dumb with astonishment and horror.

It was a violent scene.

Susie vehemently offered an alternative to her mother.

Either her sister or herself left the room and the house that moment.

Shaking with passion and hatred and contempt, the young girl faced the two—husband and wife—and denounced them, quite beside herself, resolute to rid the house of the pollution of their presence.

The revolt was in reality general.

Mrs MacGhie and Loppie, while deprecating her wrath, had nothing but mild reproaches for the other two.

Susie therefore triumphed, and the
invaders beat a hasty retreat, indignantly exclaiming and gesticulating, to the hall door, and even to the garden gate.

Then the girl suddenly collapsed.

Bursting into a storm of sobs and tears, she flung herself face downwards on to the sofa, for long refusing all consolation.

Loppie, who understood something of the inner causes of what had happened, was not able to get to sleep that night, thinking of the sombre resolve in her sister's eyes as she rose at last, completely mistress of herself, and moved about for the rest of the day solitary and uncommunicative.

In the morning, after breakfast, Susie took up the paper and retired to their little room.
The first batch of the Queensland elections was over.

Cochrane had defeated the Premier in his own metropolitan constituency by an overwhelming majority, and Brisbane streets were thronged right on into the night with crowds shouting for Cochrane and Nationalism.

When Loppie entered, Susie pointed with a scornful finger to the "leader" in which their own Anglo-Australian, squattocratic organ had tried to sneer at and belittle the significance of the event.

Loppie felt that all this was very ominous, and yet dared not attempt to interfere.

She knew it would only make matters worse.

Morecamb arrived after lunch, and
Loppie determined that they should not be left alone.

But chance was too strong for her.

She was called away by her mother for a few moments, and when she returned she found that the lovers had gone down the garden to the stream.

Half an hour later, the watching girl saw Morecamb returning alone.

He was pale, and walked unsteadily, his eyes fixed before him.

She went out to him as he was passing by the verandah, with a little difficulty attracted his attention, and succeeded in drawing him into the room.

“'Oh, what has happened, Lord Morecamb?'” she asked, putting her hand on his arm and looking up at him full of
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apprehension. "Please—please tell me. Can I be of any help? Can I do anything?"

"Nothing," he said quietly, but with a hollow voice that went to her heart, "nothing. I thank you more than I can say, Miss MacGhie. Perhaps you will present my respects to Mrs MacGhie."

She learned no more from him than the fact that he was going.

They passed out on to the grass and walked round the house to the garden gate, where he shook hands with her, and raising his hat and bowing, went out to the cab, and mounted, and was driven away.

She turned straight down towards the gully.
She met Susie coming up.

The girl's face was as pale as his, but set and stern, her eyes, like his, fixed before her, her under lip drawn in and held tight with her teeth.

They returned to the house in silence and went into their room.

There Susie spoke.

"He is gone for good," she said, "for ever! Never speak to me of him again till I tell you you may. He is the noblest and best and kindest man in the world, but I can't bear to speak about him, or hear anyone else speak about him —yet. Go and tell mother so, and make her understand about it."

Then, seeing that Loppie still lingered, she added,—
"I told him that I could never marry him, because I loved somebody else. That finished it. And now I know I shall never marry anyone at all, and I shall hope to die, and not live on hating and despising myself for ever."

She waved her sister off.

"No," she said, "don't try and console me—don't speak to me at all—only go away and leave me, and never allude to it again, but let it all be as if it hadn't been . . . as if it hadn't been!"

That night Susie suddenly roused herself from the apathy into which she had fallen.

She wrote a submissive and apologetic letter to her sister Annie, asking her to forget their quarrel.

A few days afterwards the breaking off of
the match got into the papers, and quite a social storm instantaneously began to rage.

Morecamb, after having expressed himself to one or two of his more intimate acquaintances on the matter, to the effect that Miss MacGhie had acted in the most noble and unimpeachable way towards him, and that the only consolation possible for having lost her was to have known her, took his ticket for England.

He subsequently saw fit to "explain his rejection" so far as to tell Lady Lindsay that Miss MacGhie had found that the sacrifice to her social and political convictions entailed by marrying an Englishman, and what she could not help but consider as an aristocrat, was too much for her.

He never could express adequately his
feelings of respect for and homage to her kindness and sincerity.

Lady Lindsay was too acute a woman to quite accept such an account, though she considered it was perhaps passably true in the main; but she practically promised to do her best to save Susie from suffering more than needs be at the hands of the uncharitable and the envious.

There was another woman who was sufficiently acute to divine, not only as much as Lady Lindsay did or could, but also the essence of what had really taken place.

Mary, with a sort of dumb fury, recognised that the cup had been snatched from her lips once more.

The hideous injustice of it all drove her beyond herself.
Blasphemies against the fatal order of things broke from her.

The weeks grew into a month and more, and still this second agony of despair was not overcome.

Her mother and brother went to see the MacGhies, but she persistently evaded a meeting which at present would be unsupportable.

She saw Stuart from time to time, and listened to his eager talk of the rush of events in Queensland—the tremendous victory of Cochrane, the defeat of the Governor in his contest with the Ministry over his right of veto, the rejection of the new Governor appointed by the Tory Ministry in England, the humiliation of the little local ex-Imperial Service
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autocrats, the enthusiasm with which the national movement had been taken up in Sydney, the extraordinary manner in which, in all the colonies except Victoria, the dogma of "Australia for the Australians" had been accepted by all the political parties as henceforth an established fact. All this she had listened to with a wan face and distracted interest.

Everything was going well with him.

At the approaching elections he intended to proffer himself at one of the suburban ultra-Radical constituencies, and he had a good chance of getting in, at least as junior member.

The news of the breaking off of Susie's engagement to Lord Morecamb had affected him powerfully.
Mary could see that, and she had soon to realise that a change had come over him in his manner to herself.

He grew more and more reserved and silent, and kept away from her for weeks.

All, then, was lost. It had come to that: yes, it had come to that!

Then she made up her mind to go and see Susie.

The road from Tara to Wrynton was surely her predestined cycle in hell.

What horrible solitary journeys to and fro had she not ridden along it. Perhaps her spirit, restless and forlorn, would haunt it when she was dead.

Sometimes she contemplated suicide. The future protraction of her suffering seemed more than she could bear.
Then her sense of her pride and duty as a brave and honourable woman reasserted itself, and she had short moments of serenity.

The interview with Susie was lightened by the presence of Mrs MacGhie, Loppie and Alec, but Mary learned enough to steel her last resolve.

The result of it was the following letter, which she wrote late that night in her bedroom, after a series of humiliating failures.

"My dear friend,—There is something that I want to tell you. It is of the utmost importance not only to you but to the person whom you love most in the world. You know, of course, that
I am speaking of Susie MacGhie. I see
that you do not understand what has
happened. She has broken off her en­
gagement with Lord Morecamb irre­
trievably, and the reason why she did
this is because she felt she could not
marry him when she loved someone else.
Do not ask me how I know all this, but
trust me that I do, and that I cannot
possibly be mistaken. Do not let her
suffer more than needs be. You can
guess what she has gone through, for
you understand women. Go and see her.”

She could write no more.

The effort to control her thoughts and
put together even this bewildered expres­
sion of them had broken her down.
Her hand so shook that she could not sign her name.

She sat there at the table with dry, inflamed eyes, bloodless face, and clenched teeth, forcing herself to her task, insisting resolutely, and at last angrily, that it should be done.

The desperate wrestle with her weakness lasted so long that she almost gave way.

She would lie down and rest and finish it presently.

If she could only get a little sleep.

No, no, it must be done now. She could not bring herself to face it again. It must be done now,—or not at all.

Then she slowly recovered herself, completed the letter with "Yours very
truly, Mary Frossard," addressed the envelope, sealed it up, and stamped it.

She sat for a few moments staring at it, as it lay there white and square on the blotting paper.

To her fevered gaze it seemed to grow and grow until it became a huge wall-like mass threatening to fall on her and crush her.

She got up, and with a dull, mechanical weariness stretched out her arms, raising her face with the dumb agony of a stricken creature.

It was her great renunciation and great acceptance—the Gethsemane of her life.

And when she went slowly to her bed and lay upon it, and the intolerable aching pause and infinite emptiness
of everything grew to a paroxysm of mockery, striking and shattering her mind, the long, slow convulsive sobs that seized and shook her from head to foot came bearing no relief of tears.

The sweet cup had been snatched for ever from her lips.

The bitter cup was to be drunk even to the dregs.
CHAPTER III.

EXPIATION.

Stuart received her letter the next day at his lodgings, when he came in for lunch, and as he read it his heart leaped up and seemed to flutter in his throat.

He went out and lay in the easy-chair at the end of the balcony and thought the whole matter over, winning his self-control and waiting for calm to settle upon him.

Then Polly the maid came out to tell him that lunch was ready, and he rose at once and entered.
Expiation.

No one was at home but himself.

He sat at the table, eating a little in a mechanical way, gazing absently in front of him and thinking it all over.

He did not "understand women" as well as Mary, with her heroic semimendacity, had assured him.

He did not even suspect the part the girl was playing.

He had little vanity, and all his self-esteem went out in the shape of his simple spontaneity of honest and upright word and act.

He knew his intellectual superiority to this person or that with whom he had to deal, and in his inner consciousness he felt that nine women out of ten are children who are not to be taken
seriously. But he did not contemplate the possibility of this passionate idealisation of himself by a proud and clever girl like Mary.

After a little he saw that she might indeed be right in her idea.

Susie and he had been drawn together by a mutual attraction.

He knew this, and he knew therefore that, in engaging herself to Lord Morecamb, she had very possibly acted against her true impulse and feeling.

It was only at moments that he doubted this and told himself that she had "changed her mind," in the style of people who have little or no mind to change.

Before he finished his lunch he
decided that he would go and see her, and he had a real if anxious hope that things would yet end as he wished.

He was aware of the fact that Mary liked him, just as he was aware of the converse fact that he liked her.

He had a genuine feeling of camaraderie for her, and he thought she had the same for him.

Of course there was the little added piquancy of sex in their friendship, but what of that?

It would have been the same if she had been his sister or even his mother.

His feeling towards her, when she had rejected him, had reached the pitch of an admiring respect.

Having for him, as he thought, just
that genuine camaraderie and no more, she had perceived that his love for Susie was the mainspring of his affections, and proceeded to show enough wisdom for both herself and him in preventing a second blunder as a cap to the first.

It did not strike him now, any more than at the time, that the girl loved him.

Love is popularly alleged to be blind, but in nine out of ten of his relations the god is gifted with second sight, and Stuart's experiences in the past, one of which had gone nigh to losing him his life from his ignoring this fact, should have prepared him to recognise the true cause of Mary's conduct from first to last as readily as she did with regard to himself.
Expiation.

But it did not. His stupidity was so marked in this case that he contemplated using the Frossards' home as his basis of operations, and it was only his impatience that saved him from inflicting on his friend this most cruel torture.

To-day was Thursday, and he found when he went down to the office that he would not be wanted for the next day's issue.

This gave him his freedom till Sunday evening, and he at once made up his mind that he would go out to the MacGhies' in the afternoon under the simple pretext of a call.

Who knew what unforeseen piece of luck might await him?

He might even find her alone.
And this was what actually happened, though he was not aware of it.

Susie was lying in an easy-chair on the side verandah, attempting to fall asleep or distract herself from the annoyance and wrath of a dreadful interview with Annie by reading a novel, when she suddenly heard his ring.

The sound of that bell was always won't now to startle her, although Lord Morecamb was thousands of miles across the sea.

A terrified hope possessed her that Stuart would in some way or other divine what had happened and would come to her.

In her dreams she had twice seen him enter some shadowy place where she was,
and stand, with sad eyes of reproach and scorn, looking down on her.

The first time she had covered her face with her hands and fallen on to her knees, and then his motionless silence had made her struggle awake half-mad.

The second time she had dragged herself up to him and said,—

"Well, curse me! strike me! only do not stand like that, silent and still, and send me mad with your contempt!"

As she heard the bell now she started up wide-awake, with every sense at full tension, her heart beating wildly, staring in front of her.

She listened in the aching silence.

The sounds that followed fell on her like those of the heavy blows of a great
hammer—the opening and closing of the passage door—Margaret's footsteps down the hall—the front door opened, and then, in one terrible moment, she recognised his voice.

Everything spun round her, but she fiercely mastered herself and listened again so as to be certain.

Yes, it was his voice: he had indeed come: he was there—there a few yards away from her! He—he!

She made an effort to get up, intending to go along the verandah and escape, but she could not. Her limbs refused to raise her. The sound of the closing door struck her like the lash of a whip, and with a sudden and quite unexpected power she got up, went round
along the verandah, and waited at the passage door till she heard Margaret's footsteps approaching it.

Margaret opened the door, saw her, and said,—

"It's Mr Stuart, Miss Susie. He's in the drawing-room. I was coming round by the verandah to tell you."

"Very well, Margaret," she said, and passed on to the staircase, which she mounted.

Loppie was lying on her bed, blissfully dozing, when her sister came in, pale and trembling, and put a cold hand on to her wrist.

It took some time to explain to the drowsed and blinking young woman what was required of her; but at last she
understood, and after she had washed her face and hands and arranged herself, she went down to see Mr Stuart in the drawing-room.

Susie sat on the bedside and stared vacantly out of the window.

Once she seemed to be listening again to the maddening, sententious "lecture" of Annie, hatefully redoubtable in her bobbing cap, and with her manner of an irreproachable Christian who had done her duty under adverse circumstances, and was now reaping his reward in the all-pervading odour of wifely and parsonical sanctity. And yet, though Susie was too engrossed to notice it, the memory no longer even annoyed her.

The lagging minutes dragged on pain-
fully, and it seemed to her whole hours before she heard steps mounting the staircase.

Had he not gone, then? Was it possible that he insisted on seeing her?

Loppie entered with a beaming countenance, and took her as she rose into her arms and held her embraced.

"Suse," she said, "it's all right. Everything's all right. He understands everything. We've talked it all over, and he is beautiful—just beautiful! He wants you to come down."

"No," said Susie hoarsely, "no!"

Then began a scene of explanation and entreaty, faced by incredulity and adverse resolution.

"But, Suse," urged Loppie, "he loves you—you don't know how he loves
you! He is quite beautiful about it all."

Susie stood obstinate, with fixed teeth, staring out of the window.

"He doesn't understand," she said in a low voice, "or you're not telling me the truth."

"Oh, Suse, how could you say anything so unkind! And he understands everything—right through from beginning to end! Everything! And he loves you—"

"He doesn't, or he would hate and despise me, or else you're deceiving me. You mean well. But it's all wrong and hateful, Loppie, to deceive me so."

Loppie entreated her to come down and see, and judge for herself, but Susie was obdurate. At last her sister's assever-
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ation prevailed so far as to persuade her to see him, but not to-day—not to-day, she could not stand it!

"Go," she said, "and tell him that he does not understand, and that I—that I can't believe what you say about it. Tell him I can't see him to-day—I can't! I can't!—just that. But if he will come to-morrow afternoon, I will see him, and tell him something that he ought to know, and I will make him understand, and then . . . and then we will see."

Loppie had to be content with hearing this message, but Susie still insisted.

"Now promise me," she said, "promise me solemnly, on your word of honour, that you will tell it him just as I have said. On your word of honour, Loppie."
Loppie gave the pledge required, and, after Susie had repeated the message once more to make mistake impossible, was allowed to go.

When she came upstairs again after taking Stuart out, Loppie found her sister kneeling by the bedside and crying bitterly.

Susie was sure that when her lover really knew—when he really understood—it would be all over between them for ever, and nothing the other could say could alter her opinion.

The girl wandered about like a lovely, unlaid ghost all day—now in the house and garden—now down in the gully or by the stream, seeking for strength and self-control, bracing herself resolutely for her task.
Mrs MacGhie and Loppie let her alone, only expressing their sympathy for her in delicate, indirect ways as they had done all along, talking anxiously together and reassuring one another that it would be "all right."

Susie had decided that the momentous interview should take place in their little room—"the girls' room"—there where so much of the deeper hours of her spiritual life, its hopes and joys and sorrows, had been passed.

It seemed to her somehow as if she was on her own ground in that room, as if all the familiar things in it, which were the very visible expression of herself, would give her strength for her terrible task.
It was like fighting for your life by your own hearthstone.

She sat there all the next morning, and when lunch was over, after wandering down into the gully and lying on the grass for a little, came back into it, and played a little on the piano—Schubert's *Ave Maria*—till a sudden memory of a certain association of his name made her stop and try to read instead, waiting nervously for the sound of the bell.

At last it came.

Then she heard his step on the way to the door, and rose to her feet, pale, shaking, but resolute.

Then the door opened and closed, and she knew he had entered, though her eyes could scarcely discern him, hypno-
tised by the whirl of her emotion, as if she had dragged up a blind in a dark room and stood suddenly in the pouring sunlight.

He came to her straight.

"Susie," he said, "Susie!"

She made a motion with her hands to keep him off.

"No," she said huskily, "don't touch me—don't speak kindly to me! It is horrible! I am loathsome! Wait till I have told you."

"Oh, darling," he said, "what does it matter? I know. That is all past."

She shook her head.

"You don't know," she said; "or if you did, you would not stand and look at me like that."
She could see now the bright gaze of his eyes, the tenderness of his smile, and it seemed to her the culmination of her wretchedness. In a few moments he would look so differently.

"Let us sit down," she said, "and I will tell you."

He made another effort to stop her in her self-torture, stepping to her with upraised hands, but she drew back, shrinking from his touch as if she were diseased and might contaminate him.

The pathos of her lovely courage stirred the spring of tears in him, the sweet heroic darling exacting of her own hand every lash of her self-sentenced punishment.

She sat down, resting her arms along the sides of the big easy-chair and grasp-
ing the ends of them, her eyes bent on to the ground.

Seeing that his standing troubled her he drew a chair from by the window and sat down in it, always gently looking at her.

"I want you," she said slowly, "to understand this. You seem to think that I did not know what I was doing . . . what I was doing when I agreed to marry Lord Morecamb. That is all wrong."

"It is nothing," he said softly, "nothing to me now."

She kept her eyes persistently bent on to the ground.

"Do not talk like that," she said. "I ask you not to; it only makes things harder for me."

He assented silently by a movement.
"You think," she proceeded, doling out each word with the tremendous effort to speak the exact truth, "you think that I was drawn bit by bit into my engagement with him. That was not so. I went into it deliberately, with my eyes open. You think I did not know my mind then: that I did not know I—\(I\) loved you. That was not so. I have no excuse at all. I loved you then as much as I ever did, and I knew it. I was not hurried into it; I thought it all out. He did not coax or flatter me. He did not try to bribe me, to dazzle me with his rank and fortune. He asked me simply for himself, for his own sake, and I lied to him and deceived him by pretending that that was why I took him.
He had not the least idea that I was selling myself to him for the sake of what I should get as his wife. I behaved to him abominably."

She paused, and tightened the hold of her hands and arms.

"I lay awake all one night—the night after he asked me to marry him, and I was to write and tell him next day if I would—and early in the morning I got up, with my teeth and hands clenched, and said that I intended to sell myself and take him. That was what I said. That was my deliberate choice. I went in front of the big looking-glass and looked at myself and said: 'I, Susie MacGhie, this person standing here, am going to sell myself to Lord Morecamb, in order
to go home to Europe and live like an aristocrat.' Then I frowned and grinned and tossed my hair about like a mouthing actress, and went and threw myself on to the bed and fell fast asleep. And in the morning I wrote to Lord Morecamb and told him that I should be proud and happy to be his wife."

She had put her fingers up to her breast and drawn out a piece of folded notepaper.

"That is the letter," she said, holding it out with a hand which her intensest effort could not keep steady. "Look at it."

He tried to take her hand, but she made a violent motion.

"Susie," he said, "there is no need for this."
"Read it out. Read it out."

He undid it and read aloud.

"My dear Lord Morecamb,—I have thought about what you said to me yesterday afternoon, and I have made up my mind. I shall be proud and happy to be your wife. And this is my choice.

"Susan MacGhie."

"That is not all," she said quickly, anticipating his protest; "There is something worse—far worse."

She paused a moment, and her breast heaved.

"You think," she said in a low tone, "I am innocent and pure. Men seem to have that idea of girls. You think I didn’t know what being married
meant—that I didn't realise it. That is not so. I am not innocent. I am not pure. I am very foul and bespattered all over."

There was a long silence as she collected her strength for her final effort.

"I knew very well what it meant; I tell you that every girl does, when she loves one man and gives herself to another. To have him take you and kiss you and hold you in his arms when you love someone else is abominable, and I felt it in every fibre. Lord Morecamb was a gentleman—you understand what I mean—and he treated me with a kindness and a respect which cut me to the heart. It was my fault, and only my fault, the whole thing. Think of this. It was I who kissed him and
caressed him, and drew him to kiss and caress me."

She was shivering and shuddering, a chalky white, not only in face and throat but down to her very finger-tips.

"You see," she went on, with a ghastly smile, "I had sold myself, and he had a right to what he had purchased. Pure? Innocent?"

She burst into a discordant laugh.

"I used to long sometimes to tell people that I thought myself worse than the poor girls who sell themselves openly in the streets, for they do it courageously, and get scorn and shame for it, while everybody was fawning on me—me—me! Oh what hideous cowardice! What horrible, loathsome hypocrisy!"
She raised her face suddenly and looked at him with a woful defiance.

"Now," she said, in a low broken voice, "you know what I am — what sort of a girl you want to marry and live with and help you in your work."

He rose pale, resolute, yet tender, and came to her.

"Susie," he said, "you have tortured yourself and me enough. I knew all this—"

"You knew it," she flashed out, "and you did not loathe and hate and despise me?"

He threw up his face.

"Who am I to loathe or hate or despise you or anybody for such things? Has my own life been such that I can do so? — No," he added quickly, "not
Madeline—not Mrs Brown. I loved her truly, purely, disinterestedly. But there have been others. I have done far worse than you again and again, and I have never suffered for it or repented. And right down to the end of it, this is so. For when I loved you, and knew I loved you—when I knew I had found what I had never hoped to find, the woman of my heart and soul and brain and all—yet I was ready at the first rebuff to befoul myself with gross and hideous consolation—to drug my anger and resentment with drink. Susie," he went on, bending over her and taking her cold hands in his, "my lovely heroic darling—"

"Don't, don't, don't," she whispered
hoarsely, closing her eyes; "I can't bear it."

Then in an instant they were standing in one another's arms, tightly locked, breathing together, lips to lips, silent, oblivious of all.

When she woke from that swooning ecstasy and opened her eyes and saw him gazing at her, she laughed, bending back her face, caressing him with her hand, murmuring inarticulately her love and pride.

"Proud, proud," she said, "so proud of you—my life—my love—my David—my king!"

Then, as the tears streamed out from her eyes and he kissed her again and again, her words, half sobs, half laughter came exultantly.
"Oh," she said, "and now I am so happy, and it can never tempt or trouble me anymore! I will never go to England again, or want to see it or live in it; but here is my home, and the land I love, and the people I love, and the man I love!"

"Darling, darling!" he murmured.

"And I will try to help you to work for it, and make it free and great; for I do love it, and am proud of it, and would lay down my life for it by your side so proudly, so joyously—for Australia, and democracy, and those who toil and suffer and are robbed, that they may win their rights and be free and happy! Do not smile at me—do not make fun of me!"
"Dearest, I am only smiling because I am too so happy."

"For I understand it all; indeed I do, and I believe in it, and I will never doubt about it any more, even if I do not live to see it; but I will give all my heart and soul to you to help you to work for it. And when we have children, I will—"

"Yes," he said, smiling at her, at the bright eyes and lips and rosy cheeks that had been so pale.

"You must not make fun of me, dear! For it is so much to me, so much you cannot think."

"And when we have children you will—"

"Yes, I will bring them up to live and be proud of their country, and hate to
prefer any other to it, but to give all their lives to making it better and happier than any other country."

She would have said something else, but suddenly restrained herself.

With the lover's intuition he comprehended her thought, and what she meant when, with quiet and serious eyes, pressing him close to her, she laid her head upon his breast and sighed and was content.

THE END.