

SUSAN ROUDLEIGH



ROBERT G. DE LISSER

M. BREDALL

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

JANE'S CAREER

SUSAN PROUDLEIGH

BY

HERBERT G. DE LISSER

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SUSAN PROUDLEIGH

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SUSAN PROUDLEIGH

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

SUSAN'S DILEMMA

I KNOW I 'ave enemies," said Susan bitterly ;
" I know I am hated in this low neighbourhood.
But I don't see what them should hate me for, for
I never interfere wid any of them."

" Them hate y'u because you are better than them,
and because y'u don't mix with them," sagaciously
answered Catherine, her second sister.

" That they will never get me to do," snapped
Susan. " I wouldn't mix with a lot of people who
are not my companions, even if them was covered
from top to toe with gold. It is bad enough that
I have to live near them, but further than that I am
not going. It is ' good morning ' and ' good evening '
with me, an' that is all."

" Then them will always hate you," said Catherine,
" and if them can injure y'u them will try to do it."

Catherine referred to most of the people living

in the immediate vicinity, between Susan and whom a fierce feud had existed for some months. It was born of envy and nurtured by malice, and Susan knew that well. She dressed better than most of the girls in the lane, she lived in a "front house," while most of them had to be content with ordinary yard-rooms. She frequently went for rides on the electric cars, whereas they could only afford such pleasure on Sundays and on public holidays. She carried herself with an air of social superiority which was gall and wormwood to the envious; and often on walking through the lane she had noticed the contemptuous looks of those whom, with greater contempt, she called the common folks and treated with but half-concealed disdain. On the whole, she had rather enjoyed the hostility of these people, for it was in its way a tribute to her own importance. But now a discomfoting development had taken place in the manner in which the dislike of the neighbourhood habitually showed itself.

This evening Susan sat by one of the windows of the little house in which she lived, and which opened on the lane. It contained two tiny rooms: the inner apartment was her bedroom, her two sisters sleeping with her; the outer one was a sitting-room by day and a bedroom at night, when it was occupied by her father and mother. The house had originally been painted white and green, but the dust of Kingston had discoloured the painting somewhat; hence its appearance was now shabby and faded, though not as much so as that of the other buildings on either side of it. Opposite was an ancient fence dilapidated

and almost black ; behind this fence were two long ranges of rooms, in which people of the servant classes lived. The comparison between these and Susan's residence was all in favour of the latter ; and as this house overlooked the lane, and was detached from the buildings in the yard to which it belonged, its rental value was fairly high and its occupants were supposed to be of a superior social position.

The gutters on both sides of the lane ran with dirty soap-water, and banana skins, orange peel and bits of brown paper were scattered over the roughly macadamized ground. Lean dogs reclined in the centre of the patch, or prowled about seeking scraps of food which they never seemed to find. In the daytime, scantily-clad children played in the gutters ; a few slatternly women, black and brown, drawled out a conversation with one another as they lounged upon the doorsteps ; all during the long hours of the sunlight the sound of singing was heard as some industrious housewives washed the clothes of their families and chanted hymns as they worked ; and now and then a cab or cart passed down the lane, disturbing for a little while the peaceful tenor of its way.

There were no sidewalks, or rather, there were only the vestiges of sidewalks to be seen. For the space which had been left for these by the original founders of the city had more or less been appropriated by householders who thought that they themselves could make excellent use of such valuable territory. Here a house was partly built on what was once a portion of the sidewalk ; there a doorstep marked the encroachment that had taken place on public

property ; between these an empty space showed that the owner of the intermediate yard had not as yet been adventurous enough to extend his fence beyond its proper limits. Most of the houses that opened on the lane were of one storey, and built of wood, with foundations of red brick. An air of slow decay hung over nearly all of them, though now and then you saw a newly painted building which looked a little out of place in such surroundings.

Susan saw that hers was by no means the shabbiest of these houses, and Susan knew that she was the finest-looking young woman in that section of the lane in which she lived. It was her physical attractions that had helped her to comparative prosperity. In the euphemistic language of the country, she was "engaged" to a young man who was very liberal with his money ; he came to see her two or three times a week ; and though of late he had not seemed quite so ardent as before, Susan had not troubled to inquire the reason of his shortened visits. He had never hitherto failed on a Friday night to bring for her her weekly allowance, and that she regarded as a sufficiently substantial proof of his continued affection.

But now she felt that she must take some thought of the future. Thrice during the current week she had been openly laughed at by Mother Smith, a peculiarly objectionable old woman who lived about a hundred yards farther up the lane. Mother Smith had passed her house, and, looking up at the window, had uttered with a malignant air of triumph, "If you can't catch Quaco, you can catch his shirt." Meaningless as the words might have appeared to the

uninitiated, Susan had immediately divined their sinister significance. She knew that Mother Smith had a daughter of about her own age, whose challenging attractiveness had always irritated her. Because Maria, though black, was comely, Susan had made a point of ignoring Maria's existence; she had never thought of Maria as a possible rival, however, so confident was she of her ascendancy over her lover, and so certain was she that Maria could never be awarded the prize for style and beauty if Susan Proudleigh happened to be near. Still, there could be no mistaking the triumphant insolence of Mother Smith's glance or the meaning of her significant words.

Tom's growing coldness now found an explanation. The base plot hatched against her stood revealed in all its hideous details. What was she to do? She did not want to quarrel with Tom outright, and so perhaps frighten him away for ever. That perhaps was precisely what her enemies were hoping she would do. After thinking over the matter and finding herself unable to decide what course of action to adopt, she had put the problem before her family; and her aunt, Miss Proudleigh, happening to come in just then, she also had been invited to give her opinion and suggest a plan.

Susan soon began to realize that she could not expect much wisdom from their united counsel. They all knew that she was not liked by the neighbours; unfortunately, Mother Smith's design was a factor in the situation which seemed to confuse them utterly. They had gone over the ground again and again. Catherine had said the last word, and it was

the reverse of helpful. For a little while they sat in silence, then Susan mechanically repeated Catherine's words, "If them can injure me, them will try to do it."

"They does dislike you, Susan," agreed her aunt, by way of continuing the conversation, "an' if them can hurt you, them will do it. But, after all, the Lord is on your side." This remark proved to Susan that at such a crisis as this her family was worse than hopeless. She turned impatiently from the window and faced Miss Proudleigh.

"I don't say the Lord is not on my side," she exclaimed; "but Mother Smith is against me, an' the devil is on her side, an' if I am not careful Mother Smith will beat me."

As no one answered, she went on, "Mother Smith wouldn't talk like she is talking if she didn't know what she was talking about. She want Tom for Maria, her big-mouth daughter. She an' Maria tryin' to take Tom from me—I know it. But, Lord! I will go to prison before them do it!" She had risen while speaking, and her clenched hands and gleaming eyes showed clearly that she was not one over whom an easy victory could be obtained.

She was of middle height, slimly built, and of dark brown complexion. Her lips were thin and pouting, her chin rather salient; her nose stood out defiantly, suggesting a somewhat pugnacious disposition. Her hair, curly but fairly long, was twisted into several plaits and formed a sort of turban on her head; her eyes, large, black, and vivacious, were the features of which she was proudest, for she knew the uses to which they could be put. As her disposition was naturally

lively, these eyes of hers usually seemed to be laughing. But just now they were burning and flashing with anger; and those who knew Susan well did not care to cross her when one of these moods came on.

Her father saw her wrath and trembled; then immediately cast about in his mind for some word of consolation that might appease his daughter. He was a tall, thin man, light brown in complexion, and possessed of that inability to arrive at positive decisions which is sometimes described as a judicial frame of mind. He was mildly fond of strong liquors; yet even when under their influence he managed to maintain a degree of mental uncertainty, a sort of intellectual sitting on the fence, which caused his friends to believe that his mental capacity was distinctly above the average. By these friends he was called Schoolmaster, and he wore the title with dignity. By way of living up to it he usually took three minutes to say what another person would have said in one. That is to say, he delighted in almost endless circumlocution.

It was even related of Mr. Proudleigh that, one night, no lamp having yet been lit, he surreptitiously seized hold of a bottle he found on a table and took a large sip from it, thinking the liquor it contained was rum. It happened to be kerosene oil; but such was his self-control that, instead of breaking into strong language as most other men would have done, he muttered that the mistake was very regrettable, and was merely sad and depressed during the remainder of the evening. Such a man, it is clear, was not likely to allow his feelings to triumph over his

judgment, though upon occasion, and when it suited his interests, he was ready to agree with the stronger party in any argument. Though he now felt somewhat alarmed by Susan's suspicions, and knew it was a matter of the first importance that Tom, her lover, and especially Tom's wages, should be retained as an asset in the family, he could not quite agree that Susan had very good cause for serious apprehension as yet. Up to now he had said very little; he was convinced that he had not sufficient evidence before him on which to pronounce a judgment. He thought, too, that his hopeful way of looking at the situation might help her at this moment; so, his mild, lined face wearing a profoundly deliberative expression, he gave his opinion.

"I don't think you quite right, Susan," he observed; "but, mind, I don't say y'u is wrong. Mother Smit is a woman I don't like at all. But de Scripture told us, judge not lest we be not judged, an' perhaps Mother Smit don't mean you at all when she talk about Quaco."

On hearing this, Susan's mother, a silent, elderly black woman with a belligerent past, screwed up her mouth by way of expressing her disapproval of her husband's point of view. Mrs. Proudleigh was a firm believer in the unmitigated wickedness of her sex, but judged it best to say nothing just then. Susan, however, annoyed by the perverseness of her father, burst out with:

"Then see here, sah, if she don't mean me an' my young man, who can she mean? Don't Mother Smith always say I am forward? Don't she pass the

house this morning an' throw her words on me? Don't Maria call out ' Look at her ' when I was passing her yard yesterday? Tut, me good sah, don't talk stupidity to me! If you don't have nothing sensible to say, you better keep you' mouth quiet. I am going to Tom's house to-night, to-night. And Tom will 'ave to tell me at once what him have to do with Maria."

" I will go with you," said Catherine promptly. She was a sturdy young woman of nineteen years of age, and not herself without a sneaking regard for Tom. Hence, on personal as well as on financial grounds, she objected to Tom's being taken possession of by Maria and Maria's mother.

The old man, rather fearing that Susan's wrath might presently be turned against himself, discreetly refrained from making any further remark; but his sister, an angular lady of fifty, with a great reputation for intelligence and militant Christianity, seeing that Susan's mind was fully made up as to Maria's guilt, and being herself in the habit of passing severe comment on the conduct of the absent, determined to support her niece.

" But some female are really bad!" she observed, as if in a soliloquy. " Some female are really bad. Now here is poor Susan not interfering wid anybody. She got her intended. He take his own foot an' he walk down the lane, an' he fall in love with her. It is true she don't marry him yet, but she is engaged. She is engage, and therefore it is an unprincipled sin for any other female to trouble her intended an' take him away from her. If Maria want a young man,

why don't she go an' look for one? Why she an' her mother want to trouble Susan's one poor lamb, when there is ninety and nine others to pick an' choose from? Really some female is wicked!"

A speech like this, coming from a woman whose lack of physical charms was more than made up for by strength of moral character, was naturally hailed with great approval by Susan, Catherine, and their mother. The old man himself, never willing to be permanently in a minority, now went so far as to admit that the whole affair was "very provoking," and added that if he was a younger man he would do several things of a distinctly heroic and dangerous character.

But all this, though in its way very encouraging, was not exactly illuminating. It only brought Susan back to the point from which she had started. "What am I to do?" she asked for the last time, reduced to despair, and sinking back into her seat despondently.

"If I was you," said Catherine at last deliberately, "I would catch hold of Maria, and beat her till she bawl."

This advice appealed to Susan; it corresponded with the wish of her own heart. But she doubted the efficacy of physical force in dealing with a difficult and delicate situation. No: a beating would not do; besides, in the event of an encounter, it might be Maria who would do the beating! Susan saw plainly that no word of a helpful nature would be forthcoming from any of the anxious group, who usually appealed to her for advice and assistance. So when Miss Proudleigh was again about to give some further

opinions on the general wickedness of females, she got up abruptly, saying that she was going round to Tom's house to see him. Catherine rose to accompany her, and after putting on their hats the two girls left the room.

CHAPTER II

A PASSAGE-AT-ARMS

IT was about eight o'clock ; and, save for a few lights gleaming faintly here and there in the yards and the little houses, the lane was in darkness. It was quiet, too ; only three or four persons were to be seen moving about, and the innumerable dogs would not begin to bark until nearly everybody had gone to bed. A stranger standing at one of the numerous crossings that intersected the lane, and looking up or down the narrow way, might imagine he was peering into some gloomy tunnel were it not for the brilliancy of the stars overhead. The cross-streets were very much brighter and livelier, and that one towards which Susan and her sister directed their steps was particularly bright.

A Chinaman's shop at the lane corner opened upon this street. To the right of this, and also opening on the street, was another shop presided over by an elderly woman. It was small, but contained a comparatively large quantity of things which found ready sale in the neighbourhood ; such as pints of porter, little heaps of ripe bananas, loaves of bread, coarse straw hats, charcoal, pieces of sugar-cane, tin whistles, reels of thread and peppermint cakes. On

the opposite side of the crossing were other shops, and on either hand, east and west, as far as the eye could reach, were still more shops standing between fairly large two-storeyed dwelling-houses of brick and wood. On the piazzas women squatted selling native sweetmeats and fruit. To the west, in the middle distance, two or three taverns blazed with light; away to the east was a great crowd of people singing, and in the midst of this crowd jets of flame streamed upwards from the unprotected wicks of huge oil-lamps. These lamps gave off thick columns of black smoke which slowly drifted over the heads of the sable, white-clothed revivalists who passionately preached on the always approaching end of the world, and called upon their hearers to repent them of their sins.

People were continually passing up and down. They passed singly or in groups, the latter discussing loudly their private affairs, careless as to who might hear: even love-making couples ignored the proximity of other human beings, and laughed and chatted as though there was no one within a mile of them. Many of these pedestrians were barefooted, but most of them wore shoes or slippers of some sort. A few were in rags, but the majority were fairly well dressed, for this was a populous thoroughfare, and the people took some pride in their appearance. A number of children hung about, playing with one another or gazing idly at the passing show; a fine grey dust lay thick upon the ground; gas-lamps placed at wide distances apart burned dimly, so that large spaces of the street were in shadow. Cabs conveying passengers home or on visits drove by frequently, and every now and then

Revivalists

the electric cars flew by, stirring up a cloud of dust which almost blinded one, and which for a moment shrouded the street with a moving, impalpable veil. There was life here, there was movement, and while the revivalists prayed and preached in the distance, the candy sellers near by plaintively invited the young to come and purchase their wares, the proprietors of little ice-cream carts declaimed vociferously that they sold the best cream ever manufactured, and the vendors of pea-nuts screamed out that baked pea-nuts were strengthening, enlivening, and comforting. This was the life of the street.

At the right-hand corner of the lane, where the Chinaman's shop stood, was a gas-lamp, and the gossiping groups about the spot indicated that it was a favourite rendezvous of the people of the vicinity. Susan never condescended to linger for a moment there; that would have been beneath her dignity. But Maria, her rival, sometimes paused at the corner when going for a walk, to talk for a while with a possible admirer or with a friend if she should happen to meet one. To-night Maria was standing under the gas-lamp conversing gaily with two girls. Evidently she was in a happy frame of mind.

"Yes," she was saying, in answer to a question put to her by one of the girls, "I am goin' to tell her so. She is proud an' she is forward; but she will soon sing a different tune. I wonder what she would say now if she did know dat her lover write me two letters last week, an' say that him love me! I don't answer him yet, but him say him comin' to see me to-morrow night. You watch! If I want

to teck Tom from her, I have only to lift me little finger. An' I am not too sure I won't do it."

She laughed as she spoke of her prospective victory over Susan; but her friends, though they hated Susan, were not particularly delighted with the news they heard. They were agreed that Susan ought to be humbled, but that was no reason why Maria should be exalted. It was, therefore, not altogether in a cheerful tone of voice that the elder one asked Maria :

" Y'u think Tom going to come to you ? "

" Him almost come to me already," replied Maria, with pride. " Look what him send for me last night ! "

She thrust her hand into her pocket as she spoke. As she was taking out Tom's present, Susan and her sister emerged into the light.

Both Susan and Maria caught sight of each other at the same moment. And each realized in a flash that the other knew the true position of affairs. The glare of hate from Susan's eyes was answered by a contemptuous stare and a peal of derisive laughter from Maria. Susan's sister and Maria's friends at once understood that a desperate struggle had begun between the two.

Maria's ringing jeer was more than any ordinary woman could tolerate. Susan tried to answer it with a laugh as contemptuous, but failed, her wrath choking her. Then she put all pretence aside, and swiftly moving up to Maria she thrust her face into the face of the other girl. " See here, ma'am," she hissed, " I want to ask you one thing : is it me you laughing at ? "

"But stop!" exclaimed Maria, backing away a little, and defiantly placing her arms akimbo. "Stop! You ever see my trial! Then I can't laugh without your permission, eh?" Saying which she laughed again as contemptuously as before, and swung round with a flounce so as to bring one of her elbows into unpleasant proximity to Susan's waist.

"I don't say you can't laugh, an' I don't care if y'u choose to laugh till you drop," cried Susan bitterly; "but I want to tell you that y'u can't laugh at *me*!"

"So you're better than everybody else?" sneered Maria. "Y'u think you are so pretty, eh? Well! there is a miss for you! She can't even behave herself in de public street, though she always walk an' shake her head as if she was a princess, an' though she call herself 'young lady.' But perhaps she think she lose something good, an' can't recover from the loss as yet!" And again that maddening peal of laughter rang out.

Susan did not answer Maria directly. She eyed that young woman swiftly, and noticed that her dress was old and her shoes poor and dusty. This gave her the advantage she needed in dealing with a girl who was all contempt while she herself was all temper. She turned to her sister and to Maria's friends, and pointed to Maria with scorn.

"Look at her!" she cried. "Look how she stand! Her face is like a cocoa-nut trash, and she don't even have a decent frock to put on!"

Maria might have passed over the reference to her face; she knew it was only spiteful abuse. But the allusion to the scantiness of her wardrobe was

absolutely unforgivable. If not exactly true, it yet approached perilously near the truth, and so it cut her to the quick. No sooner were the words uttered than Maria's forefinger was wagging in Susan's face, and :

" Say that again, an' I box you ! " she screamed.

" Box me ? " hissed Susan. " Box me ? My good woman, this would be the last day of you' life. Take you' hand out of me face at once—take it out, I say—take it out ! "—and without waiting to see whether Maria would remove the offending member, she seized it and pushed Maria violently away.

In a moment the two were locked in one another's arms. There was a sound of heavy blows, two simultaneous shrieks of " Murder ! " and a hasty movement of about forty persons towards the scene of the combat.

Catherine now thought it time to interfere. She threw herself upon the combatants, making a desperate but vain attempt to separate them. Maria's friends protested loudly that Susan was ill-treating Maria, though, as the latter was at least as strong as Susan, it was difficult to see where the ill-treatment came in. A dignified-looking man standing on the piazza loudly remonstrated with the crowd for allowing " those two females to fight," but made not the slightest effort himself to put a stop to the struggle. The little boys and girls in the vicinity cheered loudly. The one thing lacking was a policeman. Noticing this, the dignified-looking man audibly expressed his opinion on the inefficiency of the force.

" Let me go, I say, let me go ! " gasped Susan, her head being somewhere under Maria's right arm.

“ You wants to kill me ! ” stammered Maria, whose sides Susan was squeezing with all the strength she possessed—“ murder, murder ! ”

But neither one would let the other go. Neither one was much hurt as yet. The struggle continued about a minute longer, when some one in the crowd shouted, “ Policeman coming ! ”

Then indeed both Susan and Maria came to their senses. They separated, and vainly tried to put on an appearance of composure. It was time, for yonder, moving leisurely through the crowd, now composed of over a hundred persons, was the policeman who had been spied by one of the spectators. The girls made no effort to run, for that would surely have provoked the policeman to an unusual display of energy, and, justly angered at having been compelled to exert himself, he might have arrested them both on the charge of obstructing him in the execution of his duty. They waited where they stood, their eyes still flashing, their bosoms heaving, and their bodies trembling with rage.

But angry as she was, Susan had already begun to feel ashamed of fighting in the street. She had always had a horror of street scenes ; people of her class did not participate in them ; before this event she would not have thought it possible that she could ever be mixed up in such an affair as this. Oh, the humiliation of being handled by a constable ! She heartily wished she were a thousand miles from the spot.

In the meantime the policeman, having arrived at the outskirts of the crowd, began busily to work

his way through to the centre. True to its traditions, the crowd was hostile to him and friendly to the culprits; so some of the women managed to put themselves in his way, then angrily asked him what he was pushing them for.

"What is all dis?" was his first question as he came up to the spot where Susan and Maria stood. "What is de meaning of this?" He looked fixedly at the gas-lamp as if believing that that object could give him the most lucid explanation of the circumstances.

Nobody answered.

"What is all dis, I say?" he again demanded in a more peremptory tone of voice.

"These two gals was fighting, sah," explained a small boy, in the hope of seeing somebody arrested.

"Mind your own business, buoy!" was all the reward the policeman gave him for his pains, and then the arm of the law, feeling that something was expected of him, proceeded to deliver a speech.

"The truth of de matter is dis," he observed, looking round with an air of grave authority: "You common folkse are too ignorant. You are ignorant to extreme. You ever see white ladies fight in de street? Answer me that!"

No one venturing to answer, he continued:

"White people don't fight in de street, because them is ladies and gentleman. But I can't understand the people of my own colour; they have no respect for themself!"

He spoke more in sorrow than in anger; almost as though he were bitterly lamenting the deficiencies of the working classes. But Susan, though in trouble,

would not even then allow herself to be classed with the policeman and others in the category of "common folkses." "I am not common," she answered defiantly; "I am not your set!"

"Silence, miss!" thundered the policeman, scandalized. "I am the law! Do you know dat?"

"I never see a black law yet," cheekily replied Susan, who thought that, if she had to be arrested, there would be at least some satisfaction in humiliating the policeman.

"If y'u say another impertinence word I will arrest you!" was the policeman's threat. "Now de whole of you walk right off! Right off, I say, or I teck you all to jail!" He included the crowd with one comprehensive sweep of his arm, perceiving that his edifying attempt to awaken in his audience a sense of respectability had not been favourably received.

There was no disputing his authority, especially as he had begun to get angry. Susan knew, too, that she had mortally offended him by claiming to belong to a better class than his: which remark had also lost her the sympathy of the greater part of the crowd. So she was the first to take advantage of his command, and Maria followed her example by disappearing as quickly as she could. In another minute or two the normal activity of the street had been resumed, and the policeman had again started upon his beat, hoping that he would no more be disturbed that night. But both Susan and Maria knew that the fight would have a sequel. For war had now openly been declared between them.

CHAPTER III

THE CASE IN COURT

“ I WILL have to bring 'er up ! ”

It was Susan who spoke. She had returned to the house, where the news of the fight had preceded her. The whole family had been on the point of issuing forth to her rescue when she appeared, and now they were again assembled in full conclave to discuss at length this new aspect of the situation.

“ ‘ Vengeance is mine, ’ ” quoted her aunt ; “ but there is a time for all things. An' if y'u don't teach a gurl like Maria a lesson, she will go far wid you.”

“ She is a very rude young ooman ! ” exclaimed Mr. Proudleigh with indignation, following up his sister's remark ; he felt that he must lend his daughter his moral support. “ Ef I was a younger man, ” he went on, “ I would . . . I would . . . well, I don't know what I wouldn't do ! But Mother Smit is a dangerous female to interfere wid, and de cramps is troubling me in me foot so badly dat I wouldn't like 'er to put 'er hand 'pon me at all.”

“ Ef she ever touch you, ” his wife broke in, “ old as I is, she an' me would have to go to prison.”

“ You was always a courigious gal, Mattie, ” said the old man approvingly ; “ but I don't want to see

y'u get into any quarrel; an' to tell you de trute, I don't t'ink I could help you at all. Susan is goin' to bring up Maria, an' that is a satisfaction. I are going to de court-house wid 'er to encourage her."

"But suppose Susan lose the case?" Catherine suggested. She had been a witness of the encounter, and though she fully intended to forget every fact that would make against Susan in the court-house, she was sagacious enough to realize that Maria's friends would not do likewise.

"Lose me case?" asked Susan incredulously. "That can't be done! She provoked me first, an' the judge must take note of that. Besides, I am goin' to put a good lawyer on her: not a fool-fool man that can't talk, but a man who will question her properly an' make her tell de truth."

"Dat is right," said Mr. Proudleigh with proud anticipation of coming victory. "Sue, I advise you to get de Attorney-General."

"I never hear about him," Miss Proudleigh remarked; "an' it won't do for Susan to get a lawyer we don't know. But who to get?"

As Mr. Proudleigh knew nothing about the leader of the local bar except his name, he decided not to urge the claims of that high official upon his daughter. One after another, the names of the several lawyers of whom the family had heard were mentioned, and their various merits were discussed. As this was to be the most important case ever tried—or at least so the family thought—it was of the utmost importance that the brightest legal luminary should be obtained: the difficulty was to select one from the many whose

reputation for ability commended them all as fit and proper persons to prosecute Maria Bellicant for assault and abusive language. At last Miss Proudleigh suggested a lawyer whose cleverness in handling witnesses determined to perjure themselves had often appealed to her admiration. Having once mentioned his name with approval, the worthy lady thought it was incumbent upon her to argue away all that might be said against him and all that might be urged in favour of other solicitors ; and at length Susan decided that she would go to see Lawyer Jones in the morning. Miss Proudleigh was so delighted with the prospect of having Mr. Jones proceed against Maria, that during the rest of the time she remained at the house she could talk of nothing but that lawyer's merits. But on leaving she reminded Susan of the value of prayer as a consolation for all the troubles of life, and suggested that supplications made properly and in a reverent spirit might lead to Maria's being afflicted with manifold ills throughout the rest of her days.

After Miss Proudleigh had left, the family sat up until twelve o'clock discussing the fight and the coming case. And in many of the yards and houses of the lane the fight also formed the topic of discussion. In the yard where Maria lived some thirty persons assembled to express their sympathy with her and to give fervent utterance to the hope that she had beaten Susan properly. They were comforted on learning from Maria that she had. Mother Smith herself performed a sort of war dance about the premises, showing in pantomime what she would do as soon as she should lay hands upon Susan and Susan's people,

down to the third and fourth generation. Everybody agreed that Maria had been most shamefully ill-treated, and one of the girls who had been with Maria at the street corner went so far as to "think" she had seen Susan draw a pair of scissors out of her pocket, presumably to stab Maria. Indeed, in some of the tenement yards it was actually reported that blood had been drawn, one eye-witness even undertaking to describe the wounds. Altogether, it was a very exciting night in that section of the lane in which the girls lived, and almost every one was glad that Susan had at last met her match.

The excitement was kept alive the next day by the news that Susan had brought up Maria. Maria had been expecting this, for she had rightly calculated that no girl in Susan's financial position would forgo the luxury of a case in court after such a fight. Maria was poor, but she felt that the only proper thing to do in the circumstances was to "cross the warrant"; so she went and crossed it that same day, and Mother Smith began to sell some of her scanty stock of furniture to raise enough money to employ a lawyer.

Susan acted very rapidly when her mind was made up. After leaving the court-house she had sent a note to Tom telling him to come round to see her that night; and Tom, who had already heard about the fight, came as requested.

He was a short, stoutish young fellow of about twenty-six years of age, and somewhat lighter in complexion than Susan. His watery eyes, weak mouth, and tip-tilted nose showed a man of little strength of character; you would rightly have de-

scribed him as a nondescript sort of person. He took great pride in his appearance, always used cheap scents on Sundays, and carried on his amours as surreptitiously as possible. He had a horror of domestic quarrels, and though it was true that he had been attracted by Maria's appearance, fear of Susan's temper had kept him fairly faithful to his vows of eternal constancy. He had flirted just a little with Maria. He had made her one or two presents. He had written her a couple of letters; he was rather (perhaps dangerously) fond of writing letters. But Susan overawed him, and in the midst of these amorous exercises he had devoutly hoped that she would never suspect him of even speaking to Maria. Judge of his consternation, therefore, when, after greeting him coldly and saying that she had sent for him because he did not seem to care now about coming to see her as often as before, she launched out upon a sea of reproaches, and overwhelmed him with perfectly just accusations. Naturally, he denied all intercourse with Maria, though remembering with a sinking heart that his own handwriting might be produced against him. But Susan evidently knew nothing about those letters: perhaps he could induce Maria to return them to him. He began to take heart—too soon. For Susan did not believe a word he said, though she pretended to do so in order to gain the end she had in view. She heard him out to the end, and after he had expressed his indignation at the conduct of Maria, and agreed with Susan that that young woman deserved severest punishment, she quietly said:

" I bring Maria up to-day."

Tom was thunderstruck.

" You mean," he stammered, " that you going into a court-house with that girl ? "

" Yes," she answered ; " I make up me mind."

" An' then," he protested heatedly, " my name will be called, an' I will be mixed up in it ! What you talkin' about, Sue ? "

" You' name won't be called," she answered inflexibly. " What you fretting about ? If you know, as you say, that you have nothing to do with Maria, you needn't trouble you'self. It is me bringing her up, not you. Who is to call you' name ? "

Tom looked into her face, and realized that there was no turning her from her purpose. The two were alone in the day-sitting-room ; but even if the rest of the family were there, he reflected ruefully, that would hardly assist him.

" I don't like it," he muttered dismally.

" Don't fret about anything," she cheerfully advised him as he bade her good-night. " You' name won't come into the case."

But Tom left her with a sinking heart.

The eventful day of the case dawned at last, and found Susan and her family in a state of intense excitement. The case was to be tried in the Police Court, a building which had once been a barracks for the Imperial soldiers when troops were stationed in the city of Kingston. The courtyard of this building opened on one hand upon the city's central park, a large plot of land planted out in umbrageous

evergreens and flowering shrubs ; on the other hand, it opened upon one of the city's busiest thoroughfares. Thus on the one side was an oasis of peace and beauty, while in the adjoining street to the west all was squalor and confusion. This street itself was filled with little shops and crowded with clamouring, gesticulating people. A market was there, and the echoes of shrieks of laughter and sudden volleys of abuse sometimes came to the magistrates and lawyers as they transacted their business in the court ; but they accepted these minor interruptions as part of the settled order of things, and never complained about them. Carts rattling over the brick pavement, electric cars passing at frequent intervals and incessantly sounding their gongs to warn the careless people out of their way, diminutive venders shouting out the nature and superior quality of their wares—all this, with the inevitable clouds of dust which swept over and enveloped everything, made up the life and activity of the street. And dominating the whole scene stood the weather-worn, ugly, two-storeyed building which to so many thousands of the people was the awe-inspiring symbol of a vague and tremendous power called Law.

Both Susan and Maria knew the place well. They arrived there with their attendant retinues at a little before ten o'clock, the hour at which the court began to sit. Policemen were to be seen about the large courtyard, clad in white jackets and blue serge trousers and white helmets. They were the visible and self-conscious representatives of might, majesty, dominion, and power. Habitual criminals made

remarks about them as they passed up and down amongst the scores of people who loitered in the courtyard ; but they paid no attention to these, for freedom of ambiguous speech is the privilege of all habitual criminals.

Soon after their arrival, Susan and Maria entered the court-room with their friends to wait until their case should be called. They had been there more than once before as spectators, but now, as the principal actors in such a tremendous drama, they gazed about them with new and strange sensations.

The room was furnished in the plainest manner possible. At the southern end of it was a platform, on which stood a desk and a chair : these were for the magistrate. To the magistrate's right was the witness box, and just below his desk was a table, with a number of chairs around it. Here the court serjeant, one or two police inspectors, and the lawyers sat. Behind these, and facing the magistrate, was the dock ; behind this dock were ranged a few wooden benches without backs, and apparently designed for the purpose of inflicting the maximum amount of physical discomfort on those who might choose to sit on them. These were for the use of the spectators.

A case over, a trifling thing relating to a young lady with fifteen previous convictions for abusive language, the case of Susan Proudleigh *v.* Maria Bellicant was called. Maria, as the accused, took up her stand behind her lawyer, who rose and informed the magistrate that he appeared for her.

" Susan Proudleigh ! " called the court serjeant,

and Susan rose. But the policeman at the door, who acted as the crier of the court, would not be defrauded of his privilege of shouting out her name; so immediately his voice was heard screaming, "Su—u—u—san Pounder! Su—u—u—san Pounder! Su—u—u—san Pounder!" And another policeman outside took up the cry with, "Su—u—u—san Plummer!" "Su—u—u—san Plummer! Su—u—san Plummer!" and was about to return the verdict of "No answer," when he learnt that the lady was inside.

Susan was motioned towards the witness box after Maria had vehemently pleaded not guilty to the charge of assault and battery. She felt nervous as she gazed around the crowded room, but she was comforted by the reflection that she looked very well in her white lawn frock trimmed with blue ribbons, with hat to match.

She took the book in her hand as directed, and swore that she would tell nothing but the truth. Then she stated her case.

"My Honour, I was walking me way quite quiet an' peaceful down Blake Lane on Thursday night last week; I was goin' for a walk, my Honour, an' thinking about——"

"Never mind what you were thinking about," said the magistrate; "go on."

"Yes, my Honour. I was thinkin' about me poor old father at home, when all of a sudden I see Maria Bellicant at the corner. I was goin' to tell 'er good evening, because as I know I never do her nothing, I had no bad feelings against 'er, and——"

"Oh, never mind all that!" interrupted the magis-

trate impatiently; "we don't want to hear about your feelings. Tell us the facts."

This was distinctly disconcerting. Susan, who had been trying to manipulate her th's properly so as to make a good impression upon His Honour, now began to think he was prejudiced against her. However, she went bravely on.

"I go up to Maria, my Honour, an' I was going to say, 'Good evening, Maria,' when she look at me an' laugh. An' she say, 'Look at this wort'less gal!' I say to her, 'But, Maria, why you call me wort'less?' an' I go up nearer up to 'er in a friendly spirit; an' she take 'er elbow an' push me, an' I hold 'er hand, an' she collar me an' begin to beat me, an' I bawl for murder."

She paused, for this was her version of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Her lawyer asked her a few questions, the answers to which all tended to corroborate her story. She felt quite satisfied, believing that she had already won the case; but Maria's lawyer rose very quietly, and intimated that he desired to ask her a few questions.

"Your name is Susan Proudleigh?" he asked, the tone of his voice suggesting that he thought the name might be an *alias*.

"Yes."

"You live at No. 101 Blake Lane?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your intended's name is Thomas Wooley?"

"What has that to do with the case?" asked the magistrate.

"A great deal, your Honour," answered the lawyer.

"Now, Susan," he went on, "remember you are on your oath! Your sweetheart's name is Thomas Wooley, isn't it?"

Susan looked at him dumbly. But his "Answer me!" was too peremptory to be disobeyed.

"Yes," she answered, and her heart sank, for she remembered what she had said to Tom about his name not being called.

"And he is tired of you, isn't he?" her questioner continued mercilessly, rejoicing in her confusion.

"What you mean?"

"Answer my question, miss!" was again the command.

"No; him never tell me so."

"Ah, now, don't you know that Thomas is in love with Maria?"

"I don't know dat at all; in fact, you 'ave no business——"

"Don't you dare argue with me! Now when you met Maria Bellicant that night, and when you told her that she had stolen the clothes she had on——"

"I never tell 'er so!" Susan burst forth. "I tell 'er she didn't 'ave a decent dress to wear!"

"Oh! so you provoked her, did you?"

Susan perceived that she had blundered, but the lawyer did not give her a chance to recover herself.

"Why did you provoke her? Answer me at once!" he insisted, and she was about to blunder further, when her lawyer rose and asked the magistrate if his client was to be intimidated and bullied in that fashion? He suggested that Susan had offered no

provocation whatever, and, although the magistrate promptly stopped him, Susan caught the cue. She had to admit, however, that she had struck Maria after she herself had been struck, and Maria's lawyer was satisfied that Susan's principal witness would admit far more than that.

This witness was a young man, one Hezekiah Theophilus Wilberforce. Catherine had taken ill almost at the last moment, fear of the court-house having much to do with her sudden illness ; so Susan had had to fall back upon the assistance of Hezekiah. Had she been sophisticated she might have tried to obtain the services of a professional witness. A few of these are always to be found in every West Indian town of any importance, and they perform the useful function of swearing to things they never saw. You relate the circumstances to them, and they find that they were in the vicinity of the occurrence (whatever it was) on the day or night in question ; and, if they were not seen by any of the other witnesses, that may be attributed to the fact that the excitement was intense.

These men are well known to the magistrates and lawyers, and sometimes they are called upon to explain their astonishing ubiquity. But a man is by British law considered honest until he is proven to be a scoundrel, so these witnesses continue to flourish like green bay trees. Susan, however, knew nothing of the high mysteries of the law and the customs of the court. So Hezekiah had been selected by her, chiefly on the strength of his own recommendation, as a person most likely to give a graphic and satisfactory account

of the ill-treatment she had suffered at the hands of Maria Bellicant.

Hezekiah had always had an ambition to figure as something in a court of justice. Not being able to prosecute anybody himself, he longed for the time when he should "kiss de book," and then proceed to tell a story which should assist in sending a fellow-creature to prison. On his name being called, he came into the court all smiles, and holding high his shining head, as one who realized the importance of being a witness. He repeated the story that Susan had told, varying it only by a detailed description of the treatment to which she had been subjected. Asked by the magistrate why he had not attempted to separate the girls, he replied with a grin that "horse don't have business in cow's fight," a reason which, he thought, amply explained his apparent cowardice. That said, he was about to step down from the box, not anticipating that anything further would be required of him, when Maria's lawyer abruptly asked him where he was going to ?

He paused, confused by the sharp and even threatening tone of the lawyer, who knew his type well.

"Hezekiah, what do you do for a living?" was the first question put to him.

The question was quite unexpected, and it was simply impossible for Hezekiah to answer it straightforwardly. For the truth was that he did nothing for a living. While he stared open-mouthed at the lawyer, wondering what to say, the latter called His Honour's attention to the fact that the witness could not answer a simple question about his own means of

livelihood, and then suggested that Hezekiah must either be a thief or a loafer.

The magistrate was peremptory. "What do you do for a living?" he asked.

"Me mother help me, sah, an' me uncle," stammered poor Hezekiah, reduced to the sad extremity of telling the truth.

"Now, sir!" thundered the lawyer, "do you mean to tell me that a big man like you is living on a poor old woman? And have you nothing better to do than come to the court-house and tell lies?"

"I don't tell no lie, sah!" grumbled Hezekiah.

"Don't be impertinent, sir! Now remember you are on your oath: didn't the Chinaman at the lane corner once threaten to put you in charge for stealing a pack of Rosebud cigarettes off his counter?"

The question came like a thunder-clap. Hezekiah's love for these cigarettes was well-known to all his friends, but he had fondly hoped that that little episode, which might have had so unpleasant a termination, had been forgotten by the Chinaman himself. How did the lawyer know of it? In his bewilderment it did not dawn on him that his whole life-history, in so far as Maria knew it, had been told with point and circumstance to Maria's lawyer.

Fear now took possession of him—abject fear. A few more questions like the last, and his reputation in the lane would be ruined for ever. He moved about in his circle as a man of some importance, for he played the guitar, swore with remarkable fluency, and claimed superiority on the ground that he neither worked nor wanted. This examination was not at all what he had

bargained for. As he explained afterwards, the lawyer took a mean advantage of him. But the fierce interrogatory had had its effect; for when the lawyer asked him, "Now, didn't you see Susan Proudleigh assault Maria Bellicant first?" he meekly answered, "Yes."

After that the truth, or as much of it as Hezekiah could remember, came out. All that Susan's lawyer could do was to prove that Maria had been as quick to quarrel as Susan. Long before the witnesses were finished with, it had become clear to the magistrate that he had here a simple case of jealousy to deal with, and, as he had acquired something of a reputation as a maker of compromises (which satisfied nobody) he thought he would interpose at this point and so still further add to his fame as a peacemaker.

Looking sternly at Susan, he told her that she could go on with the case if she liked; but that though it was clear that he would have to fine Maria for provoking her to a breach of the peace, by putting her hand in her (the prosecutor's) face, which act amounted to a technical assault, he saw clearly that when Maria Bellicant's case came on he would also have to fine the present prosecutor. Both had used insulting words; both were to blame. So he would advise them to make up their differences out of court, especially as they appeared to be two decent young women.

Being a man of decided views on morality, he was particularly hard on Tom.

"That young man, Tom Wooley," he said, "has really been the cause of this quarrel. I wish he was here so that I could deal with him. But I hope that

some one will tell him what I say. He seems to be a very loose character, and I fear that there are only too many such in Kingston. I have no doubt that he is deceiving a number of other women, and his acts may lead to some of them going to prison one day." The speaker glanced at the reporters to see if they were taking down his little speech. Satisfied that they were, he went on to urge upon the girls the necessity of leading a respectable and self-sacrificing life. This they most faithfully promised to do, all the while thinking him an old crank who interfered too freely with other people's business. Much pleased with the apparent result of his efforts to rescue Susan and Maria from the broad and easy way, and proud that he had effected another compromise, he ordered the serjeant to call the next case, and the young women and their several friends left the court.

Maria was delighted, for Susan had to all intents and purposes lost her case. Hezekiah was dazed, his mind being awlirl with new and uncomplimentary thoughts about His Britannic Majesty's courts. They were to him places where mean advantages were taken of truthful witnesses, and in his heart of hearts he knew also that he had fallen from grace for ever, in so far as Susan was concerned. As for Susan, she was furious. She had not succeeded in getting Maria punished. She had been lectured by an "ole fool" as she called the learned magistrate. Worst of all, Tom's name had been repeatedly mentioned during the trial. It had been an entirely miserable affair, and, for her, a humiliating defeat.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT CAME OF THE CASE

THE thing about the trial that seemed to Miss Proudleigh the unkindest cut of all was the utter failure of Lawyer Jones to rise to the occasion and pulverize his legal opponent with arguments. She had accompanied Susan to the court-house with proud expectancy. Lawyer Jones had been recommended by her, and she felt that she had certain proprietary rights in him; that she was, in a way, responsible for his good behaviour as a lawyer. And now he had failed, failed miserably; he had disgraced her; she regarded him as guilty of a base deception. On the way home she urged this point of view upon Susan, and her brother agreed that the lawyer had indeed acted most strangely.

“The whole of them cheat me!” said Susan bitterly. “There is no justice in dis country at all. From the judge down, them is all a set of thief!”

“Solomon say that it is better to chop a baby in two dan go to law,” observed Mr. Proudleigh, “an’ I see to-day dat him is quite right. Now if you did half murder Maria, them would only fine you, an’ you would have de satisfaction to know that you give it to her properly. Instead of dat, you bring ’er up in

a respectable style, an' put a lawyer on 'er, an' pay him two pounds to persecute her, an' all de justice you get is dat the judge tell y'u to make up de quarrel or him will fine you too ! ”

“ Leave them all to God ! ” said Miss Proudleigh piously.

“ Leave them to de devil, you mean ! ” Susan rapped out. “ The judge abuse me about me intended, an' the lawyer take me money and don't do nothing for it ; an' now you tell me to leave them to God ! The truth of de matter is that all these judge an' all these lawyers is simply humbugging poor people in this country. Them want nothing better than for we to leave them to God, so long as them can get de money. But while we walk to church to pray, them drive in motor-car ! ”

Wrath had made Susan a rebel, and contemptuous of the things she had always regarded with respect ; but Miss Proudleigh had her Christian reputation to think of, and she could not join her niece in her violent protest. As for her father, though he was inclined to think Susan was right, he did not care to express his opinion of the judge too freely in the open street.

When they got home, Susan stationed herself by the window, her favourite point of vantage, and there she sat for hours nursing her anger. Now and then, as she looked around her, the pride of possession filled her soul. The room contained two American rocking-chairs, and five cane-seated chairs of a yellowish hue. There was a long wooden bench without a back placed against one of the walls, and two dealboard tables, both covered with gaudy worsted spreads. On one

of them was a kerosene lamp, a couple of hymn books, and a few earthenware ornaments. The other was crowded with thick tumblers, some of fantastic shapes, and a heap of cheap crockery ware. On the walls hung coloured prints of the King and the Royal Family, and pictures of ladies dressed in exiguous garments, and smoking cigarettes with an air of enjoyment. All these things belonged to her. They had been given to her by Tom. And in the inner room she had an iron bed on which was a straw mattress, and two more chairs, and a big trunk containing her clothes, and a basin-stand, on which she kept her "china" basin and ewer. She had, besides, a large looking-glass on a little table in the room. And all these household gods were comparatively new.

She took pride in her furniture. Only married people of her class usually had as much, and certainly Maria had not. "After all," she more than once muttered to herself, "I 'ave a comfortable house to come to, an' perhaps Maria don't 'ave a penny to-day."

Yet she was not long comforted by this reflection. Maria had practically triumphed, and her success at the court-house might embolden her to attempt to capture Tom outright. Susan did not care much for Tom; in fact, she rather despised him. But times were hard in Kingston, and lovers were not easy to obtain; so if Maria should succeed. . . . "But that can't be done," she concluded; for what was Maria when compared with her?

Susan was not given to following out a train of thought for any length of time; she usually jumped from one subject to another as it came up in her mind.

But the experience of that morning, and its unknown but dreaded consequences, caused her now to dwell lengthily upon the days before she became acquainted with Tom. Her past had not been a pleasant one. Her father was a carpenter, and when in good health he had earned a fair amount of money by working at his trade. But some sixteen years before he had been prostrated by a severe attack of rheumatism, and when he recovered he found that he had almost lost the use of his lower limbs. Then her brother went away to Nicaragua, and only wrote occasionally, sometimes sending a few dollars to his parents. After her father's illness her mother had turned washerwoman, and what the old woman earned helped to keep the family from starvation. Her father did a few light jobs, when he could get them, but these did not bring in much. Susan herself, on leaving the Government elementary school when a little over fourteen years of age, had tried to find a situation ; but there was hardly anything she could do at that age.

In those days she lived in a yard-room with the rest of the family. She could remember herself as often standing at the gate of the yard, her feet thrust into a pair of slippers, and looking with envy at those girls who could afford to wear shoes and go to all the Sunday-school picnics and treats. There were days when she went to bed without dinner, a fate by no means unknown to hundreds of other persons in her position. On other days she was glad if her dinner consisted of a piece of dry bread. The rent of the room her family occupied was always the great problem that faced them continually ; for if it was not paid their few

belongings might be levied upon, and the old people would have to go to the almshouse. Semi-starvation was better than that, so they not infrequently starved.

When she was nearly eighteen, what she called "a luck" befell her. She was in the habit of attending, every Wednesday evening, a little church near where she lived. There had been revival meetings in that church a short time before she had taken to going to the services, and nearly everybody in its immediate neighbourhood had been converted. Amongst these converts was a young fellow of nineteen, a clerk by occupation; and seeing Susan in the church once or twice, he was moved to attempt the saving of her soul. He only succeeded in losing his heart.

For some months he gave her five shillings a week out of the fifteen he earned; then he unfortunately lost his situation, and Susan's father awoke to a sense of outraged morality. It was edifying to hear Mr. Proudleigh lecture that young man on the moral obliquity of endeavouring to "draw a youthful feminine away from religion." There was no arguing with him, for very little argument is left in any youth who has lost his situation; so the young man quietly drifted out of Susan's life.

For some time longer the family was compelled to exist on the mother's earnings and on what Mr. Proudleigh's son in Nicaragua occasionally sent home. It was then that Susan tried her hardest to obtain work of some kind. But it required influence to secure a position as a barmaid; the small shops had as many assistants as they required, and in any case usually employed young women fairer than she was; as for

crochet-making, that had become so common that very few persons now cared to trim their clothes with crochet. She might have got a situation as nurse in one of the wealthier families of Kingston, but to domestic work she had a strong aversion. It was not, in her opinion, genteel. She did not want to be what she called "a common servant." So she waited in idleness day after day, a prey to discontent, and wondering if her luck would ever turn.

It did turn when she was twenty years of age. She was standing at the gate of her yard one Sunday afternoon, very plainly dressed, but with her hair neatly combed and plaited. Tom was walking down the lane, with no object in particular, and seeing her all alone he thought he might as well try to make her acquaintance and have a little chat with her. As he was well dressed, from his polished yellow boots up to his new straw hat, Susan did not object to his inquiry after her health; and being thus encouraged he made further advances.

That afternoon he talked of trifling things for about a quarter of an hour. The following evening he again walked down the lane, and Susan was once more at the gate. On the subsequent night, when Tom met her by appointment, she asked him why he did not come inside, and on his accepting her invitation he was welcomed by her family with every mark of cordiality and respect. In fact, they all went out of the room and left him with Susan, so that the young couple's conversation might not be interrupted in any way.

A week after that, she removed into the house which

she now occupied. Thus she had realized, at a bound, one of the great ambitions of her life.

But now Maria was trying to come between her and Tom. And this case—now that she had lost it, she was rather sorry she had taken it to court. Tom's name had been repeatedly called, and he had warned her against that. And her money, the money he had originally given her, had gone for nothing. If that had been all she would not have cared much, but she felt sure she had not yet heard the last of the fight and the trial. She wished she could believe that she had.

It was in an uneasy frame of mind that she ate her dinner by the window that evening, putting her plate on a chair in front of her. She was still eating when her aunt returned to the house for the purpose of further discussing the details of the case; and it was only then that Susan's father and the others came into the sitting-room, which they had avoided all during the day, perceiving that Susan was too sorely sick at heart to appreciate conversation.

Miss Proudleigh, who, more than all of them together, was versed in the newspaper reports of the courts, had conceived a brilliant idea, and wished to lose no time before letting Susan know of it.

"I think, Susan," she said, after she had sat down, "that the case was not try fair. An' I think you ought to appeal."

"Appeal?" asked her brother. "What is dat?"

Now Miss Proudleigh did not know exactly. So she answered vaguely, "Something to make de case try right."

"That won't help," said Susan decisively. "De judge tell me I better drop the case, an' I agree. It is all done away wid now. What is bothering me is the way de judge talk about Tom. It's going to be all over Kingston to-morrow, for I saw the newspaper man writing it down. What a piece of bad luck fall upon a poor gurl to-day! An' I didn't do a single soul anyt'ing."

"But don't it finish now?" asked the old man hopefully.

"I don't know about dat," Susan replied. "Tom's name call, an' him going to vex."

This was indeed what everybody feared; but Miss Proudleigh had a never-failing source of comfort in her principles as a religious woman.

"Susan," she said, "you must have faith. When did you' intended see you de first time? Wasn't it on a Sunday evening? Now if it was on a Monday or a Saturday or any other day of de week, you would say it was a sort of accident. But when an important events take place on a Sunday, all of a sudden, it is you' business to acknowledge that the Lord have made special interposition in your behalf. You mustn't be ungrateful, Sue. The Lord is not mocked. Blessed is de man that trusteth in Him. An' though the text says 'man' it mean woman too. Everything is goin' to go right. Tom won't vex too much."

"That is what I thinks meself," agreed Susan's father, who was only too glad to catch at any ray of hope. "Susan is de child of many pr'yers. From the day she born to dis day, I been prayin' for her. Not a thing can happen to her! De night before

she became acquaint wid Mister Tom, I dream dat a mango tree grow up in me room, an' I know that same time that somet'ing was going to happen. Now last night I dream dat a cow maltreat Mother Smit, an' at first I thoughted that Susan was goin' to win de case. But I see now dat it mean that Mister Tom is not goin' to 'ave nothing more to do wid Maria."

"Well, sah," answered Susan petulantly, "all I have to say is, that you' prayers didn't 'elp me much this morning!"

This, Susan's latest expression of infidelity, simply startled her audience. Their Providence was one that struck with blindness or instant death any of His creatures who dared to question His wisdom or goodness, and who bestowed no blessings upon those who worked on the Sabbath Day. To other sins He was lenient. He always allowed ample time to the sinners to repent of them. One could also think hard things of Him, for what was not spoken aloud might escape the hearing even of the higher Powers. But so openly to doubt the efficacy of prayer, as Susan had done, was to tempt Providence; and she herself felt a little frightened after the words had escaped her.

Miss Proudleigh, who herself had much of Susan's temper, and who could never forget that she stood high in the estimation of her "leader" in the Wesleyan chapel of which she was an honoured and vocal member, would not allow this last speech of Susan's to pass without reproof.

"If you goin' to talk like that, Susan," she said severely, "I will 'ave to leave the premises. I can't

sit down an' hear you laugh at pr'yer. I don't want to be include in the general judgment; for when the Lord's time come to laugh, Him going to laugh for true."

Her indignation having been expressed, faith immediately rose to higher heights, and she went on.

"As fo' Maria, she will be punished, an' you an' me will live to see Mother Smith beggin' bread. 'He will smite the oppressor, an' the wicked He will utterly destroy.' I am goin' to pray for Maria an' her mother. I am goin' to pray that them won't have bread to eat; an' when a woman like me kneel down an' pray, her pr'yers must be heard!"

"I gwine to pray too," cried the old man, with enthusiasm. "Four knees is better than two. I are going to church next Sunday night to offer up me supplication against all Susan's enemy. Sue," he concluded, turning to his daughter, "you don't happen to have a small coins about y'u to lend your ole fader? I feel weak in me chest, an' a little rum an' anisou would help de feeling."

This request for a loan, coming after his expressed determination to pray against her enemies, could not well be refused by Susan; and she was about to hand him threepence, when the front door opened quickly and Tom stepped into the room.

As he entered, the old man rose and gave him a military salute. But on this occasion Tom simply brushed past him without saying anything, and went at once to Susan. Such brusqueness was unusual, and Mr. Proudleigh, still in the military attitude, stared at Tom with wonder in his eyes.

The young man was angry. They all saw that. At any other time they would have left him alone with Susan, but now curiosity got the better of respect, and they remained to hear what he had to say.

"Susan," he began, without even bidding her good evening, "didn't I tell y'u not to take the case to court?"

"You goin' to quarrel wid me about it now?" was her answer. "It's not my fault dat I lose it! It's Hezekiah wid his foolishness. An' instead of sympathizing with me, you walk into the house, like a nager man, an' don't speak to nobody! See here, Tom, if it's because I lose the money you give me, I will work an' pay you back."

"Never mind, Susan, never mind," interposed her aunt, anxious to play the blessed part of peace-maker. "Mr. Tom don't say anything of an aggravating nature. Two young people mustn't quarrel. You is to live in peace, an'——"

"I don't want to hear anything from you," snapped Susan. "Tom 'ave no right to come into de house like this."

Thus she tried to put Tom in the wrong, feeling that if she frightened him by a display of temper he would not say very much about his name being called in the court-house, a circumstance which she herself regretted greatly.

But the old man, alarmed at Tom's attitude, and fearing lest Susan should drive him away at a time when Maria, and probably others, were spreading their nets for him, thought that now was the opportunity for proving to Tom that in every important

domestic crisis he would have the head of the family on his side.

"Susan," he commenced, with some fear in his heart as to how she would receive his admonition, "I don't exprove of you' conduct. Mister Tom is a young man, an' a young man is supposed to get aggravated. Ef I did know that him tell you positive not to take de case to court, I would have tell you the same meself. The fact of de matter is, I did tell you so. For when you look upon one thing, an' also upon another——"

But Susan would listen to no more. She sprang from her chair. "See here!" she asked, looking rapidly at each of them in turn, "you all want to abuse me to-night? What I do any of you? Eh? What you interfering with me for?"

But Tom was now in a desperate mood, and Susan's rage did not seem to frighten him.

He glared back at her. "Didn't I tell you I didn't want me name call in the court-house?" he demanded. "Y'u had no business to fight with Maria. If you didn't speak to her, she couldn't have troubled you. But you infernal women——"

"Don't call me infernal, Taam! Don't y'u call me infernal! It's not because you paying me rent that you must use me an' take an advantage of me as if I was a common street gurl. Don't y'u do it, Tom!"

"Well, whether you like it or not, I say it already," replied Tom bitterly. "As to the rent, y'u will have to pay it yourself next month!"

"Oh yes?" retorted Susan. "So you gwine to

Maria, eh? Well, I tell you straight that I will pull every plait out of she head! An' as for you, me good man, I don't know what foot you goin' to take to walk go to Maria's house!

"Lor-r-rd!" she screamed. "Look what this man come an' tell me to me face! Him say him going to this woman, Maria, an' is leaving me!" and she burst into angry tears.

"I didn't say that at all," Tom muttered sullenly. "I said I am not going to pay any rent next month. Somebody go to-day an' tell Mr. Jacobs all that de judge say about me, and Mr. Jacobs pay me two weeks' wages and tell me him don't want me any more."

It was only too true. Tom had many friends who envied him his job, and it was one of these who had hastened to his employer with a full account of Susan's case. In his narration this friend had managed to convey the impression that Susan and Maria were not the only two ladies who enjoyed the good things of life at Tom's expense; and as Mr. Jacobs thought that it was not Tom, but he himself, who might later on suffer through Tom's excessive gallantry, he concluded that the wisest thing to do was to get rid of his philandering employee at once. Thus had the blow fallen with dramatic swiftness. Susan realized what it meant. She ceased sobbing. This was no time for angry tears. Even her aunt felt that a religious text would not relieve the gravity of the situation. The old man gazed in blank amazement at Tom. Susan's mother and sister were dumbfounded.

"Then what y'u going to do, Tom?" It was Susan who asked the question; she knew she was

the cause of the crisis, but did not wish to face the blame. "P'rhaps," she went on, without waiting for an answer, "you will get another job? Mr. Jacobs can't say y'u rob him, an' him must give you a character paper."

Tom shook his head despondently. "When a man lose his job in Kingston," he said, "it is the hardest thing for him to get another one."

He had sat down, no longer angry, but a prey to despair. His natural weakness was beginning to re-assert itself.

"But you can't live widout working?" said Susan. "You mean to say that y'u don't know anybody who will hire you? Don't you have education?"

"Yes, Mister Tom," her father remarked encouragingly, dipping into the conversation; "a ejudated gen'leman like you is not common. Trust to God!"

But Tom was not to be comforted. "I been with Mr. Jacobs six years," he said, "an' everybody is goin' to say that it is funny him discharge me all of a sudden."

"Then what you goin' to do?" Susan asked again.

"I'm going to Colon."

"Colon?" repeated Susan, with mingled hope and fear in her heart.

"Yes; Colon."

"Well, Colon is a very good place," said the old man reflectively. He was entertaining hopes of being taken to Colon himself. "I thinks Miss Susan will like it."

"I can't take her. I don't have sufficient money."

"Then what you goin' to do wid me?" asked

Susan, seeing her worst fears about to be realized.

"Leave me here?"

"I will send for y'u, Sue," Tom answered, "if I get a job. But I don't know what is goin' to happen. . . . It's all your fault."

This was so true that the rebuke was accepted in silence. But Susan did not wish to be left behind, for Maria and her mother to triumph over her downfall.

"Tom," she pleaded, "take me with you! I can work, an' there is plenty o' work in Colon."

"We all can work," said her father anxiously, though why he should have included himself was something of a mystery. "I have always wanted to go oversea like me son. The fambily could makes you very happy, Mister Tom." He paused, for he saw that nobody was paying any attention to him.

Tom, in fact, was explaining to Susan how impossible it was for him to take her to Colon with him, and was mingling his explanations with weak reproaches. Susan listened dumbly. She was thinking how few of her friends and acquaintances would sympathize with her; how the front house would have to be given up, and perhaps some of her furniture sold. Nor was that all. For if Tom did not send for her, as he promised, the old life might have to be resumed; and that would be more intolerable now than before. She would miss all that she had become accustomed to. She might have to face actual want—she who had for one full year enjoyed what she considered luxury. . . .

"When you goin'?" she asked at length, after Tom had said his say.

“ Saturday.”

This was Wednesday night : three days more and he would be gone.

She cried, this time in real distress. Tom was touched, or he thought, erroneously, that she was crying because he was going to a foreign land where he would be far away from her.

“ Don't fret, Sue,” he said, trying to soothe her. “ Colon is a place where a lot o' money is making now. If I strike a job, you will be all right. In the meantime y'u must do you' best.”

What that best was, and how it was to be done, was not apparent to Susan. But the old man faithfully promised Tom that Susan would do her best.

“ An' when you is arrive, Mister Tom, write to de ole man,” Mr. Proudleigh added, rising, for Tom had risen to go.

“ God bless you, me son,” said his wife, as Tom shook hands with her ; “ you has been kind to Miss Susan.”

“ Put your trust in de Lord,” said Miss Proudleigh, “ an' He shall renew thy strength.”

Susan's sisters said nothing ; Susan herself put on her hat to walk with him a portion of the way home, partly for the purpose of discussing certain financial matters, partly to make sure that he did not call at Maria's yard.

They went out together, and then Catherine remarked : “ If Susan didn't take de case to court, this wouldn't happen.”

“ What we gwine to do now ? ” asked Mr. Proudleigh dolefully.

No one answered the question.

CHAPTER V

LETITIA'S INVITATION

I DON'T do too badly this week," said Susan, as, sitting at the threshold of a little room, which was one of a range in a yard, she slowly counted a number of small silver and copper coins which she held in her lap.

"How much you make?" asked Catherine, who sat on a little box near to the door, watching Susan's addition with interested eyes.

"I make eight shillin's and sixpence, an' two shillin's is owing out to me, all of which is profit. If I did 'ave anybody to go an' dun for it last night, I would 'ave ten shillin's an' sixpence this morning. Next week I going to sell more, for I am goin' to put more things in the shop."

"Business is good," said Catherine, "but it will soon get better; so even if Tom don't send for you, Sue, you will be all right."

"Yes, I am independent now," returned Susan, with a touch of pride in her voice; "but I sick of this life. Every day it's de same thing. I 'ave to work too hard, an' sometimes I don't make as much in a day as I use to spend on car ride when Tom was here. I feel so tired, I can't even go to church dis morning.

An' yet I have some good frock. I going to save up money meself an' go to Colon, even if Tom don't send for me."

"That is a very good resolution, Sue," said her father, speaking from inside of the room. "Colon is a better place dan Kingston. I hear dat you can earn money there like water, an' that's de place I want to go to. Ef you' brother could only send me a few dollars, I would give it to you, an' then you could go an' send for the whole of we."

"Yes, sah," replied his daughter. "I would send for you, an' mammee, an' Eliza. Kate could go wid me. P'rhaps Kate would get an intended in Colon."

"I wish so," said Catherine wistfully; "de young men in Kingston don't have nothing."

"It wasn't so when I was a young man," observed Mr. Proudleigh, harking back to the past. "In dose days a man could make plenty money, an' he treat de females like a king. Me first sweetheart rob me over ten pounds, an' yet I didn't miss it. But now a man don't 'ave ten shillin's to give a gal, much less ten pounds for anybody to rob."

"You right," agreed Susan. "Dis is not the place for me. Colon or Port Limon is the country to go to, an' if me business prosper I going to save an' go there."

She nodded her head determinedly, then tied the money in the corner of a handkerchief, put it in her pocket, and went towards the back of the yard.

Her father came out and sat on the spot she had vacated. He did not like to question Susan too

closely, but of Catherine, who was of a milder disposition, he had no fear.

"Kate," he said, "you t'ink Susan will really save money to go away?"

"So she say, papee," Catherine answered. "An' she doing very well. She make ten an' six this week, an' she goin' to make more."

"That is good," said the old man. "Ef you go wid her you mustn't forget you' ole father, Kate. I don't want all me children to be away from me when I dead. An' if you don't send fo' me when you go away, I don't see how I can ever go."

As Kate saw no immediate prospect of leaving Jamaica herself, she did not pursue the conversation. And both she and her father continued sitting there for some time in silence, gazing at nihility, and thus keeping the Sabbath day holy.

They were still living in a lane, but not the lane in which they had lately lived for fully a year. This one was called Luke Lane, and their yard was situated near the northern end of it, close to North Street. It was some eight weeks since Tom had left, and much had happened in the interval. The first four weeks had been a trying time for Susan, for, even before Tom sailed for Colon, Maria and her mother had heard of his dismissal. They spread the news rapidly and all Susan's enemies rejoiced without any attempt at concealment. They assembled at the gates of their yards when she passed up and down the lane, and laughed loudly. They made remarks which she knew were intended for her hearing. Maria, remembering Susan's fatal allusion to her dress, attired

herself every Sunday in her most gaudy garments and went to see some people who lived opposite to Susan, so that the latter's cup of humiliation should be full. She knew that Susan's establishment could not be maintained long after Tom's departure, unless some extraordinary piece of good fortune should befall her. This Maria confidently hoped would not happen : she had missed taking Tom away from Susan ; but still there was great satisfaction in knowing that if she had lost what she might have had, Susan had lost what she actually had possessed.

Susan endured all these insults with considerable fortitude, and went about her business quietly, keeping her own counsel as to what she intended to do. About a month after Tom had left for Colon, she and her family, aided by a cart, removed what remained of her furniture (for she had sold some), and went to live elsewhere.

They removed late at night, and silently ; for Susan's pride revolted at the very thought of being seen taking last leave of the beloved front house. Removing late at night had its inconveniences, for it was certain to be said that she had left without paying the month's rent, and without the knowledge of the landlord. Night removals in the West Indies (and they are very frequent) are always attended with this suspicion, a suspicion based upon extensive experience. But in this instance the landlord knew all about Susan's intention, for she had given him the proper notice, and at the end of the month had gone to him and paid him two-thirds of the rent that was due. As she had been a good tenant, he made a virtue of

necessity and generously allowed her to owe him the balance. Yet all this did not prevent it from being circulated in certain quarters of the lane that Susan, true to the principles of many who live in yard-rooms and little front houses, had availed herself of the darkness to cover her rent-escaping tracks.

She heard from Tom before her removal. In his letter he mentioned that the chances were that he should obtain a good situation if he did not fall ill of fever. Like a sensible girl she concluded that his chances of being ill were probably as great as his prospects of getting a job ; so she told her aunt, " I better look for meself." Her way of looking for herself was not original ; but it proved successful. Tom had given her two pounds before leaving. She had also saved a few shillings. And this money had come in useful for the setting up of a small business.

She had rented a little shop and had stocked it with the things she knew would sell. The shop was built against the fence, and opened both in the yard and on the lane. It was constructed of odd bits of board and roofed with three sheets of corrugated iron. It could scarcely accommodate two persons. Customers were not allowed inside. They stood in the lane and made their purchases over a counter which was merely a square bit of board cut out of that side of the shop which faced the lane. This counter formed a shutter at night ; you fixed it into the opening and secured it by means of an ingenious system of bars and bolts. As thieves might break in and steal, Susan usually removed some of her goods to a safer place at

night; the room in which she and her family lived being the only place available to her.

She sold bread and "grater cake" (a cake made of desiccated cocoa-nut stewed with sugar). The prices of this sweetmeat ranged from a farthing to three farthings each, and she did a considerable trade in it. For the children held that a halfpenny spent on a small loaf of bread and a small grater cake yielded abundant satisfaction, and even grown-up people frequently made their lunch off the same articles.

She sold cocoa-nut oil, sugar-cane, mangoes, bananas, and flour-cakes. These last were made of flour and sugar and plenty of baking-soda, were very cheap and filling, and were openly despised by everybody and secretly eaten by all.

She sold Rosebud cigarettes, for that, she wisely calculated, would be a good bait for the boys and men, and she wanted the biggest custom possible.

She sold firewood, and yams and plantains, and gingerbeer. Ice also; and she proclaimed that fact by means of a red flag, hung out diagonally on a pole, and having sewn upon it three ill-shaped letters in white calico which spelt out the word, I C E. She was, in short, a full-fledged higgler, and as she sat in her shop surrounded by boxes and baskets, and little heaps of bread-stuffs, she assumed the important facial expression common to all higglers, though in her case neither ugliness nor slatternliness had set its seal upon her; which alone differentiated her sharply from most of the other women who followed her trade.

There were many of these in the lane. They were rivals, but among them Susan easily stood first. For

the stock of none of them was ever worth more than seven or eight shillings, and sometimes not worth even half of that amount. She, on the other hand, had boldly invested thirty shillings in purchases at the start, and the venture had been justified by success.

Her looks helped her. The young men who passed by her shop patronized her and attempted to make love to her; but they were obviously poor, so while she was polite to them she kept them at a distance. Her family was also of great assistance. Her mother made the "grater cakes" and boiled the cocoa-nut oil; her sisters went in the mornings far beyond the northern boundaries of the city to meet the countrywomen coming down to market, so as to buy fruit cheap from them. By this means Susan saved money, an important consideration, for a shilling a day was the very most that she could spend on food for all the family. As for the old man, he rendered no material assistance; but he personally felt that his moral influence upon the situation was immeasurable. With the tattered remains of an old soft felt hat upon his head—he never went without it, for he imagined that it added to his dignity—a pipe in his mouth, and his feet thrust into slippers, he hovered about what he called "de little shaps," feeling himself the natural protector of his daughter, and the inspiring genius of the family.

He was proud of Susan. The problem of living had presented itself to him with distressing intensity on the night that Tom had announced his intention of going to Colon. He then had seen nothing before himself and his wife but the Union Poorhouse, an institution which he thought of with a shudder. He

knew he could do nothing to help himself, though he never would have acknowledged that to anyone; so, even though the girls might shift for themselves, he could see no ray of hope for himself and the old woman. Susan, however, had solved the problem by unexpectedly developing commercial instincts; and he reflected that most of her ability must have been inherited from him, since he had never credited his wife with much intelligence.

As he sat this Sunday morning at the threshold of the single room they now lived in, he felt placidly contented. The shop had become a certain source of revenue, and no Maria could interfere with it. He was quite satisfied not to take much thought of the morrow; and the change that had recently taken place in Susan's circumstances was accepted by him with a temperamental equanimity which could only be disturbed by fear of the almshouse or of immediate starvation.

He looked about the yard, seeing nothing. Such scenes he had been familiar with all the days of his life. It was an ordinary Kingston tenement yard; the low range of rooms, each room being separated from the other by but a thin partition of board; the broken-down kitchen; the water-pipe continually dripping, so that a part of the yard was never dry; babies sitting in little boxes stuffed with rags to prevent the little creatures from hurting themselves; bigger babies creeping about; wash-tubs everywhere; it was what he had always seen in every similar place. The prevailing squalor did not affect the old man and his wife, and even Catherine and his youngest daughter

had reconciled themselves to it. But Susan rebelled; she felt that she ought not to be reduced to living in a yard-room.

This Sunday morning, however, she was better pleased than usual, for she saw that if her custom continued to increase she would soon be in a position to save money. Up to now she had been living on every penny of her profits, for the rent of the shop and the room together was sixteen shillings a month. But good luck was plainly attending her, and already she was speculating upon what she would do in the future.

Presently she returned to where her father and Catherine were still sitting. Catherine made room for her on the box, and Mr. Proudleigh, never happy if compelled to remain silent for long, asked her when next she expected to hear from Tom.

"How can I tell, sah?" was her very reasonable reply. "Him only write me once since he gone to Colon; an' I wants to believe he must be in the hospital. From all dat I hear about Colon, Tom don't likely to get on there. Him too soft! Kingston is all right enough; but in Colon—so I hear—if you look on a man too hard, him wants to shoot you; an' if you don't look on him hard, him wants to take an advantage of y'u. That is not the sort o' place for Tom."

"Then how you expects to go down to him?" asked her father. "Ef him is such a young man of unreliable nature, I don't see how you can teck up you'self an' put you'self under his protection an' care."

Susan laughed scornfully. "I was ever under his protection an' care in Jamaica?" she asked.

"No," said Catherine; "but here everything is quiet. Down in Colon a young gurl must 'ave a young man to look after 'er; otherwise there may be boderation. I wouldn't like to go down by meself that way."

"I would go," said Susan decisively. "After all, whatever y'u meet in this world it is you' luck. If you to dead in Colon, you will dead there. If you to come back to Jamaica, y'u will come back."

This fatalistic note, struck with such confidence, awoke a responsive echo in the hearts of her hearers.

"You is right," said the old man. "A man shouldn't bother him head about what goin' to happen to-morrow, for him can't prevent what is gwine to happen. Therefore, sufficient to de day is the evil thereof. You saving money to go?"

"Don't I tell y'u so a little while ago, sah?" asked Susan, though she knew that the old man would repeat the question every day.

"I don't mean nothing by askin' you," he explained; "only, ef I was you, I wouldn't put me money into any bank. I hear that bank is a thing that broke every now an' then; though," he continued sagaciously, "I don't see how such a strong place can broke."

"When a bank broke," explained Catherine, "it mean that de clerk rob you' money."

"Oh! I see! But, even then, I don't t'ink Sue should put her money in a bank, for if them rob her few shillin's, what she gwine to do?"

"The Government bank is safe," said Sue, conscious of superior knowledge. "Nobody can rob it, an' them give you interest on you' money."

"Then you gwine to put yours in de Government bank?"

"Yes, sah; to-morrow morning I goin' to lodge three shillin's: it is me first commencement. It's to help me to go away.—Who that?"

Some one had knocked at the gate, and the person thus addressed loudly answered:

"Me!"

"Who me?" asked Catherine.

"Letitia Samuels: can you hinform me ef Miss Susan Proudleigh resides here?"

Both Susan and Catherine rose simultaneously and rushed towards the gate. They opened it, and a young lady of about twenty, glossily black, fat, not bad looking, and extremely stylish, walked into the yard. She was dressed in a white lawn frock trimmed with any quantity of lace; wore high-heeled shoes and carried a pink parasol. Her hat was a marvel; her cheeks were covered with white powder. She kissed both the girls loudly, said she was feeling "fine," shook hands with Mr. Proudleigh, and then was taken into the room.

There she met the old woman, who spoke to her, then went outside, with the true West Indian instinct of hospitality, to prepare some refreshment for her.

The room, originally small, was divided into two apartments by a cloth partition, one side of it being reserved for the old people, the other being occupied by Susan and her sisters. Letitia sat in the one chair that she saw, while Catherine and Susan perched themselves on the bed.

Letitia was an old friend. She had known Susan at the elementary school, and Susan had admired and envied her because of her constant possession of small coin. Letitia's father was a plumber in a good position, and he looked after his daughter well. She was a Roman Catholic, and loudly sang hymns in honour of the saints; Susan, on the other hand, was a staunch Protestant, and strongly objected to "the worship of idols." But differences of doctrine did not disturb their personal relations, and even Mr. Proudleigh's efforts to convert the erring Catholic to a truer faith did not sow the seeds of discord. For though his theology (from a Protestant point of view) was perfectly sound, he never ventured on moral admonitions. This was satisfactory, for Letitia still enjoyed the favour of the priests and nuns and other important personages of the Church, and gratefully rejoiced in the present security of a suspected virtue.

She was very excited.

"I didn't know you move, Sue; I went roun' to Blake Lane, an' them tell me y'u move. It was you' aunt told me yesterday where y'u live."

"Yes, me dear," was Susan's remark. "My intended gone away, so I have to look for meself. Just see where I living now!"

"Cho! never mind! Y'u soon get another intended. Now guess what I come to tell y'u about?"

"What?"

"A picnic. A big picnic! Father Moulder making it at Cumberland Pen to-morrow, an' it's only one an' sixpence for trainage and hentrance to the pen. You 'ave to provide you' own refreshment; but

that can't cost more dan one an' six. I want you come. Y'u will come?"

Susan's answer was interrupted by the entrance of her mother, who brought in a mug of chocolate and a plate containing a big slice of bread.

Letitia spread out her handkerchief in her lap, and rested the plate on it, then took the mug from the old woman. Eating and drinking, she continued the conversation.

"Y'u must come, me child! It's goin' to be grand. All the young men in Kingston is goin'. There is to be six piece of music, an' dancing all day."

Catherine's face lighted up, then fell as she remembered that she had no money.

Susan shook her head slowly, the wish to go struggling with her desire to save.

"It will cost me three shillin's," she said, "an' I don't see how I can manage it." She paused as a vision of the dancing on the sward rose before her mind's eye.

"I engage a bag of coal for Thursday, an' I must have to take it. An' I 'ave to save money. . . ."

"Cho!" pleaded Letitia. "Come, man! It's only once!"

The old man, still sitting at the threshold, had overheard the conversation. By way of showing disinterested generosity, he called out:

"Don't fret you'self about t'ree shillin's, Sue. Go an' enjies you'self. Don't kill you'self, me daughter. You lookin' thin."

"Then how is Sue to go to Colon?" asked Catherine,

who, seeing no prospect of going to the picnic herself, was not inclined to be enthusiastic about it.

The old man remembered that he also wanted to go to Colon, and immediately regretted his precipitancy. But his words had had their effect. The struggle in Susan's soul was over. In a moment she passed from a calculating to an excited frame of mind.

"All right!" she cried, jumping from the bed; "I will go." Excitedly, "I will wear me blue dress, an' me new straw hat! Lord! I goin' to dance every dance! I goin' to enjoy meself! What a thing!"

She was dancing already, and all thought of saving was thrown to the winds.

"Come for me in the morning, Letitia, early," were her last words to her friend, when she bade her good-bye at the gate.

CHAPTER VI

SAMUEL JOSIAH JONES

THAT afternoon Susan made special preparations for the great event of the morrow. Hair-dressing being a very important part of her toilet, she literally sat at Catherine's feet, who, armed with a strong comb and a pot of scented castor oil, bent over her sister's head and spent fully three-quarters of an hour in combing out the hair, oiling it, plaiting it, and twisting the plaits into the shape dictated by the latest fashion. That done, Susan tied up her hair very carefully in a towel, so that it should not become disarranged. Then she took out her blue dress and hung it up over the head of her bed. She polished her shoes, carefully looked over her hat, and fished out a fan from the bottom of her trunk. When all this work was over, she untied her head, dressed hurriedly and went to church, her sister going with her. Both her parents strongly approved of church-going; and though the old man himself never went out on Sunday, he would not allow the day to pass without reading aloud the first Psalm, laying special stress on the opening words which proclaim a blessing on those who walk not in the way of the ungodly.

Susan and her sisters enjoyed the service. They usually did. The large church, nearly filled with people dressed in their multi-coloured best, the deep-toned organ, the hearty singing in which they joined, the bright light from the electric lamps—all this was a weekly source of pleasure to girls who had nice dresses to wear on the Sabbath day. The sermon might consist of denunciations of the popular way of living. They listened to it with interest and agreed that the parson was, from his point of view, perfectly right. But he, so to speak, was looking at life theoretically, while they were compelled to regard it from the practical standpoint of daily bread. If he expounded doctrine, they appeared engrossed in his words, and followed his meaning with a fair degree of understanding. What they liked best were the hymns; and when the service was over, and they mingled with the contented home-going crowds, they felt that they were, after all, not very far from the Kingdom.

Susan went to bed immediately after going home, not omitting to bind up her head once more. She wished to be up early in the morning. Her father talked to her for a while from his part of the room, a cloth partition placing no obstacles in the way of conversation; but though he was very anxious to hear about the sermon, so that he might give his opinion on the parson's theology, she soon shut him up by saying she wished to go to sleep. Then silence reigned unbroken, but for the barking of the dogs in the lane; for by nine o'clock practically all the inmates of the yard had retired, after a day spent for

the most part in lolling about and avoiding any unnecessary work.

At half-past four in the morning Susan was awake. She hurried out of the hot, stifling room to wash her face under the water-pipe, then went in again to dress. She was ready by five o'clock. Her dress fitted her nicely; and though blue was perhaps not the colour that best suited her complexion, it was more striking than white would have been, and she wanted to attract attention. She wore a pink sash, and her hat was trimmed with pink roses and ribbons. Her high-heeled shoes were gorgeous with buckles. When fully arrayed, and after she had gulped down her cup of coffee, she turned herself round and round to be admired. Catherine and Eliza surveyed her critically.

"You is all right, Sue," said the first, and her younger sister agreed. Her mother smiled, then went about her business. Her father was vocal in his praise.

"Ef I was a young man," he said approvingly, "I would fall in love wid you. Dat frock suit you' figure. Everybody gwine to dance wid you, an' you mustn't fo'got to bring somet'ing nice fo' me."

Susan, satisfied with this appreciation, promised to bring home for him a part of whatever she might get; and Letitia coming in just then, both girls went out to catch the electric car that should take them to the railway station.

It was not yet six o'clock, so the air was still comparatively cool. It was a public holiday, consequently they met numbers of other pleasure-seekers like themselves, all gaily dressed. They caught the

car, and it took them by a circuitous route to the station, going first towards the north of the city for nearly a mile, then south again, then east to where the railway station stands. On the way they passed handsome villas ; those were the houses, they thought, where the rich people lived, people so much above their own station in life that they never dreamt of envying them. The white and the higher classes of fair coloured people belonged to one world. They belonged to another. But envy and hatred did not embitter the relations of one class with another, though their interests in life were superficially as different as was the yard-room or little front house from the spacious-looking residence with its garden of tropical shrubs and flowers blooming in front of it.

They alighted at the railway station, and found it crowded. Every colour of the rainbow was represented in the dresses of the women and the neckties of the men ; and a stranger not accustomed to a West Indian crowd might well have thought that there could have been no greater confusion at the Tower of Babel. Everybody talked and nobody listened. Everybody gesticulated. Laughing, pushing, screaming, scrambling through the iron gates, the good-humoured picnickers made towards the platform, and then began to fight their way into the train. In vain the guards shouted. In vain they tried to direct the passengers. Discipline and order were thrown to the winds on this holiday morning, when the chief thought of every one was to obtain all the fun and excitement that the day could afford.

In the struggle for a good seat Susan was nearly

*Class (race)
No tension
The race*

separated from her friend. But by a vigorous use of their elbows they managed to keep together; and when at last, breathless but triumphant, they were seated, they began to look about them to see if any of their friends were near. Susan saw many persons whom she knew. Amongst these was Hezekiah, and him she stared out of countenance. She nodded to the others, and commenced with lively anticipation to discuss the prospects of the picnic with Letitia, when the train, with a sudden jerk, pulled out of the station.

Slowly at first, then quickly, and crowded to its utmost capacity, it ran out of the city and into the open, sunlit country. The transition was abrupt. Within a minute Kingston had been left behind, and broad fields and forests soon appeared on either side, all steeped in the early morning light and still green and fresh with the dews of the night. The hot and dusty city lay baking in the sun behind the pleasure-seekers; the country, with its wonderful beauty of deep blue skies, giant trees, and variegated green; with its dark-gleaming rivulets, placid streams and leaping waterfalls, unrolled itself before them. Peeping out of the windows, they could see the cattle and horses browsing in the pastures, the distant skyline broken by a long chain of dream-like verdure-clothed mountains, the long, delicate tendrils of parasitic plants waving gently in the breeze, and clumps of water-hyacinths glowing in the ponds or in some quiet backwater of a stream. All, all was beautiful. A majestic peace pervaded the spacious countryside, and the great yellow sun of the tropics lighted it up

with splendour. There was something alluring, enticing about it all; something enervating too in its luscious appealing beauty. But Susan and Letitia gave no thought to it all, nor did many of the people in the train. Their minds were centred upon one subject—this picnic to which they were speeding and which was to afford them a whole day's intensest pleasure.

“Cumberland Pen!” The guard shouted the name of the station, the train slowed down and stopped, the doors of the carriages were thrown open, and then the scramble and hubbub began once more. Parcels were grabbed at and secured, and then—a phenomenon which one observes in every country and on every occasion among passengers on a train—every one pushed forward to alight as quickly as possible, and as though a second longer spent upon the train would lead to the most unpleasant results.

The siding was soon crowded, and already a straggling stream of human beings was pouring towards the Cumberland Pen gate, where stood two men who collected the tickets and indulged in arguments with those who pretended to be scandalized at the amount they were called upon to pay as entrance fee. It was quick work at this gate in spite of the chaffing and arguing; then other trains came in from Kingston, and soon more than a thousand persons were assembled on a grassy sward, spacious and fairly smooth, and shaded here and there by leafy trees that grew singly or in cool inviting clumps. But shade trees were not in demand just now, except as convenient

places for the storing of parcels and baskets filled with refreshments, which some of the more prudent or more fastidious picnickers had brought with them. These impedimenta put away for the present, the pleasure-lovers broke into groups, and a loud cry for music arose.

Then rose the piercing squeal of the clarionettes, the squeak of fiddles, the blare of cornets and the bang of a big drum. There was noise enough, and the dancers called it music. The young men took off their jackets and waved them wildly in the air to show their appreciation of the band. Girls with arms akimbo swayed their bodies to and fro, keeping time with the tune. Thus encouraged, the musicians redoubled their efforts and the discord was infernal; but partners were rapidly selected, places taken, and in a few minutes there were nearly five hundred couples dancing on the sward and under the now burning, blistering rays of the forenoon sun.

Susan was in her element. Quadrilles followed lancers, polkas followed quadrilles, and mentoes, a sublimated West African phallic dance, followed the polkas and were the most popular with a certain section of the people. The girls danced these, swaying on their hips. Some of the women, however, and amongst these was Susan, did not care to dance these mentoes, on the ground that they were not quite proper. So while mentoes were being danced, Susan sat at the foot of a tree fanning herself, and trying to mop up with her wet handkerchief the flood of perspiration that streamed from her face.

Gazing intently at the dancers during one of these

*Mentoes
phallic
dances*

intervals, she did not notice that a man had approached her, till she heard herself addressed.

"Young lady," said the stranger, "you not dancing?"

"No," she answered shortly, without looking round to see who the speaker might be.

"Why?"

"I don't dance mento."

"But why you don't?"

The persistency of her questioner annoyed her; it was common enough for girls to be accosted by strangers at a picnic; but she did not want to make any more acquaintances that day, for the simple reason that she was tired. The stranger, however, was not to be denied. He deliberately sat down near her, and resumed the conversation.

"Well," said he, "allow me to introduce meself. My name is Samuel Josiah Jones from Spanish Town. I been watchin' you all the time you been sitting here; an' when I see a beautiful young female not enjoying herself, I think I ought to do the consequential."

Susan had not the faintest idea of what the consequential might be, but the word pleased her. Besides, Samuel Josiah Jones had called her beautiful, and such a compliment predisposed her to be kind. As she did not exactly know what to reply, she looked at him with an inquiring air; but that did not in the least disconcert Mr. Jones, who blandly went on.

"My name," he repeated, "is Samuel Josiah Jones." (He plainly expected the repetition of his name to have a talismanic effect.) "Spanish Town is my paternity. Where you come from?"

"Kingston," said Susan briefly; then she added, "What is that to you?"

"Oh, don't be vex," said Jones appealingly. "Don't expostulate with me. I don't ask you for nothing. But you didn't introduce you'self properly, so I interrogated you. You angry?"

Susan saying nothing in reply, Jones's voice became more confidential.

"I wouldn't tell you a lie. I have had a few good drinks to-day. But me head is strong, an' when I see a young lady like you, I would rather die than disgrace meself.

"If a young man can't behave himself in the company of ladies," he continued, still speaking confidentially, "he ought not to frequent their company. Don't you think I am right?"

Susan was obliged to nod her agreement.

Pleased with this, his voice took on a triumphant ring.

"Quite so," he resumed. "As I tell these boys here, sobriety is the great thing; sobriety an' temperance. Take a drink when y'u want one; but don't disgrace you'self—like me."

"But you not disgracin' you'self," said Susan, flattered by the respect he professed for her, but a little puzzled by his last sentence.

"No," said Jones, "that is what I say. I don't disgrace meself. I set a good example. I don't want no man to say that Samuel Josiah Jones disgrace himself in public."

Mr. Jones leaned back against the tree, obviously proud of the example he was setting, and quite as

obviously pleased with the world and himself. Susan looked at him curiously. He was a young man of her own complexion ; that is to say, dark brown. His features were good, his face frank and lively, and when he spoke two big gold teeth gleamed brightly, showing that Mr. Jones did not belong to the common classes. He was tall, and flashily dressed, his necktie reminding one of a Scotch plaid of the most pronounced pattern. A gorgeous fob hung out of the trousers pocket in which he kept his watch. It was plain to Susan that he was a young man of some importance, and by the words he used she judged him to be a man of considerable education. She was pleased too he had recognized that she was a young lady, for some "fast and forward young men" of her acquaintance had not always been ready to do that. She was rather glad now that he had persisted in talking to her. His preference for her company was a distinct compliment.

She saw that his sobriety had been tempered with a fair quantity of strong drink. He had himself said so. But temperance folk were held in strong contempt by her, and she had always heard her aunt quote with great approval Paul's advice to Timothy, that he should take a little wine for his stomach's sake. Miss Proudleigh faithfully followed this advice herself : every night before going to bed she drank, not a little wine, but a little rum and water ; and Susan's parents would have done the same had they been able to afford it. So she thought more highly of Mr. Jones for being able to enjoy himself in the free and independent manner which his appearance denoted. She

was about to continue the conversation when Letitia came up.

The latter stared at Jones, not exactly surprised, for on such a day a girl might pick up half a dozen new acquaintances. Susan introduced her, and Jones, rising with great dignity, assured her that his name was Samuel Josiah Jones, and asked her to take a seat.

"I not sitting down," said Letitia, shaking her head. "I came to henquire if Sue are going to 'ave her lunch." (Letitia was very careful of her diction in company.)

"Lunch?" said Jones; "lunch? Of course! The inner man must be replenished. We will have lunch immediate. Miss Susan, arise!"

Miss Susan arose, as bidden, and seeing that Letitia showed no objection to accepting Mr. Jones's hospitality, she followed the young man to the spot where refreshments were being sold.

Under a tree, and protected by a barricade of deal-board tables and low wooden benches, were a number of women and a man, retailers of refreshments, and all busy attending to the crowd of customers that surrounded them. Quick-tempered and aggressive, the women bustled about with their sleeves drawn up above their elbows, and the upper part of their skirts tucked up into bundles around their waists. Within the enclosure, huge pots steamed and bubbled on improvised fireplaces; and barrels and boxes containing aerated waters, and beer and whisky and Jamaica rum, stood invitingly open.

The smell of stewed beef mingled with that of

stewed salt-fish, and the heavy odour of cocoa-nut oil rose from two five-gallon cans in which rice and red peas were boiling. The women ladled the food into coarse earthenware and enamelled plates as it was ordered, and the man served the liquors.

Jones and the girls sat down to a lunch of stewed fish and rice-and-peas. He ordered whisky for himself, and asked his companions what they would have. After some hesitation, they decided on beer, this being a luxury they did not often enjoy. He called for two glasses of "the best beer," and the girls gulped the stuff down, declaring with grimaces that it tasted bitter.

Letitia noticed that Jones paid a good deal of attention to Susan. "I wonder if him speaking 'er up?" was her thought, but presently she ceased to think, the beer having set her head a-swimming. Susan felt dizzy too, and had to cling to Jones for support when they rose from the table.

He offered an arm to each of the girls, and gallantly escorted them back to the tree. They sat there for a little while, Jones talking, Susan and Letitia hearing nothing.

The pipes still screamed, and the fiddles squeaked, and the dancers continued dancing. A good many persons had strolled down to the river that ran through the pen, to bathe. Here and there some sat on stones or logs of wood, resting; contented-looking cows cropped the grass within a stone's throw of the picnickers, no longer frightened by the unusual noise; children climbed the trees to hunt for mangoes; big green lizards pursued their prey among the stones and

leaves ; and down on men and beasts and trees came the fiery rays of the now vertical sun, scorching, blistering, burning, but powerless to exhaust the energy of the musicians or to put an end to the dance.

"This sun," remarked Jones, "is the hottest sun I feel for a long time. It make me sweat like a bull. But I come to dance, an' I must dance. What you say ?"

His words were addressed to Susan, who faintly murmured in reply, "Too hot."

Two or three minutes passed in silence, and then the beer, acting in conjunction with the heat and the exertion of the morning, completed its work. Reclining against the tree, Susan slept. Letitia, who was not so easily affected by strong drinks as her friend, laughed at first ; then, finding it dull sitting there, asked Jones what he intended to do.

"Remain here," he said. "A gentleman must behave gentlemanly. Can't leave this female alone when she is not in her senses."

"All right," said Letitia ; "I goin' to dance. I will come back later. Tell Susan so when she 'wake.'"

Jones nodded, then stretched his legs out more comfortably, covered his face with his handkerchief, and disposed himself to reflect on his own superior manners, while Letitia walked away.

He dozed, and for an hour both of them lay there, recumbent in the sun.

Jones woke first. Although desiring to be gentlemanly, his first impulse was to go and join the dancers ; for a chance meeting at a picnic did not, he felt, compel

him to remain constantly in attendance upon one young woman. Instead of doing so, however, he bent over and shook Susan slightly. She opened her eyes, yawned loudly, stretched her arms above her head, yawned again, then remarked, "I seems to 'ave been sleepin', Mr. Jones."

"Yes," he said. "You been sleepin' all the time. An' I been watching you, in case any of these common young men wanted to take any liberty with you. I wouldn't move a foot while you reposed."

"Thank you," said Susan; "but I mustn't keep y'u back from dancin'."

"Don't mention," said Jones; "it would be preposterous to leave you in a somnolescent state. Will you take some more beer?"

She shook her head firmly. "It make me giddy," she confessed.

"All right, then, you stay here till I come. I am goin' for a rum; I soon be back."

He went off to the refreshment stand, and Susan followed him with her eyes. He was showing her a lot of attention: did he mean anything? She quickly persuaded herself that he did; otherwise why should he have remained with her all the time? It might be her good fortune to get another intended in place of Tom. She thought of the yard-room and the shop with disgust. This fellow was evidently well off, decent looking, generous. . . . She smiled when he returned, and readily rose when he suggested that they should take a little walk and then have a dance.

"Y'u like Spanish Town, Mr. Jones?" she asked him as they moved away.

"So, so," he replied; "but I been living in Kingston these last ten years—up in Allman Town."

"Funny I never see y'u," said Susan, though there seemed nothing really funny in her not having before met one particular person in a city of over sixty thousand souls.

"That is so," Jones agreed; "it is a peculiar incident. And here we have become acquainted just when I am goin' away."

"Goin' away?" Susan asked, surprised. "Where?"

"Panama. They wants mechanics down there. An' Mr. Hewet, an American man that was down here three months ago hiring labourers, send for me. They wants a man like me to help them dig the canal," he proceeded grandiloquently. "Fifteen dollars a week, an' quarters. Here I can't earn much more than thirty shillin's, an' I have so many people to boss me that sometimes I don't know what to do.

"This is a worthless country," he continued. "No prospects at all. It is much better foreign. I don't think I will bother come back to Jamaica."

So he wasn't "speaking her up" after all! The disappointment she felt was keener than she would have thought possible. Her hastily constructed castle in the air came toppling down, and only the shop and the yard-room remained in their sordid reality.

Tom had gone to Panama. Jones was going. She knew that every week scores and hundreds of other people went, and that the dream of almost everybody she had met was to go to Colon or Port Limon, or "anywhere," as one man told the steamship clerk to whom he applied for a decker's ticket. "Anywhere."

Anywhere outside of Jamaica. That was the wish of thousands of persons in all classes and ranks of society, and she had caught the general infection.

She too wanted to go away. She had heard of the riches of Panama and Costa Rica, and had often talked about those places with her friends. Life there, they believed, was free as air ; money almost to be had for the asking. True, returning emigrants told of fearful fevers, and unsympathetic policemen, and months of continuous rain, and the dark impenetrable jungle ; but the bright fantastic picture painted by imagination cast no shadow in spite of all these dreadful tales. The emigrants who returned to Jamaica almost invariably went back. The fascination of the semi-civilized Central American countries, once felt, was too often irresistible. Hundreds of forgotten graves in Central America contained the bones of men and women who had gone thither with high hopes of enriching themselves ; but still the exodus continued. The restless longing for change, for new scenes, for a new life, acted as a spur to discontent.

Susan had become silent and depressed. Jones noticed this and asked her :

“ You tired ? ”

“ No,” she said, “ I was thinkin’ ! ”

“ What was you thinkin’ about ? ”

She hesitated, then said quite frankly :

“ I would like to go to Colon.”

Jones pushed back his jippi jappa hat and stared at her. So she was dissatisfied with Jamaica also ! Half-jestingly he asked her :

“ You want to go with me ? ”

She, on her part, surprised by the question, looked at him with eager eyes. Her heart beat quickly, her face lit up with excitement.

“ But y’u don’t mean it ? ” she asked.

Now he really did not know whether he meant it or not. He was a very impulsive man, who did most things on the spur of the moment. He was also a very gallant man, and wasted much of his substance on “ females.” He had no permanent connexion with any one of them just then, however ; and on Susan asking him whether he really wanted to take her with him or not, it occurred to him that it might be a very fine thing indeed to land in Colon with so attractive a companion.

The idea was worth playing with. “ A man,” he answered Susan, “ say a lot of things he don’t mean. But y’u don’t answer me question yet. You would like to come with me ? ”

She made up her mind to a straightforward reply. “ I wouldn’t mind, if—— ”

“ If what ? ”

“ If y’u would treat me good.”

“ Oh,” he remonstrated. “ Do you think a gentlemanly man like me would treat y’u bad ? I never do such a thing in me life ! ”

“ I don’t think y’u would,” Susan graciously replied. “ You don’t look like those sort of young men at all.”

This compliment pleased Jones immensely. “ You are intrinsically correct,” he assured her. “ Not a female have a word to say against Samuel Josiah Jones. An’ you will find when you get to Colon what sort of man I am.”

“ Then you goin’ to take me ? ” Susan asked quickly.

“ Of course ! Don’t y’u want to go ? ”

Her heart gave one great bound. Here was the opportunity come to her at last !

“ All right,” she exclaimed. “ I will come. When you goin’ ? ”

“ Three weeks’ time. I give notice at the Railway already, but I have to fix up me business. Where y’u live in Kingston ? ”

“ Luke Lane. Y’u must come wid me to-night, let me introduce you to me parents. The place don’t too nice, but you mustn’t mind dat.”

“ Certainly not. You are nice, an’ that is enough.”

He felt that something more was required of him—something that a lover in one of the novels he had read would have thought appropriate to the occasion. At the moment only one thing in the way of what he called poetry came to his memory ; but still it was poetry, and therefore suitable. He repeated it, standing still and looking fondly in Susan’s face :

“ Fleecy looks and black complexion
Do not alter Nature’s claim,
Skin may differ, but affection
Dwells in white and black the same.”

He expected applause. As Susan did not know what the verse was intended for, she simply answered, “ Yes.”

“ Let us go and tell Letitia,” she added, catching hold of his arm and dragging him with her in her excitement. Nothing loth, he followed, and soon they found Letitia, to whom the good tidings were told. Hezekiah heard it too. He was standing near by when

Susan was speaking to her friend, and Susan spoke loudly on purpose that he might hear.

“ I goin’ in three weeks’ time. I not comin’ back to Jamaica at all ! Sam going to get three pounds a week ! What a good luck, eh, Letitia ? What a luck ! ”

Hezekiah heard it all, and saw Jones in the flesh, smiling with the consciousness of irresistible masculine attractions and great potential wealth. Hezekiah could not doubt, and so that night he did exactly what Susan had calculated on his doing. Not only Maria and her mother, but everybody else that he met in Blake Lane was told that Susan had got another intended with plenty of money, and was going to Colon.

“ Dis world don’t level,”¹ was Maria’s bitter comment on Susan’s undeserved good fortune.

¹ Fortune is not fair.

CHAPTER VII

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

“**W**E must take a 'bus,” said Jones, when he and Susan alighted from the train at Kingston. “Don't bother with the car. It's late already.”

He hailed a cab, and both of them, after bidding Letitia good-bye, got into the cab and drove off, but not before the cabman had exchanged some sharp words with the policeman who was regulating the traffic. Jones wanted to take sides with the cabman, partly through a natural inclination for argument, partly from a desire to impress Susan with his utter contempt for the guardian of the law. But she urged the cabman to drive on, fearing any serious quarrel at the very beginning of her new career; and the cabman obeyed after some grumbling, though he was clearly in the wrong.

She was glad to be back in Kingston, glad to be riding once more through the ill-lighted streets, to be amongst the slow-moving, chattering people, to feel the dust of the city in her face. She thrilled with excitement at the thought of her parents' surprise; the whole yard would wonder who it was that had brought her home !so splendidly from the

picnic. Then she remembered the room and felt ashamed.

"The place shabby," she again warned Jones. "Me an' me family are poor; but we are decent. Me father 'ave cramps in his feet; that is why we 'ave to live in a little room."

She said nothing about Tom and the house in Blake Lane; Jones again declared that the place she lived in did not matter to him.

"I can't stay long," he said, when the cab stopped at Susan's gate. "I will have to go home for me dinner."

He entered the yard jauntily, and Susan took him up to the room, sitting near the door and at the threshold of which were her father and mother and sisters, and her aunt who had dropped in to see them, as she so frequently did.

They were expecting Susan, but when they heard the cab stop at the gate they had not imagined it was she who had come home in it. Seeing her now with a tall young man whose face they could not distinctly make out in the darkness, they all rose, each one looking at him intently.

"This is Mr. Jones," said Susan; "I met him at the picnic."

"My best respects, sir," said Mr. Proudleigh, taking off the remains of the hat he wore—"my distant respects."

"Same to you, sir," said Jones, feeling a trifle awkward.

"Won't you step inside?" asked Miss Proudleigh. "The place is small, but de heart is warm. Susan, show the gentleman inside."

She stepped inside herself as she spoke, being curious to know who the gentleman was and what he had come for. That he had some sort of design upon Susan she had no doubt whatever; for no man could take a young woman home without a very definite interpretation being given to this ostensibly innocent act. Susan led Jones into the room. Mr. Proudleigh transferred into the apartment two chairs from his part of the room, and on these he and his sister sat; Jones took the one remaining chair, and Susan sat on the bed. Catherine and Eliza stood by the doorway, curious, while their mother disappeared, as usual, being a woman who rarely indulged in conversation or obtruded her presence upon anyone.

“Very noice picnic, Mr. Jones?” inquired Mr. Proudleigh. “Plenty of music and enjiments? Hope you enjie you’self?”

“Magnanimously,” said Jones; “I met you’ daughter an’ we had a nice conversation. You have a beautiful daughter, Mr. Proudleigh.”

“Cho!” said Susan deprecatingly, but nevertheless pleased.

“Oh yes, sir,” agreed Mr. Proudleigh; “she take after me. She have my features and my disposition. I always say she is me own daurter.”

“Hi! papee,” cried Eliza, a trifle indignant; “don’t we are you’ own daughter too?”

“Of course,” assented her father; “but Sue is de most oldest; an’ she take the world upon her shoulder.”

The world was really himself and the rest of the

family, and a good deal of the deference he showed to Susan was inspired by the fear that she might some day throw the burden off.

"Yes," said Jones, wishing to come to the point at once; "I seldom see a female like Miss Susan. She is perfectly emphatic."

"Quite true, sir," said Miss Proudleigh; "but we must remember that beauty is only skin deep, and except a young lady have the fear of de Lord in her heart, she can't prosper. What society you belongs to, Mr. Jones?"

"Society? Me?" said Jones; "I never belong to any society since I use to go to Sunday school when I was a boy.

"Church is a very good thing," he continued, "but a young man is wild."

"Yes," said Mr. Proudleigh, "I didn't jine society meself till I was long time over forty. Then I felts that I was a ripe man, an' could do me duty. I don't like to see a young man goin' too much to church. That is like de Scribes an' Pharisee; it is hypocritical."

"Well," his sister was beginning, but here Susan's impatience got the better of her manners.

"Why don't you tell them what you 'ave to tell them?" she asked Jones.

Every one's ears were pricked up. What was it that he could have to say? Miss Proudleigh forgot entirely the remark she had been about to make. Catherine glanced quickly from Jones to Susan, and back again.

"I am goin' to take away your daughter altogether

from you," said Jones to the old man, and struck an attitude.

So that was it! Everybody had heard the "altogether," and Mr. Proudleigh and his sister immediately came to the conclusion that Jones wished to marry Susan. It was a most unexpected announcement, but Mr. Proudleigh loved dramatic climaxes, and, fearing lest his sister should forestall him, he quickly rose from his chair and grabbed Jones by the hand.

"I esteem y'u, sir!" he exclaimed. "It is true I never meet you before; but Miss Susan is a big ooman an' must judge for herself. Besides, I can look 'pon you an' tell dat you are a honourable gen'leman. Miss Susan will makes a good wife, better dan all——"

He stopped, seeing that Jones was shaking his head decisively.

"I didn't say I was going to married—yet," Jones explained; then he looked at Susan as if expecting her to complete the explanation.

"It's all right," she said; "papee understand."

Mr. Proudleigh sat down again. He was sorry he had not grasped the purport of Jones's words from the start, for it was rather embarrassing to have mentioned marriage when marriage was not immediately intended.

But Miss Proudleigh rose to the occasion. "Ef Susan are satisfied," she said, "there is nobody to interfere. A respectable young man may not feel like marrying now, an' yet that does not signify that he is to remain widout a partner in life. After all,

*Defences
of not
marriage*

who make the marriage service? Don't it is man? Read the Bible, an' y'u won't find a word of it there. Isaac an' Rebecca didn't married in a church; an' yet look how lovin' them live together. I am a Christian woman, an' I know what is right from wrong. But I don't agree wid all those stiff-neck people who say that everybody ought to married right off. That is not a practical view."

Mr. Proudleigh saw the golden bridge which his sister had built for him, and he went flying over it.

"That is my own opinions," he remarked with emphasis. "When Mister Jones mention dis matter, I did thought it was funny that . . . I mean that I thought dat a young man would want to know the sort o' female him goin' to get married to. Before I married, I was along wid Susan's mother for ten years. I had the twins that dead, an' me son who is now oversea—a good buoy that. Then I married, an' Susan was born. An' p'rhaps I wouldn't married at all ef the parson of de church I use to attend sometimes didn't talk to me an' tell me I ought to jine society an' don't live no more in sin. I don't regret I are married, but I wouldn't tell any young man to married right off if him don't wants to."

"That is what I say meself," put in Catherine from the door. "If a gurl get a young man, she would be foolish to drive him away because him don't want to married at once. After all, if him is free, she is free too."

Now Catherine had no young man in view, so far as Miss Proudleigh was aware. And though many

excellent arguments might be found to show that Susan and Jones were doing almost the right and proper thing in the circumstances existing, Miss Proudleigh felt that a stricter code of morality ought to be enforced in so far as Catherine and Eliza were concerned, at any rate until the time should come when moral theory might wisely be dispensed with on the tacit understanding of a marriage in perspective.

She pursed up her mouth. "I doesn't thinks," she observed, "that a young gurl should talk in that way. Susan is different. But you an' Eliza don't know de world yet, an' you should be modest. When I was young, me parents wouldn't allow me to make such a remarks."

Catherine bridled up, Eliza tittered, Susan laughed outright.

Catherine made a peculiar noise with her mouth which is locally known as "sucking your teeth," and which expresses both contempt and defiance. Miss Proudleigh would have volubly resented this, had not her brother interrupted her by going to the door and calling his wife.

"Mattie," he explained, when she answered the summons, "Mister Jones is takin' Susan as an intended. Him is a decent young gen'leman, an' I tell him we is pleased to welcome him."

"Yes," said his wife; "we very pleased, sah." She looked at Jones as she spoke, not liking him as well as she had liked Tom, but yet feeling that Susan was woman enough to make her own choice.

"I am goin' to make you' daughter very comfortable, old lady," said Jones, involuntarily glancing

round the little room. "When we go to Colon we going to have fine times."

He spoke loudly and gaily, for the effect of the liquor he had been drinking had by no means worn off, and he held himself to be something of a hero who had arrived just in time to rescue a good-looking girl from poverty and distress.

The old woman smiled, then asked: "You an' Miss Susan goin' to Colon, sah?"

"Yes; three weeks' time. They offered me an occupation down there, an' I am taking Susan with me."

"Well! there is coincidence!" exclaimed Miss Proudleigh. "P'rhaps, Sue, you will meet T——"

"What you goin' to say now, ma'am?" asked Susan, in a threatening tone.

Miss Proudleigh heard and understood in time. "I was sayin' that p'rhaps you might meet you' brother; but I just remember he gone to Nicaragua an' not Panama," she replied, with admirable presence of mind.

"Sue did want to go to Colon all this time," said her mother; "an' now she can go." She glanced again at Jones, and left the room; then that gentleman rose to bid them good night, saying as he did so that they would see him on the following night.

Susan accompanied him to the gate, where they remained talking for a little while. When she returned she was clinking a few silver coins in her hand, and smiling gaily.

"Well!" she said, "you see me luck don't desert me! I did think I would 'ave to work an' save be-

fore I could go away ; an' before I save a shillin' I get a friend to take me."

" An' you remember, Sue," said her father, " that it was me who strongly advise y'u to go to de picnic. I had a sort of feeling that you should go. Something say to me, ' Make her go.' I am a man who follow me feeling all de time ; an' p'rhaps if I didn't do it, you wouldn't have gotted such a chance to go foreign.

" Well, nobody can say I don't do me best fo' me children," he proceeded, in a self-satisfied tone. " An' if them should forget me, the curse of God must fall on them. All night long I lay down and thinks about them. When you believe I are sleeping I am thinking about you."

If snoring be a proof of wakefulness, then it must be admitted that Mr. Proudleigh spent all the long hours of the night in anxiously reflecting on his children's future welfare. In fact, on the strength of such evidence, it might reasonably be contended that he never knew what it was to sleep. On the other hand, it was difficult to reconcile his claims to habitual insomnia with his habit of frequent dreaming ; for every morning he had at least one dream to relate, and nearly every dream of his was fraught with prophetic meaning.

That he should now be anxious to bind his children, and especially Susan, to him by the bonds of gratitude was natural. And the reason was obvious. If Susan went to Panama and did not take the others with her, or agree to send something regularly for them, the prospects of himself and the old woman might again become serious, however it should fare with the two

girls. In mentioning the vengeance of God upon ungrateful children, therefore, he felt he had struck a note that would vibrate to good effect, and inwardly congratulated himself on his diplomacy. Susan, however, did not need to be reminded of the necessity of doing something for her people before she left; she had already made up her mind as to that while driving home from the railway station. So by way of answer to her father's remarks, she began to tell them of her plans.

"I can't take Kate wid me again, as I was goin' to do if I did go by meself," she explained. "An' I can't promise to send for any of you, for Sam not going to like it. If Kate can manage to come to Colon by herself, after I get down there, dat will be all right, for I would like some of me own family near me. But I not sending for her. And I don't see what you would do in Colon, sah," she went on, turning to her father, "for you're old, an' you can't work."

"Me!" exclaimed Mr. Proudleigh indignantly; but Susan calmly continued with her statement, without taking any notice of his protest, or giving him the opportunity of showing how extremely useful just such a man as he would be in a country devoted to the strenuous task of building a great canal.

"I am going to leave the shop, an' all of you can look after it, same as if I was in Jamaica. It getting on well, an' if you don't act foolish you will make a profit every week. An' I will send something for y'u whenever I can. And see here! Remember that I don't want nobody to talk about Tom when Sam come to see me. Aunt Deborah nearly do it a little while

ago when Sam was here, an' it is all that sort of stupidness I don't like."

" You needn't express you'self in that way, Susan," protested Miss Proudleigh severely. " I didn't mean anyt'ing. It only occur to me that Jones might meet Tom, an' Tom might make confusion."

" Him make confusion ! " retorted Susan scornfully. " What about ? What him send for me since him gone away ? I only hear from him once, an' him say that if he don't get sick him will send for me ; an' he didn't even put a dollar in de letter. It's two months now since him gone. If I didn't look for meself I might have been dead by this time. Besides, after all, I am me own woman, an' if I choose to get another intended, that's my business ! "

" But suppose Jones meet Tom in Colon ? " said Catherine.

" Well, what about dat ? Jones couldn't think that he is me first lover. I am not his first sweetheart. I don't want him to hear anyt'ing about Tom, for I don't want any chat in Kingston before I leave ; but if him meet Tom an' I see any confusion goin' to come, I will simply look for something to do, like I been doing here since Tom leave. Once I am in Colon I will be all right."

But Miss Proudleigh, not pleased with Susan's confidence and self-assertion, and perhaps resenting her niece's continued good fortune, assumed a dismally prophetic air and uttered this doleful prediction :

" I don't quite like this, Susan. This young man's name is Jones, an' the lawyer who lose you' case against Maria is Jones. Now if you put two an' two

together, an' reflect in a general way on the coincidence, y'u will see that there is trouble before you. Howsoever——”

“Howsoever,” flamed out Susan, “it would be a good thing if everybody mind them own business. It wasn't me who select Lawyer Jones; an' a lot of people in Kingston have the same name. Those who envy me can think an' believe what them like.”

Then she asked for her dinner, which she had been too excited all this time to think of; and about an hour after eating it she went to bed.

But her excitement prevented her from sleeping; and with the excitement was mingled some anxiety lest Jones should change his mind in the morning and not come back to see her after all. That was not improbable, for a man sober might think much differently from the same man who, according to his own admission, had taken “a few good drinks” during the day. Yet she was inclined to believe that he had been in earnest. He had given her five shillings when bidding her good-bye at the gate, and no one who was not very much in earnest would have done so. On the whole, after thinking the matter over, she felt she was certain of him.

She began to think about her approaching migration. To her, Colon and Panama meant one and the same place, the lesser thus being made to include the greater. She could form no idea of what the town might be like, but of one thing she was certain: she would enjoy herself there immensely and all the time. She would have plenty of money to spend. She would have many fine dresses to wear. If Jones did not

treat her nicely ? Well, she was not the sort of young woman to submit to bad treatment. She would not stay with him. But she liked Samuel Josiah ; he was attentive and generous. She speedily decided that they would get on excellently together. . . .

As for all those who disliked her, how she had triumphed over them ! They would hear of her good luck, and gnash their teeth with envy. Maria ? Mother Smith ? They were entirely beneath her notice now.

She dwelt upon this thought with delight for some time, then gradually fell asleep.

CHAPTER VIII

SUSAN GIVES " A JOKE "

UNLIKE Susan, Jones slept very soundly that night. It was not until the next morning that he thought over the proposal he had made to Susan, and he did not regret it. He was attracted by her, more so than he had been by any other woman he could remember. He did not know the reason, and would have been the last person in the world to have thought about reasons in such a connexion. He simply believed he was in love with her, and not in quite the same way that he had been in love some twenty times before.

He felt happier now about going to Colon. The truth is that Jones, in spite of all his talk, had been rather uneasy about leaving Jamaica and going to a land where he might meet with no one whom he knew intimately. Susan's will was stronger than his. Hers was a more determined character. That was one cause of the attraction she had for him; impulsive, uncertain, volatile, and talkative as he was, it was not surprising that a girl who usually knew her own mind in matters that directly concerned her, and who could stick to her own point with remarkable tenacity, should exercise considerable influence over him almost

from the moment of their first meeting. Then she was good-looking, lively, and of excellent figure. She was not common either, he was sure, for she had not welcomed his advances at the start as so many other girls would have done. Consequently he was satisfied with the arrangements of the previous day; and he lost no time that evening in going to see her. When he appeared, Susan's last doubt vanished. She was now quite certain of him.

Soon Mr. Proudleigh began to speak of him as his son-in-law, and Susan's sisters regarded him as their brother-in-law. Calling Jones brother-in-law appealed to the girls' sense of propriety, while it suited their aunt's religious views to consider Jones as almost married to Susan. The family's standards of respectability demanded that some deference, if only in words, should be paid to the conventions of recognized propriety.

Jones went to see Susan every night, sometimes taking her out for long car rides. Usually they were left alone when at home, for, as Mr. Proudleigh put it, "A courting couple don't like disturbance." On these occasions the rest of the family distributed themselves amongst the other people who lived in the yard, or sat together in the yard on boxes talking about Susan's good luck. Both Catherine and Eliza would then dearly express the hope that a similar stroke of good fortune might befall them, for they were heartily tired of their present way of life. But whenever they voiced their discontent Mr. Proudleigh would ask them to have patience, assuring them at the same time that he was praying for them as he had prayed

for Susan, and was expecting a similar answer at any moment.

One night it rained, and then all of them were obliged to assemble indoors. It was then that Mr. Proudleigh took the opportunity of mentioning certain fears that he professed to feel in regard to Samuel's and Susan's future ; though, if the truth must be told, he had begun to think that as Jones already had a good situation in Jamaica, he might as well remain in the island with Susan and endeavour to be happy, instead of going to a place where he (Mr. Proudleigh) might not be able to follow them. Not without some hope of dissuading Jones from leaving Jamaica, he remarked :

" You know, Mister Jones, I been hearing dat Panama is a dangerous place for a young man. A person tell me this morning dat the Americans don't like Jamaica people at all ; an' that the first word you say to them, them shoot y'u."

" That don't frighten me," said Jones. " No American man is going to shoot Samuel Josiah. I can do my work, an' when the work is done, I go about me own business, an' leave the Americans to themselves. Besides, I hear that all y'u have to do is to tell an American you are a British subject, an' he wouldn't put a finger on you."

" So I hear meself," said Susan. " If you belongs to another race, them will take an advantage of you. But so long as them know y'u are an English subject, them will respect y'u."

" Is dat so ? " asked the old man, rather disappointed at hearing that British citizenship was such

a sure protection against the dangers of which he was warning Samuel; "but how is it that I hear them sometimes illstreat folkse that go away from here?"

"It can't be Americans do it," said Jones, quite positively.

Now Mr. Proudleigh, although not gifted with particular quickness of wit, could perceive that there was something lacking in Jones's reply. "Not reburting you, Mister Jones," he said, "but even ef it wasn't de Americans who half-murder the Jamaica mens, it was somebody. An' those people didn't seem to mind dat Jamaica people was British subjects."

This way of looking at the matter was certainly of some importance; Jones, however, was not one to allow himself to be easily beaten in an argument.

"The Jamaica people couldn't have been Jamaica people at all," he answered. "For a British subject can't be touched."

"I don't see how dat can be," said Mr. Proudleigh doubtfully, "for those Jamaica people did really born in Jamaica."

"Then they were a set of fools," replied Jones shortly. "Most Jamaica people is foolish; they have no cranium whatsoever. I bet you those men never told they were British subjects. Now, if it was me, I would have made everybody to understand that I was an Anglo-Saxon, an' that if they touch a hair of me head, war would be declared. That's the way to talk in a foreign country. I wouldn't make a man bluff me out. No, sir!"

"Dat is all right, Mister Sam," said the old man. "But p'rhaps them wouldn't care what y'u call you'-

self till after them finish beat y'u. An' then I don't see how it would help y'u, even if them publicly expologize to you as you are a British subjec'."

"But why y'u want to frighten Samuel, papee?" asked Susan, who now began to suspect that her father had some motive in arguing like this. "Don't y'u think Sam can look after himself? An' don't a lot of other people gone to Colon an' nothing 'appen to them? Why you talking like that?"

Mr. Proudleigh may never have heard of the proverb which asserts that discretion is the better part of valour, but he certainly lived up to both the spirit and the letter of it.

"Y'u misunderstand you' poor ole father, Sue," he answered, with the suggestion of a reproach in his voice. "I only wanted to hinform Mister Sam as to what I hear. I know him can look after himself. Him is as brave as a . . . a . . ." He cast about in his mind for a term of comparison that would transcend all such other commonplace terms as "lion" and "tiger," and finally came out with—"as a hedgehog." He had not the faintest conception what sort of animal a hedgehog might be; but that in itself induced him to think of it as possessing remarkable qualities of courage. His children, who had read at the elementary school of the hedgehog and its ways, laughed outright; but Jones was not at all offended.

"You are right, old massa," he observed, "if y'u put your hand on a hedgehog, he stick you with his porcupines, an' that's like me. I am a word and a blow all the time. If any man interfere with me, he get the worst of it."

"But nobody going to interfere wid you," Sue insisted. "Y'u will mind your own business, an' leave everybody else alone."

Given Jones's temperament, this was highly improbable. But he agreed with her.

"Besides," he added, "it is quite true that they can't do what they like with a British subject. That's undiscussable."

"I wonder why dat is so?" asked Mr. Proudleigh. "I always hear so, but I don't understand de reason."

"It is the King," explained Catherine. "Them 'fraid of the King. If y'u do one British subject anything, an' the King hear about it, him send ships to fight for you. Him 'ave sojers an' ships, an' nobody can beat them. And as Jamaica belongs to him, him protect us."

Catherine's display of political knowledge deeply impressed her father. "I see!" he remarked. "It's like what Queen Victoria used to do. I hear dat when she come to the throne she get up one day an' say, 'I don't want any more slave in Jamaica,' an' the moment she say so, them send an' free every slave! That was a good ooman. An' that is why she live so long that I was beginning to think she would never dead. An' her children take after her, or them wouldn't protect us when we go foreign."

"It's not only the King," said Jones, anxious to show that he knew much about such matters. "It's the Parliament as well. The Parliament look after British subjects wherever them go to."

"Yes, eh?" said Mr. Proudleigh, still more deeply impressed; "what is de Parliament?"

Jones thought for an instant, then answered, " It's something like our Legislative Council. A lot of dukes ; an' they all discuss an' argue. I hear, too, men are elected to it ; big men, like lords, and that sometimes them fight, but them don't fight often. They are all white, for in England y'u never see a black man. But if a black man go there an' just say he is a British subject, they do anything for him. They love him, y'u know, because he is born under the British flag."

" That's a place I would like to go to," said Mr. Proudleigh. " I would like to see de King. Howsoever, ef he protect Jamaica people in Colon, you an' Miss Susan will be all right there."

Then the talk drifted to other subjects, and Mr. Proudleigh made no further attempts to persuade Jones to remain.

The days flew by quickly. During the last week that she was to remain in Kingston Susan busied herself in going round to her debtors and letting them know that Catherine would collect the moneys due to her, in going to see her friends to bid them good-bye, and in going for long car rides in the evenings with Jones. It was when she was returning from one of these rides one night that she stopped suddenly and looked back at a woman who was walking slowly at some distance behind her.

" What's the matter ? " asked Jones.

" Nothing," she replied. " I thought I did know that person back of us ; but I can't see her face. I must be mistaken." But that night after Jones had left she said to Catherine :

“ Kate, y’u know who I could swear I thought I saw in the lane to-night ? ”

“ Who ? ” asked Kate.

“ Mother Smith. As I was coming down, I pass a person that look familiar. An’ something say to me, ‘ Turn back.’ An’ when I look back, the person seem to be Mother Smith, but I wasn’t sure ; an’ as Sam was wid me I couldn’t go up to her.”

“ But what is Mother Smith doin’ here ? ” asked Catherine. “ Maria was with ’er ? ”

“ No. P’rhaps it wasn’t her, after all. If it was ’er, she must ’ave been walkin’ this way to see what sort o’ young man Sam is, for Hezekiah must ’ave told her an’ her big-mouth daughter that I going to Colon. I hope she see what she come to see ! Thank God ! She can’t interfere wid me any more—the old wretch ! ” Then she dismissed Mother Smith from her mind.

She was to sail on Saturday, so on Friday night quite a number of her friends came to see her. She had specially invited them ; for though, the exigencies of space forbidding, she could not give a dance, she had heard that rich people had “ at homes,” and she saw no good reason why she should not have one herself. She did not call it an “ at home ” ; she merely told her friends it was to be “ a joke ” ; but she meant it to be a very serious and fashionable joke, which was what she conceived an “ at home ” to be.

Letitia was there, and Cordelia Sampson, a reddish-brown young lady, very much freckled, and with a voice of astonishing shrillness. Cordelia sang in the choir of an Episcopalian mission church in one of the suburbs of the city, always spoke of herself as “ a

choir," and was always alluded to as " a choir " by those who knew her. She was the terror of the mild-mannered clergyman who, for some utterly inexplicable reason, believed that she was endowed with a splendid voice, and that her resignation, so frequently threatened, would mean a great loss to the church. You sometimes had to persuade her to sing when she came to see you ; but, once she began, the problem was how to persuade her to stop. She was clothed in pink this evening, and was aggressively prepared to be musical ; in fact, she had brought a music folio with her, and she sat with it in her lap, so as to be ready for all emergencies. There were four other girls, two of them black, and the other two of the dark brown shade known as sambo. All of these were dressed in light white frocks which fitted them to perfection. No men had been invited, except Letitia's brother ; for Susan did not think highly of the few young men she knew.

The cloth partition in the room had been taken down, and the beds removed. Some chairs had been borrowed from the people in the yard, who, since they had heard of Susan's good fortune, treated her with marked respect and never neglected to address her as Miss Susan. There was therefore room for the guests, who, if they did sit rather close to one another, and perspired profusely, did not seem to mind that much. As for refreshments, Susan had laid out eight shillings in cakes, aerated waters and syrups, being determined that no one should call her mean. She was expecting Samuel ; but he, she told her friends, might not come until nine o'clock.

There was but one thing to talk about, of course.

"I may 'ave to sing at you' wedding, Sue," said Miss Sampson. "For if a young man can fall in love with a young lady at first sight, an' take 'er away with 'im, it is likely he may marry 'er."

"I believe so!" said Letitia. "The moment I saw Sue an' Jones together, I know 'im love 'er. Y'u should see the way him look on 'er. Sort of funny, y'u know . . . in fact, you could see love all over his face."

"Well," said Susan complacently, "if it's my luck to married, I will married. But I not putting me head on that. After all, a lot of people married an' don't better off than me to-day; so ef I don't married I won't fret."

"Y'u right, me child," said Letitia. "What's de good of getting married if you 'ave to work 'ard? I know some married woman that toils like a slave from morning to night, an' I don't see what them get for it. That wouldn't suit me!"

"Nor me," observed one of the other girls. "What any woman going to kill herself for?"

"But I say, Sue," she went on, inadvertently turning the conversation; "y'u ever hear anything about that gurl y'u brought up in de court-house? I never see y'u since dat time, an' I wanted to ask you about 'er."

"I never see her. I don't 'ave no bad feelings for 'er now, for if she didn't interfere wid me, I wouldn't be goin' away to-morrow. But I glad she didn't get Tom, for that teach people like she not to interfere wid other gurls' intendeds," Susan replied.

" She an' her mother must be cursing y'u," said Cordelia with a shrill laugh. " You are all right, an' they are all wrong ! Y'u ought to sing ' Sound the loud Timbrel o'er Egypt's Dark Sea,' Sue, because y'u really beat them out," and she fingered her song folio suggestively.

" Ladies," said Susan, taking the hint, " don't you think Miss Sampson should favour us with a song ? "

Her careful pronunciation and formal speech was, as it were, a call to order ; it meant that the serious business of the evening was about to begin.

Miss Sampson simpered, opened her book, said, " You must 'elp me with the chorus," and then uttered a terrifying scream.

In the choir she must have been a disturbing element. As a soloist she was indisputably remarkable. Yet that did not prevent the company from assisting her with the chorus to the best of the ability of their lungs ; and when the song was ended they expressed themselves as enraptured.

It was after that that Susan's sisters handed round glasses of kola and bits of cake in saucers, and while the guests were enjoying these refreshments Jones came in.

He was duly introduced, but would not sit down.

" Some friends of mine," he explained, " want to give me a send-off ; so while you girls enjoyin' you'-selves here, I will go an' enjoy meself with a few males."

This was disappointing to the girls, who had already begun to find the society of their own sex a little dull.

" We would like to enjoy you' conversation, Mr.

Jones," Cordelia suggested. "I've just rendered a song, an' now we would like you to say something."

But Jones would not be prevailed upon to say something. He shook hands with them, told Susan at what hour he was coming for her the next day, and went out. Susan followed him to the gate, as usual, and her friends, finding the ceremonial of an "at home" much too stiff for enjoyment, began to discuss him and Susan and their own affairs in an intimate manner, and without paying any special and irksome attention to the pronunciation of their words or the grammatical sequence of their sentences. This sort of talk was congenial to Susan herself, and she heartily joined in it when she returned to the room. And when her friends were leaving her at a little past eleven o'clock, she agreed that she had had a very fine evening, and that the "joke," although not by any means as lively as a joke with music and dancing, had nevertheless been a very good joke of its kind.

Yet, when all the guests had gone, her sisters noticed a puzzled look on Susan's face.

"What is it?" asked Catherine.

Susan wrinkled her brows. "I am sure Mother Smith was outside this yard to-night," she answered. "I saw her when I went to de gate wid Sam. What is dat woman coming about me for? What can she mean?"

CHAPTER IX

JONES IS WARNED

IN the meantime Jones had gone to meet his friends. On leaving Susan, he turned southwards, and as he emerged from the lane on to a crossing an old woman approached him, as if with the intention of speaking to him. Thinking she was a beggar, he took no notice of her, but hurriedly continued on his way. In about ten minutes he came to a saloon, over the principal entrance of which was a huge signboard with the encouraging invitation, "Welcome to All."

He went up a short flight of steps, pushed the slat door, which swung back on its hinges behind him, and found himself in a large well-lighted room. He knew the place well. Facing the entrance was a long bar of dark polished wood, and behind it, against the wall, were a number of shelves arranged in the form of a pyramid. These shelves were stocked with bottles of all sorts and shapes, all of them containing liquors. In the centre of the pyramid was a huge mirror, the only one in the room. At one end of the bar was a great pitcher of iced water, and scattered about it were glasses and ice-bowls and long silver-plated ice-spoons.

Behind the bar stood two bright-looking dark girls,

gaily dressed and busily attending to the orders of the customers. One or two of the latter were lounging against the bar, but the most of them were seated at little marble-topped tables scattered here and there about the room. The people who frequented this place were nearly all clerks, shopmen, and superior artisans. It was towards one of the tables, round which four or five men were seated, that Jones walked immediately on entering the saloon.

One of the men held a newspaper in his hand, and was talking loudly. "Hullo, Sam!" he shouted, when he caught sight of our friend, "I thought you weren't comin' again. Make room, boys, make room!"

They made room for Jones, who sat down.

"What'll you have?" said the same speaker, who was known to his friends as the Professor. "Order something good, old boy: won't see you after tomorrow, y'u know. What is your drink?"

Jones decided on gin and ginger beer; ordered a pack of cigarettes, then settled down to enjoy his beverage, his smoke, and a last friendly chat.

"So you going to leave us, eh?" said a dark, serious-looking man, who sat stirring a bit of ice in a glass with his finger. "Going away! I travel once meself to Colon when the French was diggin' the Canal. I nearly die, an' when I came back to Jamaica I swear I never would go away again. A man don't have long to live, an' it's just as well to remain here till his time come."

"Why you talking like that?" asked Jones. "You not sick? When I come back y'u will be alive

and kicking, Septimus, an' yet you talking to-night like a dying duck in a thunder-storm. You are too pessimistical, man."

"You don't know what y'u saying," replied the serious Septimus seriously. "I know you are a man don't read the newspaper, but you should hear what Professor been reading to-night!"

Curious, Jones turned to the Professor, who impressively read from a local journal the views of a European astronomer on Halley's Comet, then visible in the morning sky. Jones had heard of the comet, like most other people in the island, and, like them, had not given it much thought. Now, however, he listened to what the newspaper had to say about it with a great deal of interest. It appeared that somebody in Europe believed that he had discovered certain green bands in the tail of the comet, which indicated a poisonous gas, and now that astronomer was warning the inhabitants of the earth of their possible extermination at an early date. The whole article was read out aloud by the Professor (for the third time), and nearly everybody in the room listened intently. When the reader stopped, the serious man again took up the burden of his lamentations.

"There you are!" he exclaimed dismally. "I have been expecting that thing for I don't know how long. It is written in the Book of Revelations that before the last day there shall be signs and wonders. The Kingston earthquake was a sign. An' this comet is a perfect wonder; for when I saw it the first time a few days ago it only had a head, an' yesterday morning I only saw its tail! Oh! you can laugh as

y'u like" (Jones had laughed) "but I tell you the situation is serious."

The seriousness of the situation so overcame him that he called for another drink.

"Well," said Jones, "I wouldn't trouble about that. I don't see the comet yet; an' you say you only see the tail. But if you see the tail, you see the comet. An' if you see the comet, the head must be somewhere."

This reasoning appealed to the Professor, a light-complexioned man of about thirty, who had once been an elementary schoolmaster.

"I agree with you, Jones," he said. "Besides, the Book of Revelations is unscientific. There is something about a three-footed horse in it, isn't there?"

"A pale horse," said Septimus reprovingly. "A three-footed horse is a Jamaica duppy¹ story."

"Even so," said the Professor, "a horse cannot be pale."

"What's to hinder it?" asked the serious man. "If a man can be pale, a horse can be pale too. The pale horse in Revelations was a sign; an' I tell you that everything y'u read in that book is coming true. I wouldn't leave Jamaica now, me brother! All we can do in these last days is to watch and pray. I think I'll take a little rum."

He took it, then—"It's rather hard," he said, "that after a man spend his whole life looking after his family, a comet should come like this to destroy him. What have I done?"

¹ Ghost.

Jones found the conversation distinctly depressing, though there was no denying that many persons in the room were listening to it with very serious faces. He was going away next day, and he began to fear that, at sea, he might be more directly exposed to danger from the comet than those on land.

"I like to talk about big scientific things, meself," he said, "but I don't see the good of talkin' about the end of the world."

"Well, perhaps you are right," said the serious man. "It's not everybody who can face these questions like me. You know, I was brought up very religious. Me gran'mother was a very strict woman; she used to make me say me prayers every morning, an' she flog me whenever I didn't want to go to Sunday school. That's why I turn out so well."

This claim to superiority nettled Jones. "I have been brought up religious meself," he said, a little indignantly. "Suppose we have a game of billiards?"

"No, Sam," Septimus replied gravely. "This is not a time for billiards. I think I shall go to church on Sunday. It is time to turn our thoughts to higher things. I nearly got killed two years ago, an' since then I not taking any risk with my soul. "Y'u going to join Church when you go to Panama?"

"No," said Jones, "I don't have nothing to do with churches; the fact is, I don't understand them at all."

A chorus of approval greeted these words. "Something should be done to reform the churches," said the Professor. Then he added impressively, "Something is going wrong somewhere."

"If the churches were better," said Jones, "there would be less sin in the world. That's what I always say."

"That is so," said Septimus; "the churches are to blame." Then calling to the younger barmaid, he said, "Missis, you hear about this comet?"

"I am prepare," the girl answered, "whenever the call shall come."

"That's a fine girl," said Jones approvingly. "If I wasn't taking one with me to Panama, I would take her."

He spoke loudly enough for the barmaid to hear him, and she (though prepared for instant death) imagining that he was making fun at her, promptly faced him with an indignant rejoinder.

"See here, Mister Jones! you really wouldn't be rude to me to-night. It's not because y'u see me servin' behind a bar that you must think y'u can laugh at me! I am a lady, though I am poor; an' if me dead father should know I was workin' here, him would dead again from grief!"

"I wasn't making any fun!" protested Jones. "I was only admiring you. An' I meant what I said!"

"Stop!" said his serious friend. "You really takin' a female with you?"

"Yes," said Jones gaily. "You didn't hear?"

"No! y'u don't mean to tell me you married an' didn't let me know? You will regret it, me friend! You don't know what marriage mean yet! A man who have a wife an' children have a feeling of responsibility he can't get over, no matter how hard he try, an' I tell you I have tried very hard. How-

Mary

ever, we all have to shoulder our burden, an' do our duty, an' so let our light shine."

Here the elder barmaid happening to pass near by him, he (for he seemed to be on terms of surprising familiarity with her) tried to put his arm round her waist. She drew away giggling, and he nearly lost his balance. But his good humour was imperturbable in spite of his fears of the comet, and of the heavy responsibility of wife and children, which, as he alleged, weighed him utterly down.

Jones speedily reassured him and his other anxious friends.

"It's only a female I taking with me," he said. "She and I became acquainted recently."

"What's her name?" asked one of the men who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation.

"Miss Susan Proudleigh. Fine girl, man! Fall in love with me the same day she see me. I am going to cut a dash with her in Colon."

"Proudleigh?" asked the Professor, lifting his eyebrows as if trying to remember something. "I think I know that name. . . . Yes, she had a case in court some time ago."

"What's that?" Jones asked sharply. "You make a mistake, me friend. She is not the sort of girl anybody can take to court-house. She is a perfect incomparable, man!"

"I didn't say anybody take her to court-house, Sam; but she did have a case. I don't remember it exactly, but I think she brought up a girl."

"It can't be so," said Jones, "for I never hear anything about it. It must be somebody else."

"Perhaps so," said the Professor, who had no special object to gain by contending he was right, and who knew also that there might be other Susan Proudleights in Kingston besides the one he remembered having read about.

"Yes, y'u can make a mistake about a name," said Septimus, "but you can't make any mistake about this comet. The newspaper say it have sanatogen in its tail, an' sanatogen is not a thing to fool with."

"Cyanogen," corrected the Professor; "sanatogen is a tonic—something you drink."

"Well, whatever y'u call it, it's a dangerous thing. However, let us hope for the best. Jones, old man, if we even don't meet again, let's have a drink before we part."

He led the way to the bar, and each of them ordered the liquor he most preferred. It was a farewell glass, and the sincerity with which Jones's health was drunk showed that his friends really liked him. Under their hilarity there was emotion concealed. Which of them could know for certain that he would ever see Samuel Josiah again?

This last glass was the signal for the breaking up of the party.

Jones lived to the west of the city, and the Professor said he was going that way. So they bade the other fellows good-bye at the tavern door, and started homewards.

They had hardly gone fifteen yards when an elderly, respectable-looking woman boldly accosted them; she spoke to Jones, calling him by name: could she speak to him for a moment?

She was close enough for him to perceive that

she could not be a beggar. He wondered what she could have to say to him. He stopped, and asked his invariable question :

“ What’s the matter ? ”

“ Y’u mustn’t vex because I stop you out here, my gentleman,” said the old woman : “ but I came up to speak to you in Luke Lane to-night, an’ you walk on before I could stop y’u. I only want to tell y’u one thing. I hear y’u going away some time dis month wid Susan Proudleigh. That is *your* business. But let me tell you—for I don’t believe she tell you herself—dat she has a young man in Colon already, an’ is only making you a fool. You can ask her to-night about Tom Wooley ! I don’t like to see a nice-lookin’ young gentleman like you deceive ; so I tell you about the sarpent you is nourishin’ in you’ bosom.”

She ceased and said good night, having done the work she had been striving for several nights to accomplish. The oath that she had taken on the night when Susan had fought with Maria had been by no means forgotten, for Mother Smith was a revengeful woman, and, bitterly disliking Susan, would have gone far to injure her. To think that Susan had been more fortunate than Maria was gall and wormwood to her already bitter spirit. Only one chance of striking at Susan was open to her and she had seized it. She wanted Jones to know the truth about Susan ; how he would act she could not guess, but she hoped for the worst.

“ Tom Wooley,” said Samuel’s companion as the woman walked away—“ why, that’s the name of the man mentioned in the case I was telling you about.”

Jones, who had been astonished at the old woman's reason for stopping him, continued his walk.

"I don't see through this whole business," he said to his friend. "What she mean?"

Professor, who had read the case in the newspapers, had easily grasped the situation. He explained:

"The old woman's daughter was the girl your intended brought up; so the old lady want to put a spoke in her wheel."

"Yes, of course!" said Jones; "what a woman, eh? She nearly frightened me! Now what she think I can do, me dear sir?"

A question which showed that he intended to do nothing; which indeed was the decision he had arrived at. As he had never had any reason to suppose that he was Susan's first lover, he could not profess to feel shocked at learning that a former flame of hers was now in Colon. Nor did he really feel aggrieved, for even though she had not told him of the case, there was clearly nothing to her discredit about it, since she had been the prosecutor. He would have liked to ask her about it, and said to himself that he would do so some day; but the truth is that he already knew Susan well enough to understand that she might lose her temper if questioned about anything she did not want to discuss. On the whole, he did not see that Susan's past mattered to him, any more than his could matter to her. This conclusion was characteristic of Jones. Before he had reached his house he had begun to talk of another subject having no relation whatever to Mother Smith and her story.

*Jones
discredit
Susan's
Past.
Don't
seem
a to have
double
standard*

CHAPTER X

“ THE SWORD OF THE LORD ”

ON the afternoon of the following day a wharf at the eastern section of the city was thronged with people, chiefly black and brown. Scores of cabs were drawn up at both sides of the entrance to the wharf, and any number of porters were conveying trunks on their heads to the ship which lay anchored alongside of the pier. Steam was up; a donkey engine rattled and clattered as the sailors lowered some packages into the vessel's hold; the captain stood on the bridge shouting out his commands with a fine sense of ultimate authority; the passengers streamed up the gangway, while their friends and relatives who had come to see them off stood on the pier and looked with envy and admiration at those who were about to brave the perils of the deep.

It was a scene characteristically West Indian. The long wooden pier crowded with a jabbering, multi-coloured throng, the mountains of coal from which fine particles of coal-dust came flying as the sea breeze swept over the wharf; the noise, the confusion, the total lack of all appearance of order—though order of a kind was certainly maintained—the dark faces, eager or tearful; the ragged porters

who balanced on their heads packages weighing over a hundred pounds each as though they were feather pillows ; the few white men moving perfectly at ease amongst the excited people ; the brilliant sunlight, the great arch of dazzling sky, the gently-heaving green-tinted water, the crowds of boys, who, simply clad in a short pair of breeches, swam and dived like fishes in the sea, shaking their heads as they rose to the surface, and showing their strong white teeth as they laughed and shouted to the people on the ship—all this was typical of a British West Indian island on a day when a vessel leaves the port.

To Susan and Jones it was not strange, and the noise could not possibly confuse them. They pushed their way through the crowd, followed by Mr. Proudleigh, his wife, Miss Proudleigh, and Susan's sisters ; but at the gangway they were stopped by one of the Steamship Company's officials, who firmly told them that only passengers were allowed to go on board. Here they separated. Susan kissed all her folk, Jones shook hands with them, and then the two climbed up the gangway, and Susan found herself at last on the deck of the steamer which was to take her to a strange and distant land.

For the first time doubts assailed her. For the first time she realized fully that she was leaving her home, perhaps for good ; and as she looked from the deck down upon her people a lump gathered to her throat and she began to wonder if she were altogether wise. Yet she would not have given up her purpose for a moment. She was too deeply bitten by the prevailing desire to go somewhere.

She leaned against the vessel's rail, now and then exchanging a word at the top of her voice with Catherine or her father. Jones was as gay as ever, and was loudly explaining to some of his friends on the pier that he would have travelled first-class had he not been taking a female with him. He was in the condition locally known as "merry" (this term indicating generally a half-way stage between soberness and intoxication), and seemed to entertain a cheerful expectation of being shot immediately after arrival in Colon; but Susan saw nothing exhilarating in such a prospect, and more than once suggested to him that he should stop talking nonsense.

She was to travel second-class; but for the present she remained standing amongst the deck-passengers. There were over a hundred of these, and the deck on which they were gathered was littered with boxes and trunks containing their clothes, and with the deck-chairs on which they would sit during the day and sleep at night. It seemed a strange scene to Susan's wondering eyes. The beat of the engines stunned her, the smells nauseated her, she was conscious of a throbbing in her head. Suddenly it seemed to her as though the pier and the people on it were moving backwards. She heard a great shout of "Good-bye!" She saw a great waving of hands. They were going, going, and now she broke down and began to cry outright.

"Look after the shop good, Kate!" she called out to her sister; and "Good-bye, mammee—good-bye, papee! good-bye!"

Her mother waved in reply, two big tears stealing

down her withered cheeks. Her father, though much comforted by the reflection that the shop had been left to the family as a source of revenue, yet felt sad. But he waved his hat and shouted, "Take care of you'self, Susan, an' write to me!" and continued waving his hat long after there was any possibility of its being seen by her. Then, when the crowd on the pier had become an indistinct mass, Susan went to the second-class passengers' deck and began to wonder once more what sort of life awaited her in Colon. . . .

Steadily Kingston dwindled into a collection of white houses nestling amidst a forest of trees and backed by a noble range of smoke-blue mountains. And as the ship steamed through the narrow channel that forms the entrance to the city's harbour, the shrill voice of a woman rose in a quavering chant, and soon all the deckers were singing the words of some plaintive hymn.

It was their way of bidding farewell to Jamaica. Thus singing, they left the land behind.

"Susan! get up! This is not a time to sleep."

Susan, who had been sleeping but fitfully, awoke at once with a start. Jones was rapping loudly at her cabin door. Something in his voice startled her.

"What is it?" she asked, frightened.

"The comet! It's the first time I see it."

Susan dressed in a minute; she hurried out of the cabin and went to the well-deck with Jones.

It was about four o'clock in the morning, but there was as yet no sign of the coming day. A crescent moon was glowing above, but the light of it paled into

insignificance before the radiant splendour of the morning star. There in the East hung Venus, like a great lamp illumining all heaven and earth, a diamond set against a magnificent background of millions and millions of stars. These indeed were strewn almost as thickly in the sky as sand in a desert ; look where you would, you saw them, some faint, some bright, and some like silver dust scattered profusely about the lofty silent dome that overarched and covered the wide circle of the sea. The gleaming planet and scintillating sky were alone sufficient to impress those who beheld them that morning with a sense of wonder and of awe. Their serene and lofty beauty, immeasurable grandeur, and vast incalculable distance must have appealed even to the most indifferent care-blunted mind. But it was not upon these that hundreds of eyes were turned when Susan and her lover reached the starboard of the vessel, where a crowd of persons were already standing. All looked at but one object—a great band of light that streamed up from below the eastern horizon and swept across the sky to the south-west, where it dipped into the sea. Clear and distinct it shone, in spite of the radiance around it : a flaming portent, as it seemed, emerging suddenly out of the mysterious depths of space. Most of the travellers on the ship saw it for the first time that morning. They looked at it startled, and with palpitating hearts.

“ The comet,” whispered Jones again, and—

“ The sword of the Lord,” said calmly but distinctly an old man who stood amongst the deckers.

Almost every one talked in whispers. Something

oppressed them—a vague, uncanny feeling. The women pressed their hands against their hearts.

They were alone on the sea. On land they would not have feared so much, for nearly all calamities, or imagined indications of calamity, the West Indian peasant can face with a calmness which springs from his deep-rooted fatalism. But here they were amidst surroundings strange to them; they were alone in a world which they regarded with apprehension—alone upon the sea with the sword of the Lord flaming in the heavens above them.

The sea ran swiftly, wave racing after wave, black and foam-crested. They dashed against the sides of the vessel, flinging high into the air a glistening shower of spray which fell back upon the bosom of the waters in sparks of liquid fire. The prow of the ship seemed to plunge into argent flame; in its wake writhed and twisted a long serpent of light. The phosphorescent gleams of the tropic sea flashed an answer to the brilliance of the tropic sky above, and fire seemed glancing and blazing everywhere.

The wind blew steadily from east to west, and the throbbing of the engines added to the roar of the leaping, hurrying waves. Now and again a murmuring sound was heard amongst the people on the deck—a sound as if they prayed.

Long and earnestly they gazed upon the comet; and then into Jones's mind came the words of his friend Septimus, spoken so short a time before.

He bent down and whispered in Susan's ear:

“ You think it mean anything, Sue ? ”

“ I don't know,” she replied, almost inaudibly;

" but it's awful ; an' if it was to come close an' we should all dead, where would we go to, Sam ? "

As if in reply to her question, the old man amongst the deck passengers, who had called the comet " The Sword of the Lord," again lifted up his voice, this time repeating some words from the Scriptures :

" Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save ; neither His ear heavy that He cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear."

Susan heard and trembled ; a woman in the crowd of watchers groaned out, " Yes, Lord ! "

" Have mercy ! " sobbed another.

Some one began repeating the hymn; " Jesus, Lover of my Soul."

" Christ, have mercy," prayed the shivering people.

" Sue," whispered Jones, " I heard on Friday night that the comet won't touch the world until Wednesday ; so when we get to Colon to-morrow morning we better married. This sort of life is not one to face death in. I am not a coward, Sue, but, after all, it will be better to die right."

An immense weight seemed lifted off Susan's heart as she heard these words. Her present mode of life was called " living in sin " by the ministers and religious folk of her country ; and so persistently had this view of it been inculcated that, in common with thousands of others, she had come to regard unsanctified connexions as the one offence really worth considering. True, she had never gone further than giving her intellectual assent to this proposition ;

Handwritten notes:
 Hannah's answer to disaster live it the comet in James

Handwritten notes:
 Care of the earthquake.

but then she had never seen a great comet blazing in the sky before. She now agreed with it with all her soul.

“ You right, Sam,” she whispered ; “ let us make our peace wid God, in case anything happen.” And as she spoke the thought flashed through her mind that, if nothing did happen, she would be Mrs. Jones, a prospect of social advancement which, even at that tremendous moment, gave her a thrill of delight.

Some of the deckers were audibly praying now. The old man, who in Kingston had been a well-known street-preacher, kept on repeating tags of Scripture and words of warning ; but gradually, in spite of his efforts to terrify the passengers into hysterics and thus establish his spiritual supremacy, they grew more calm, and soon began to talk at their ordinary pitch of voice.

For the sky was lightening. Slowly the morning star dimmed her brightness, the other stars paled and flickered out, the comet shone but indistinctly, and the moon grew white. Before it was five o'clock “ The Sword of the Lord ” had disappeared. And as the sky changed from black to grey, and from grey to pink and pearl and loveliest azure, as the phosphorescent brilliance of the water died away and the sun came surging up out of the sea, a great palpitating globe of golden fire, the passengers busied themselves with their toilet, and laughed and chatted as though they had not, but an hour before, been thinking of imminent death.

The transformation was complete. The sun had restored their courage, and had banished for the

moment all fear from their minds. As for Susan, she fell sick during the day, her stomach no longer being able to endure the rocking and vibration of the ship. So she did not talk much about anything, and did not even trouble to mention the marriage which she and Jones were to celebrate the next day in Colon, as a sort of spiritual insurance against the eternal fire with which the greater part of mankind might be threatened on the 18th and after.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

THE LAND OF PROMISE

THE comet was again visible on the ensuing night, but the horrors of sea-sickness were too acute, the misery of the passengers far too intense, for them to care greatly about the future of the world and of themselves. Word had been passed around the ship that the comet would not touch the earth for a few days yet, and that was a blessed respite. In the meantime there was no cessation of the strange agony caused by a rolling, pitching vessel which was traversing nearly six hundred miles of the roughest part of the Caribbean Sea. Some of the emigrants were secretly of the opinion that the comet could not be worse than the ship, and certainly was not just then interfering with their bodily comfort ; they had also heard the sailors jesting at their fears, and that gave them a sort of courage, not unmixed with hope. Then the ex-street preacher, in the midst of one of his urgent appeals for the instant conversion of all sinners, had been suddenly taken with a desire to rush to the ship's side. The people were too ill to laugh, but some of them smiled faintly at the unfortunate gentleman's

mishap. And smiles, coupled with sea-sickness, must inevitably reduce religious terrorism to the ridiculous.

So the second night wore on, and Jones in his cabin, and Susan in hers, slumbered fitfully, taking comfort as they remembered, when they started out of a doze, that the morning would bring an end to their present misery.

As it drew towards morning they found sleep impossible. It was as though they were in a steam bath, the awful, close, clammy heat was something they had never experienced before. They struggled out of their bunks, as did all the other second-class passengers, the perspiration streaming from their bodies. "This must be the beginning of hell," Jones muttered impiously, though not without a certain sense of terror. He was still sea-sick, and this, and the terrific heat, inclined him to believe that he had now sounded the ultimate depths of human misery. "I wonder why I bother come to this infernal place?" he grumbled, as he struggled into his clothes with the intention of going on deck.

He peeped out of his porthole, trying to peer through the darkness. He heard outside the labourers jabbering as they moved about the ship; the swish of water as it poured from the upper deck into the sea warned him that they were swabbing down the decks, and he guessed that Colon could not now be far away. He hurried out of his stifling cabin and went to call up Susan; she was ready dressed, but pale and weak; she gladly came out, and together they went to the ship's side, anxious for a first glimpse of the land.

The prospect was sufficiently depressing. The sky

above was dark with heavy rain-clouds that hung low and the sea ran fiercely—one vast expanse of slate-coloured water. The rain was falling, not in a torrential shower, but steadily, pitilessly, unceasingly, and at quick intervals the pallid lightning flashed upon the scene, and the low rumble of thunder proclaimed the gathering storm.

“Colon!”

The cry came from one of the watchers on the emigrants' deck, from one of the many men who had come to seek their fortune in this land of adventure of which the world had heard so much for some four hundred years. “Colon!” The word signified for them the land of promise, the land of their thoughts and dreams for many a long day. The cry was taken up and re-echoed from many lips. The sufferers forgot their sickness. The magic word had charmed it entirely away.

Jones and Susan bent forward quickly, electrified by the shout. In the distance they saw something like a huge bank of cloud on the horizon, and at once they thought it was their destination—Colon at last. By straining one's eyes one could just perceive it; but it was not Colon, for that town lay fully fifteen miles away. Still, it was part of the Isthmus of Panama, and as the sunlight began to fight its way slowly and painfully through the clouds that hung over land and sea, you could perceive, stretching away for miles and miles, the low-lying inhospitable shores of the country which has one of the most romantic histories in the world.

There the mainland of Panama lay, dreary, ugly,

uninviting. One could see the waves breaking listlessly against the shore, just as though the very energy of the water were affected by the terrible steaming heat. There was something unspeakably gloomy about the scene, something that subdued one to silence; and so it was in silence that almost every one on board watched the mangrove-covered banks slip by as the ship sped on her way.

The lightning flickered more frequently, the rumble of the thunder became louder, more insistent. The deckers, who had never undressed during the thirty-six hours of the passage, now began to make themselves presentable for going ashore, and Jones and Susan forced themselves to re-enter their cabins for the purpose of gathering together their possessions. It was daylight now, though the sun could not be seen. As they drew nearer to the town of Colon the rain slackened somewhat. The steamer slowed down, stopped, and lay idly rolling in the dark, oily water, waiting until the officials of the port should come on board.

Susan could now see before her the town of which she had heard so much. To her inquiring eyes it looked a small place: there was a cluster of ugly wooden piers jutting out into the sea and roofed with corrugated iron painted black; behind these was a street or road that ran along the seashore as far as she could follow it, and behind this street rose a line of frail-looking wooden buildings two or three storeys high. But farther away to the right, as one gazed landward from the deck of an incoming ship, could be seen bungalows of a description superior to the

buildings near by ; these bungalows stood amidst rows of cocoa-nut palms and light green shrubs evidently planted and tended by the hand of man. This touch of tropical scenery redeemed the town from the stigma of utter ugliness. Even so, and in spite of the well-known enchantment of distance, Colon stood confessed a mushroom town, a low, damp, rain-sodden bit of land which accident had made the terminus of a famous railway, and, after that, the site of the Atlantic entrance of the great Panama Canal.

Something like disappointment was expressed on Susan's face and in her voice as she turned to Jones, saying :

“ What you think of it, Sam ? ”

“ Can't say yet,” he replied dubiously ; “ howsoever, I am ready to go ashore.”

He started to stroll away, though he had no idea of where he was going to, when a swarthy little man unceremoniously sprang in front of him, caught him by the arm and waved him back. Jones had not observed the little man before. The latter had come on board at the same time as the doctor, and perhaps he thought that Jones wanted to disappear from view when it was necessary that he should be visible. Anyhow, he addressed Samuel in a perfectly unintelligible tongue, much to our young Jamaican's astonishment, and wildly waved his arms. “ What you mean ? ” indignantly demanded Jones, planting his feet firmly on the deck and refusing to move.

The little man appeared to be annoyed, and again poured forth a flood of Spanish. As Jones could not understand what he was saying, and could not possibly

guess what he would be at, he concluded that the man was a fool, and said so loudly.

“ You seem to be preposterously ignorant ! ” he exclaimed, addressing his excited aggressor. “ You can’t even talk English ! What you call you’self— Chinese or Cuban, or what ? ”

Now the man could not speak English, but he understood just enough of it to grasp the fact that Jones was insulting him. So he again addressed Mr. Jones in a violent manner, and gave him a backward push.

“ Look here ! ” exclaimed Jones. “ It’s about time you finish pushing me, you understand ? I am not a Colon man, but an English gentleman, an’ if you touch me again I will box the head off you’ body ! ”

The little man was not daunted ; indeed, he appeared to increase in pugnacity. But just then, fortunately, one of the petty officers of the ship, seeing that a serious quarrel was imminent, interfered.

“ You’d better not argue with that man,” he said to Jones ; “ he’s the Captain of the Port.”

“ But that is no reason why he should push me,” argued Jones, bent upon establishing at the outset his claim to deferential treatment at the hands of foreigners. “ What he push me for ? ”

“ Thought you were doing something you shouldn’t do, I suppose. They are rather funny, these people. There are all sorts of rules you have to obey down here.”

Jones fell back, not at all pleased with his first experience of Panamanian methods. But he waited quietly till the doctor, who was an American official, came up the second-class deck and assured himself

that the passengers there had all been vaccinated at home and were suffering from no serious complaints. It took a longer time to examine the deckers: the doctor was very strict with these. But it was all over at last; the officials of the port boarded their respective launches and sped away (Jones following the launch of the Captain of the Port with eyes expressive of unmitigated contempt), and then the ship began to draw towards the dock. The gangways were shoved out, word was passed that the passengers were free to go ashore. Susan and Samuel prepared to land, the latter still fuming over his treatment by a little dark fiery man amongst whose serious offences was his utter inability to speak the English language.

On the pier they had to hunt for their luggage, which was mixed with that of other people whose frantic exertions to recover their belongings impeded themselves. But the baggage was assorted at last, and now came the inquisition of the Customs officers. These were quite young men, almost boys, and their slight, emaciated frames, sallow faces, and leisurely movements did not at all appeal to Jones's sense of what was proper in Government officials. He watched them with amazement as they delved into his boxes and turned up everything, carelessly motioning him to re-arrange his things when they were through. "Sue," he observed impressively, when the ordeal was over, "this is not a civilized country;" and, having thus announced his discovery, he accepted the offer of a truck-man, who wheeled their trunks to the gate of the wharf and then coolly demanded a dollar for the job.

As this bit of work would not have been worth more than a shilling in Jamaica, if as much, Jones and Susan were scandalized, and protested loudly against the imposition. But the man called a little policeman to arbitrate in the matter. This policeman spoke English of a kind, and the intention of his discourse was to assure Jones that, as he had made no previous bargain with the man, he must pay what the man asked. He said this with all gravity, but with a pronunciation so peculiar that Jones expressed his great anxiety to know at what school he had been educated. It was rather lucky for him that the "policia" did not grasp his meaning.

It was drizzling still, but very slightly. The clouds overhead, however, and the continuous flashes of lightning warned our friends that the downpour might come on at any moment. They hailed a cab (driven by a West Indian), and Jones told the man that he wanted to go to the Canal Commission's Department of Labour and Quarters. He asked the cabman to drive slowly, so that they might see something of the town as they went on. With their luggage piled in front of and around them they began their ride through the principal street of Colon.

It was a busy thoroughfare. To their left, as they drove towards the Commission's Department of Labour and Quarters, were the principal stores and shops and cafés of the town, wooden buildings all, painted pink, dull yellow, grey, or light blue, with pointed roofs, broad verandas running round the first and second floors, and a paved piazza running along the whole length of the ground floors. The

projecting floors of the verandas above formed a shelter from sun and rain, and the piazzas were thronged with pedestrians. All sorts and conditions of human beings were represented in these crowds—West Indian labourers, East Indian pedlars, Chinese, Greeks; men from every country in Europe; natives of Panama and Colombia, ranging in colour from pure black to a sallow white; Americans—the men with their jackets thrown over their shoulders, energetic, masterful; the women, in cool white dresses and bareheaded, who walked along as unconcernedly as though they were taking a stroll in Broadway. Susan noticed that the Panamanian women were careful to have shawls thrown over their shoulders though their unstockinged feet were thrust into slippers down at heels. No one seemed to mind the rain. The shops were stocked with all sorts of showy goods; the cafés were crowded and business in them appeared to be brisk; the cabs were well patronized, and their drivers abused one another with a fluency of bad language that did not argue much for the vigilance or the good hearing of the Panama police. It was a busy town—that she could see at once. A peculiar town, too, from her point of view, for bordering the street were railway lines, and trains were passing or shunting up and down with a continuous tooting of shrill whistles; while immediately beyond the train lines was the ragged, sea-beaten shore of Colon, destitute of a sea-wall and ugly. She was not sure that she liked Colon at first sight, yet its bustle, its evident prosperity, appealed to her. Suddenly, and even while Susan was looking at the shops and houses, without turning

out of the street the cab passed into that part of old Colon which is known as Christobal and which the Americans had taken over as part of their territory and converted into an American settlement.

Here she and Samuel found themselves in the midst of the bungalows and cocoa-nut trees they had sighted from the sea. There were no shops here, no noise, no bustle; there was absolute cleanliness and a sense of order that formed a sharp contrast to the careless life of the Panamanian town they had just left behind them. Gardens bloomed in front of many of the houses, the sanitation was perfect; the wire-screened doors and windows of the buildings gave them the quaint appearance of huge cages, and behind those wire-screens (a protection against the once-virulent mosquito of Colon) peered many a white face, the faces of American women and children who during the long warm days thought wistfully of their homes in the North. This, to Susan's mind, looked an eminently respectable locality. "I would like to live here, Sam," she remarked, "more than in the other part of the town."

The cab stopped in front of a large building near the end of the street, and Jones jumped out, bidding Susan wait for him. He went into the office indicated by the cabman, where he found some other men waiting. He gave his name, and mentioned that he had been engaged in Jamaica by one of the Canal Commission's agents, who had promised him quarters in the Canal Zone. "You must have been expecting me," he observed, with an air of consequence.

"I kain't say we have," replied the tall American

who attended to him, "but I guess it's all right. I kain't give you quarters to-day, anyhow; I've got to see what room we have for mechanics. You kin turn into work right here in Christobal to-morrow, an' when you come I'll see what we kin do about puttin' you up." With that he turned away abruptly to see what another man wanted, and Jones made his way back outside.

Where were they to go to now? It was the cabman who suggested a way out of the difficulty. He knew a place, he told them, where they could get a room for the night if they were willing to pay a dollar for the accommodation. Jones protested that the price was "ridiculous," but agreed nevertheless to be taken to the place, Susan shrewdly suspecting that they were being victimized by the cabby, who knew that they were strangers. Back they drove into Colon, stopping for a minute at a shop to purchase some bread and cheese. Then the cabman took them to a house at the back of the town, charged them a dollar and a half for the work he had done, and drove away well satisfied with the innocence or ignorance of "dose Jamaica fools." He was a Jamaican himself, but sophisticated.

The house, in which they secured a room for the night, was a long wooden barn divided into small apartments. Each room had a wooden shutter for a window, and the place had originally been built upon a swamp. The piles driven into the swamp still remained as the building's foundation; the land behind the house had only lately been cleared by the American authorities and was not yet filled

up. So the ground was covered with a sheet of fetid water, and a little behind this the mangrove bushes flourished, dark green and horrible, a sombre background suggesting fever and loathsome ailments even to the least observant mind.

A dank heavy smell of rotting vegetation permeated the air. The room was almost as stifling as the ship's cabin had been that morning. No sooner had they taken their things inside when the thunder-storm, which had been threatening for hours, burst in full force upon Colon; the lightning writhed like maddened serpents through the blue-black sky, the crash of the thunder was deafening. Susan shuddered with fear. Even Jones looked lugubrious. This was a poor sort of welcome to the land of promise.

They set to and made the best of their circumstances. The room contained a cot, one wooden-seated chair, a table with a tin basin, a ewer of water and a glass, and another table, placed in the centre of the apartment and suggesting by its position that it was intended as a sort of ornament.

Jones, seated on the chair, placed the edibles he had procured on this centre table, and pulled a flask of rum out of his pocket. He offered some of the liquor to Susan, who refused it with a shake of her head. He helped himself liberally, then ate some of the bread and cheese, while she watched him sullenly. She felt downhearted, almost inclined to cry. But the rum had inspirited him, and already he was brighter. "What's the matter? You sorry you come?" he asked her.

"Not exactly," she replied; "but I don't know

a soul here ; I feel lonely an' miserable, and dis rain——” She could find no words to express her disappointment. “ If I was to stay long in this room, I would dead,” she plaintively concluded.

“ Don't fret,” he cheerfully advised. “ To-morrow we will get good quarters, an' even here will soon be better. From all what I hear about the Americans, they are not the sort of people to procrastinate in improving conditions. As for you, you are all right now, Sue. I am goin' to make a woman of you. I am more than a match for anything ! ” He suddenly remembered the comet. “ That is, if we don't dead,” he hastily added, “ in which case we had better begin to prepare our soul.”

He relapsed into seriousness again, but not for long : the rum he had taken fought successfully against an access of melancholy brought on by the prospect of early death through the agency of ethereal bodies. He saw with genuine regret that Susan could eat nothing. The bread and cheese he did not like himself. But the rain soon began to fall less heavily, and the thunder became more and more distant. Susan not caring or not able to talk, he waited in silence until only a drizzle remained of the tremendous downpour. Then he and Susan put on their hats and went out into the streets of Colon once more.

CHAPTER II

JONES CHANGES HIS MIND

“THE first thing we got to do is to find a place where we can get some good food,” said Jones, whose mind was just then centred upon practical matters.

There was an abundance of such places in the narrow streets in which they soon found themselves, but they were crowded with men and Susan hesitated about entering them. It seemed to both herself and Samuel that a very large portion of the house-space of Colon was devoted to bars, the doors of which stood wide open, thus allowing the passers-by to stare at will at those who sat inside industriously playing dominoes or cards, or drinking beer. Now that she was away from the house near the swamp, and amidst pedestrians whom she could hear talking English, Susan felt a little easier in mind. But she was painfully aware of her bodily weakness, caused by sea-sickness and lack of food. She was decidedly hungry.

In about ten minutes, in a narrow back street of not very prepossessing appearance, they came upon a building over the doors of whose lower storey was displayed this legend: “The Jamaican’s Heaven of

Rest ; Welcome all to Dine." Heavens in which hot dinners were provided were particularly welcome to Susan and Samuel just then, and it was evident that this place was owned or looked after by some one from "home." They gladly entered. The room was dark and not over-clean. Two long tables covered with greasy cloths, and a number of chairs, constituted all its furniture. At one end of it, to the right as you entered, was a small bar well stocked with liquors, of which Colon consumed an extraordinary quantity ; at the other end was a door leading into a kitchen which could be plainly seen and smelt, and which appeared to be overcrowded with cooks and waitresses, all slatternly attired, and as greasy as they well could be. Seated around the tables, some eating, some waiting to be served, were a number of men. Susan was the only woman guest, so, of course, all the men in the room paused to have a good look at her as she and Samuel took their seats.

Lunch was quickly served, and Jones ordered some whisky, which he promptly drank. After a few minutes of rapid mastication, he looked about the room with an inquiring air, with the view of engaging in conversation with some communicative person. One man noticed his look, and saw that Samuel was a stranger. "Come this morning?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jones quickly, "by the ship. This is a rainy place, eh? When you think the rain will stop?"

"About November," the man answered.

"November! You makin' fun! Why, man, this is only May!"

"Wait an' see," was the significant rejoinder. "When rain commence to come in dis country, it don't know when to stop. How is Jamaica when you leave it?"

"Oh, pretty well," replied Jones. "Dull as usual, an' little cash. All that the people talkin' about over there is the comet."

As he mentioned the comet he remembered that he had undertaken to marry Susan before the dreaded 18th, when the earth would pass through the comet's tail. He suddenly grew grave.

"This is a very serious time," he observed. "In a few hours we may be all before our Maker."

This remark, apparently apropos of nothing, astonished those who heard it. In Panama they were not accustomed to discuss the hereafter at lunch. Some of the men laughed; the man who had addressed him asked:

"You are a evangelistic preacher?"

"No," said Jones; "of course not. But don't y'u know that the comet is going to destroy the world?"

"The other man shook his head doubtingly. "Who say so?" he asked.

"The newspaper," Samuel answered, mentioning the only source of information he knew of.

"It can't be the latest paper, then," observed the other; "for the *Star* and *Herald* to-day have a telegram that say there is no reason for anybody to frighten: the comet is not goin' to come near us."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Samuel in a voice of profound relief. "Then we are all right! Sue, you hear?"

"Yes," replied Susan, "but which newspaper is right?"

"The latest, of course; every day a newspaper learn something new."

"That may be so," said the stranger; "but I don't depend on newspaper to tell me about the end of de world. I are satisfied to think that this world was lasting from Adam was a boy; an' if it don't get destroy by a comet all this time, it not likely to destroy now."

This way of looking at the matter, coupled with the latest statement in the Isthmian journal, convinced Jones that no danger to his existence was to be apprehended from the comet. He was so delighted to learn that the comet was innocuous that he did not pursue the conversation, but quickly finished his lunch, eager now to explore Colon and to begin that gay manner of living to which he had looked forward with such expectation for weeks. He paid the bill and he and Susan left the eating-house. They had not gone ten yards when Jones heard his name called by some one behind him.

He turned round, wondering to find himself known already in this strange town. He saw a black man, short, strongly built, with a genial face on which there was a smile of recognition. This man was over forty years of age, and his whole appearance indicated self-confidence and prosperity. Jones thought he remembered his face, but could not just then remember his name or where he had met him. Clearly, however, the stranger knew him, for he

clapped him on the shoulder in a friendly way and asked him what he was doing in Colon.

"I come here to fill an occupation," Jones replied; "but, to tell the truth, you have an advantage of me. What's your name? I am Samuel Josiah Jones."

"Oh, I know that well," laughed the other; "you used to tell us so every day at de railway. You remember now? Mackenzie? Mac that was at the railway when you was learning trade?"

"Of course!" cried Samuel, now completely enlightened. "Sue, this is Mr. Mackenzie, who you always hear me talk about. Shake hands."

Susan had never heard Mackenzie mentioned before, but did not say so. She shook hands as directed.

"When you come?" was Mackenzie's next question.

"This morning, an' it been raining ever since. Nasty place for rain. I was just goin' home, Mac, when you accost me; but now we must go an' take a drink together for luck. Where can we go?"

"But what about you' sister?" asked Mackenzie, glancing at Susan and noticing that she did not seem to relish Jones's proposal.

"She is my intended," said Jones (Mackenzie had already guessed as much), "and she can go home in a 'bus. Sue, my dear," he went on, turning to her, "Mr. Mac is a particular friend of mine, an' I want to have a little confabulation with him. Take a 'bus an' go home, like a good girl. I soon be there."

If Mackenzie had not been a stranger, Susan would certainly have protested against being disposed of

in so summary a fashion, especially as this was her first day in Colon. She was wild at being sent back to the miserable room while Jones was preparing to go about the town and enjoy himself. But she let him hail a passing cab, into which she got, and she left the two men standing on the side-walk without saying a single word to either of them.

It was seven o'clock before Jones went back to her. For hours she had remained in the wretched den, nursing her misery and her wrath. It had come on to rain again—a steady rain that held out no promise of stopping and which had not ceased when Samuel returned. He had been sufficiently thoughtful to bring with him some bread, a can of preserved meat, and a pint of whisky, for he judged that she had not been out to dinner. On these things he proposed that they should dine, and Susan watched him in silence while he placed them on the table and went outside to borrow some plates and a knife and fork. She made no effort to help him. He was not perfectly sober, yet he was sober enough to perceive that she was angry, and he had somewhere deep down in his heart an uneasy feeling that there was some justification for her anger. He became determinedly and manfully cheerful.

“To-morrow,” he remarked, as he began to eat, “we’ll be in better quarters and will settle down peaceful and regular; in the meantime we must eat an’ be happy.”

“Why you stay out so long?” Susan asked; speaking for the first time and showing no inclination either to eat or to be happy.

“ Couldn’t help it,” he replied. “ Mac wanted to treat me good, an’ I wouldn’t have been a gentleman if I refused him.”

A sandwich in one hand, a glass of whisky in the other, he smiled jovially as if in approval of his own meritorious conduct. But he gave her no opportunity to comment on his ideas of gentlemanly behaviour.

“ You know, Sue,” he observed, “ I think you are a lucky girl? I am acquainted with about twenty other females, an’ them would kill themselves to be here to-night. But I am a man of emphatic decisiveness, an’ when I select a gurl I will stick to her—if she behave herself.” He paused, in order that she might mark the proviso well. Then he added, “ But you will behave you’self.

“ Tell you what ! ” he went on enthusiastically. “ I am goin’ to raise cain as soon as I meet a few more Jamaica boys like Mac. No American man is goin’ to boss me. A Jamaican is more than a match for anybody ; an’ if a man ever talk to me hard in this country, I kick him ! ”

“ Y’u can’t kick anybody in this country,” said Susan quietly ; “ it’s not home.”

“ Don’t matter. They got to think a lot of me in this low-down place. I won’t let a man interfere with you, either. I intend to stick to you.”

Susan, sitting on the cot, shifted her position a little. She had listened carefully to all that Samuel had said ; she had noticed how persistently he dwelt upon his intention to stick to her—she had especially noticed that he expected her to behave herself. But to one matter, which had been in her mind ever since

they landed, he had not once alluded. She intended that it should be discussed that night.

"See here, Sam," she began, with simple directness, "you say on board the ship night before last that you was goin' to marry me as soon as you get to Colon. But all day to-day y'u don't say nothing about it. You goin' to do it to-morrow?"

Samuel Josiah Jones paused in the act of conveying a glass of whisky to his lips and stared at Susan with a countenance expressive of profoundest astonishment. Susan's question appeared to him a most unreasonable one. He was silent for some seconds, then in a tone of voice which was eloquent with reproach, and even with sorrow, he answered:

"You mean to say that y'u didn't hear what that man tell us to-day in the cook-shop?"

"Yes," said Susan, "I did hear what him say; but that don't 'ave nothing to do with what *you* say on board the ship. Y'u promise to marry me because we wasn't living quite correct, an' if that was true yesterday morning, it must be true to-night."

Susan's rejoinder was so straightforward and clear that Jones could only reply indirectly.

"Well!" he exclaimed, apostrophizing the ceiling; "I never see people so unreasonable like Jamaica females. They have no logical perspecuity. They are so ambitious that I can't understand them. Susan, you forget that when I talk to you about marriage an' all that sort of foolishness we didn't expect to live another week? You forget that? I don't tell you that if the comet was really goin' to kill us I wouldn't get married. But now, seeing that we are safe, it would

be the height of stupidity in me to pick up meself an' enter in the bonds of matrimony, which, when you once get into it, y'u can't get out of it at all. What you take me for? Specify!"

"Then you not goin' to marry me again?" was Susan's only reply to this long speech.

"Don't I have signified to you?" he answered; and as she sat there looking at him darkly, he hastened to pacify her.

"But you are all right, Sue; you goin' to live like a queen. After all, when we leave Jamaica we didn't think about married. Besides, look what I do for you already!"

She did not see that he had done much for her at all, for she was not a woman easily satisfied. But Colon was not Kingston; she had no friends here; all the advantage would be on Jones's side if she quarrelled with him now. She was well aware too that she could scarcely claim that he had brought her with him under false pretences. Nevertheless she felt bitterly disappointed, and Jones's way of looking upon marriage with her as being only a sensible action when death appeared imminent, wounded her vanity. If he had not promised to marry her on the ship, she would not have mentioned the matter; but he had created hope in her, had awakened a dormant ambition, and she understood how advantageous it would be for her to have a legal right to his name in this new country. She now felt, therefore, that she had a grievance, and her resentment was increased by her sense of entire dependence upon Jones. It was true that she had boasted in Jamaica about going to

Maria

Colon as an independent woman to earn her own living; but her few hours' experience in that town had taught her that with girls like herself that was more easily said than done. Catherine had proved right after all. The young woman who did not know Panama well must have some one to assist her.

She did not propose to argue any more with Samuel. If her family were with her, she reflected, the situation might be very different, for together they would surely be able to earn a decent living, and then she would not feel so much obliged to tolerate anything like neglect from Samuel. Or again, if she had some money and knew Panama, she might be able to make her way about with ease. But she was not prepared to become a servant. She knew that women of a certain type flourished in Colon, but to their depths she would not and could never sink. Her mind ran upon Tom: she knew she had influence with him, and as a last resort she could always appeal to him for assistance. Truth to tell, however, she had felt Tom's departure as a relief after he had left Jamaica: she had never cared for him. Samuel was wild, unstable, but was not intentionally unkind. . . . She liked him.

Sitting on the edge of the cot, one leg crooked over the other, her chin supported by her right hand, she thought the matter over. The sound of the rain and the thunder's long roll came to her ears. In the next apartment a girl was singing—she knew the words, she had heard them in Jamaica:

“Ef I did hear what me mammee did say
I wouldn't be in dis wort'less Colon.”

But no one had warned her against Colon ; she had wished to come to this place, she was here, she must make the best of it. She listened to the singing. It seemed to her that, despite the words, the singer's voice was cheerful.

Samuel, on his part, was not worrying. He was not sober. He was quite satisfied that he was acting with the most becoming propriety and in strict accordance with the high gentlemanly standards of Samuel Josiah Jones. His mind was filled with pleasing anticipations of the part he would play in the society of the town. He had a dazzling vision of happiness, now that he had recovered from his first feeling of discontent, and was no longer haunted by fear of approaching dissolution. He was determined to make Susan comfortable ; he would earn lots of money, dress well, sport, distinguish himself : there were no spots just then upon the bright sun of his reflections. So he went to bed in a merry frame of mind ; but Susan sat up for some time longer, thinking. To one thing she had made up her mind when she finally determined to rest. She would save money, and so secure her personal independence.

CHAPTER III

SUSAN SETTLES DOWN

THE clanging of bells awakened Susan and Jones the next morning. The sharp peals came insistently from different directions ; from Christobal, where the labourers were being warned that the day's work would shortly begin once more ; from the shunting trains and engines along the waterfront of Colon ; from the ships in the harbour. The noise pervaded the little town, and soon every one was stirring and preparing for the labours which, however diverse and apparently unconnected, had all a very definite connection with the one great undertaking of Panama, the building of the Canal.

Jones was soon ready to report himself for duty at Christobal. Whatever his failings, shirking his work was not one of them ; he had been trained in the workshops of the Jamaica Government Railway, where discipline was well understood and where each man had been well drilled into his work. Jones had grumbled at his chiefs at the railway, but now he thought of them with pride and was determined to show the American bosses that a British subject who had served the Government was in no wise inferior to any man from the States.

He had an early breakfast at the cook-shop where he had lunched the day before, then hurried off to Christobal, where Mackenzie had promised to meet him at eight o'clock. Mackenzie appeared on time and together they went into the office of Labour and Quarters. Here the arrangements between Jones and the Canal Commission were promptly concluded.

Jones was to work in the railway shop in Christobal as an under-mechanic. He was to receive fifteen dollars a week, payable every fortnight, and could have free quarters in the Canal Zone, house accommodation being regarded as part of his salary. He gladly accepted this offer of houseroom, but was somewhat disconcerted when Mackenzie asked him if he proposed to leave Susan to live by herself in Colon.

"Can't she come with me?" he asked, partly of Mackenzie, partly of the American clerk.

"Who is 'she'?" inquired the latter.

"A female of mine," he replied—"a young lady I am talking to."

"Well, you don't want to talk to a woman all the time, do you?" asked the American. "Is she your wife?"

"Not exactly," said Jones; "she is a young female under my protection an' care; I am responsible to her parents for her. We are practically husband an' wife, though I don't put a ring on her finger as yet."

"Nothin' doin'!" returned the clerk emphatically. "We kain't allow them sort of things here. You've got to marry that female of yours if you want her to live in the Zone. Judge Riggs in the court building near here will fix you right now if you go to him, and

then I'll give you married people's quarters. Now I guess there's some other people waitin' on me, so you'd better make up your mind quick, or get out."

Jones stared at the clerk, wondering if he should not immediately resent his peremptory manner of disposing of Samuel Josiah Jones, but Mackenzie took him aside and explained to him that by an ordinance issued some time before, in obedience to the outraged moral sentiments of America, it was made compulsory that only married men and women should live together in the Zone. "It is a hard rule," said Mackenzie, "an' a lot of people only form that they married. The Americans don't bother them, unless they can't help it. But if them find it out, an' have to take notice, there is a big fine. That's why I warn you in time. P'rhaps you better married you' sweetheart, an' get a comfortable little house in the Zone, like a lot of other Jamaica people."

"Me?" said Jones. "I let a man force me to marry if I don't want to do it? No, me brother! It's an infringement of the rights of the subject, that's what I call it! I have a good mind to go back to that man an' tell him I am a British subject an' born under the English flag!"

"That's what a lot of people from Jamaica is always sayin' here," replied Mackenzie dryly. "Only, some of them say they're a British object."

"An' what the Americans do?" inquired Jones anxiously.

"Laugh at them, an' say them don't care what sort of object Jamaicans are. You don't bluff out an American easy in this place, Jones. Them don't talk

a lot like we do in Jamaica ; wid some of them it is a word an' a blow, an' a blow first if you cheek them too much."

" You don't mean to tell me that them ill-treat a man down here ? " asked Jones, beginning to feel alarmed.

" No ; not if you don't interfere wid them. There is plenty of law in the Zone, like in Jamaica. If you mind you' own business, do you' work, an' keep you'self to you'self, you will be perfectly all right. But of course if you abuse them, an' go about an' talk all the time about you are a British subject, some of them will hurt you. You meet some of the toughest men in the world down here. I don't know where them come from ! "

" This is a funny place, me friend ! " cried Jones indignantly. " They don't seem to care about a man's feelings at all. If I was a married man now, what that American say or do would not affect my peace of mind ; but I am not a married man. An' yet I don't like the prospective view of livin' in Colon, an' I can't leave Sue to live by herself. You don't think she could come with me as me cousin ? "

Mackenzie explained that the Canal Zone authorities drew the line sternly at unmarried cousins.

" Well, in that case Sue an' me will have to live in Colon, an' the Americans can keep their house. What am I to do now ? "

Mackenzie advised him to report himself at the railway machine shop without delay, and propose to turn in to work the next morning. They would allow him time to get quarters in Colon. He, Mackenzie,

was on vacation this week, and would help Jones to find a suitable apartment in a decent part of the town.

Together they went to the machine shop, where Jones beheld in one great building more engines than he had ever seen in his life. They were of all sizes, from the diminutive engines used on soft ground or for conveying materials to the workmen, to the giant locomotives that could pull any number of laden freight cars at high speed. Hundreds of men were at work in this place repairing the engines, the air resounded with the clangour of hammers striking on hard metal, the workers swarmed under and around the iron monsters as though they were ants. Jones was impressed. Here was something he could understand: this mere collection of railway machinery told him, as nothing else could have done, that the building of the Panama Canal was a stupendous undertaking. He allowed Mackenzie to do most of the talking for him, and it was agreed that he should not report himself for service until eight o'clock on the following morning.

This matter settled, they went back to Susan, who had managed to procure some breakfast in the meantime; then the three of them set out on the hunt for a large apartment. The rain, having temporarily exhausted its energies during the night, was not falling now, indeed Mackenzie thought that there wouldn't be much rain that day. It was gloomy enough overhead, but here and there the clouds had broken, allowing tiny patches of muddy blue to be seen. Colon was wet; but, compared with its condition on the day before, it might almost be said that Colon was

bright. The people moving about were in cheerful spirits. Susan herself began to feel lively.

Through the assistance of Mackenzie they secured an apartment in Cash Street, at reasonable terms. Cash Street, probably originally so called on account of its poverty, ran in an east and west direction, was the third long thoroughfare behind Front Street, and therefore was near to the water-front and in the very heart of the populous town. There were numerous cross-streets in Colon, running in a north and south direction and indicated by numbers; the house in which Susan was to live was situated at the corner of one of these crossings: 6th Street it was called. It was a new building, three storeys high, all of wood, with very wide verandas, and painted a bright pink. The ground floor or first storey was devoted to commerce; there a haberdashery shop, a barber's saloon, and a flourishing public-house found accommodation, and all these businesses did a thriving trade. Susan selected a corner room on the second storey, a room opening on a veranda six feet wide and commanding a view of Cash and 6th Streets. Her inspection of the premises showed her that privacy—even such limited privacy as the poorest might enjoy in Kingston—was not appreciated here. For the tenants kept their doors wide open and were singularly indifferent as to who should see them or what they might be seen doing, while it was as easy to gaze into the apartments of the houses opposite and watch the inmates going about their intimate household duties. She noticed too that the people living in the apartments near hers spoke English. As a matter of fact many

of the tenants in this house were British West Indians.

The room engaged, they started out on another important errand, and again Mackenzie was of great assistance. He took them to a furniture shop, where Susan selected a "set" [suite] of furniture, which was to be sent to her new address at once. The salesman, being a Chinaman, did not imagine that "at once" signified some time in the indefinite future, hence the furniture arrived at its destination soon after its purchasers did. It did not take long to arrange it as Susan directed; this done, the men went for the trunks which Susan and Jones had taken with them to the lodging near the swamps the night before. These trunks contained not only clothing but some domestic linen, or, to be accurate, some domestic calico, and while the men were away Susan bought a couple of small iron stoves, a few plates, and some other things which a good housekeeper must have. She learnt that the cooking and the washing must be done on the veranda or in the open courtyard below, which was always wet and could be stared into by all the people passing by. She decided for the veranda. In the courtyard, in addition to washtubs and cooking-stoves, were quite a number of babies ranging from six months to five years of age, and all stark naked, in accordance with the prevailing fashion of tropical Spanish America. To naked babies she was not accustomed. So she resolutely set her face against the courtyard.

She would not have the men go out for lunch that day. She provided it at home, and as she had a turn

for cooking, it was a very good meal that she placed before them in about an hour's time. She provided coffee also, with a view to preventing Samuel from indulging in whisky or beer; and as the men gulped down the hot, fragrant liquid and puffed at their cigars, a feeling of contentment stole over them and they gave vocal expression to their appreciation of Susan as a housewife.

She was satisfied. Her discontent of the night before had vanished. Possessed of a new "set of furniture," which was better than the things she had been obliged to sell in Jamaica, settled in a busy part of the town and fairly far from the noisome swamps, with Mackenzie also as a good friend ready to aid them with his advice and to put himself to some trouble on their account, she felt that her fate was by no means an unpleasant one. "We not going to batter about from pillar to post any more," she observed to Jones when lunch was over. "We are comfortable here." And, to crown her happiness, when Jones and Mackenzie were preparing to go out that evening, they invited her to go with them.

They did not return home until ten o'clock that night; in the interval Susan had seen as much of Colon as she cared to see, and that was nearly all of it. They dined out. They walked about the streets, Mackenzie conducting the party; they hired a cab and drove along Front Street and through Christobal, and the glitter of glass and lights in the open bars, the crowds that gambled at cards and dice and dominoes in these places, the shops, which kept their

doors open to a late hour, appealed to Susan, and even more to Jones, with a peculiar fascination.

Here what was done in public by people unashamed, could only take place behind closed doors in Jamaica. Here the people had money to spend, and spent it freely. Here there were contradictions and anomalies which were nevertheless enjoyable. At the corner of a street, in a chapel built entirely of any old bits of board, a self-ordained preacher from Jamaica held forth to a small congregation on the error of their ways, though his ways did not differ from theirs in any essential particular. Opposite to this building was a merry-go-round in full swing and abundantly patronized. On the other side of the street, on the second storey of a high tenement structure, a dance was in progress, the guests footing it to the sound given forth by an execrable band; at a little distance away a moving-picture palace invited with flaring posters the lovers of silent drama to come within and be stewed in a steam bath provided by corrugated iron and the climate of Colon.

From this spot a walk of two minutes brought them to Christobal, and there they could see dimly the huge concrete piers jutting out into the sea—the piers which grew day by day and which were designed to accommodate easily the largest vessels in the world. It was quiet here: listening, they could hear the cocoa-nut palms moving their long fronds if ever so slight a breath of wind stirred, and the long waves of the Caribbean dash and break eternally on the coral shores of Colon.

Soon they turned their backs on Christobal, and a

leisurely stroll of ten or twelve minutes brought them nearly to the opposite end of the little island, now artificially connected with the mainland, on which Colon and Christobal were built. At this part of Colon there was a park, quite new—a park with paths and seats, little fountains, evergreen shrubs, flowering hibiscus, and banana trees. They sat here for a little while, chatting about Jamaica and the life they had lived there, and after that Mackenzie bade his new friends good night and they went home.

Susan was happy. This day had been so different from the previous one.

CHAPTER IV

THE FLY IN THE OINTMENT

JONES went to work the next day, and as he was a competent man he had no trouble with the workmen of superior grade or the bosses of the shop, who were all white men. He was pleasantly surprised to find that these bosses were quite easy in their manner, speaking in a friendly and encouraging fashion to the men who were under them. They were far more familiar during working hours than any Englishman in their position would have been in Jamaica. Later on he added to his experience. Whereas the Englishman would have recognized him outside of the shop, and would even have been affable, his American chief did not seem to be aware of his existence after work was over. Jones did not think that this was at all correct.

But the pay here was nearly double what it was in Jamaica, and the work was not so hard. Jones was too loyal to concede, even to himself, that any American could be a better worker or organizer than an Englishman. But he liked the eight-hour day of the Zone workshops and the liberal wages. He felt too that he deserved these things. He deserved

them in his character of British subject and by virtue of being Samuel Josiah Jones.

In the meantime Susan was picking up some acquaintances. This was not difficult; she had money to spend; and as she lived in an apartment of a distinctly decent type, she was regarded as a desirable person to know by young women of more or less her own class. Some of these she had known in Jamaica, but had lost sight of for quite a long time. These young women were either married or "engaged," and their menfolk were all in fairly good positions.

What with visiting one another, going to church on Sundays when so inclined, taking chances in the National Lottery, and gathering at the park on those nights when the National Band insisted upon playing, Susan and her friends passed their days pleasantly. Those who could obtain a girl from Jamaica had a very easy time of it; but in a country where the men outnumbered the women no girl remained a servant for long. Even so, Susan found that she could send some of her washing to the laundry, and could easily wash and iron the lighter things at home. Cooking she liked, and she could make her own clothes. Samuel was generous, and now that she knew Colon she found that the cost of living need not be very high if one did not wish to be extravagant. She saved money.

But she had one trouble that grew as the weeks went on. After his first few days in Colon, Samuel had begun to leave her every night, and sometimes he did not return until eleven or twelve o'clock. She was of a jealous disposition: one night she followed him. She tracked him to a café near by,

where he played for money with some other men. He had fallen in with a few of the wilder spirits of the town, but as these men played fair and he was clever at cards, he won more often than he lost. This encouraged him to continue, and sometimes he would come home with as much as ten dollars more than he had taken out with him. He was always a little tipsy then, and disposed to contend loudly that Panama was the finest country in the world.

She rated him bitterly at times, and always took good care to subtract a portion of his winnings, which she put away in some place where he could not easily get at it. But he minded the loss far less than her nagging; he would have given her the money for the asking. When she upbraided him he would bark back at her and swear to leave her if she did not behave herself. But this threat disturbed her not at all; she knew he did not mean it. The next night, however, he would go to meet his comrades again.

Mackenzie was a frequent visitor, and Mackenzie made no secret of his liking for Susan. He even went so far, once or twice, as to remonstrate with Jones about his leaving her so much to herself at nights. But Jones was glad when Mackenzie came to see them, for that gave him the opportunity of pointing out to Susan that, with friends of both sexes coming to see her, she should not complain of neglect. Susan welcomed Mackenzie always: she could talk to him freely about the shortcomings of Sam, and he habitually sympathized with her. It was he, too, who had first begun to address her as Mrs. Jones

in company, an example which was speedily followed by some of her less intimate acquaintances. His tact flattered Susan.

There were nights when Jones did not leave the house before eight o'clock; on those occasions, if Mackenzie happened to be there, Jones would pour into his ear a long recital of his grievances; and, as Mackenzie was not much of a talker, Samuel had an attentive if somewhat amused audience. Jones now pretended to a fine contempt for all things American, and as the colour line was somewhat strictly drawn in Christobal he was moved to frequent protests when supported by his friends. He objected to white men being better paid than coloured men, to there being separate white and coloured quarters in the Zone, and to the Americans not permitting coloured people to attend their sports. One evening he especially enlarged upon these grievances to Mackenzie. Mackenzie making no comment, Jones was nettled. He put a question pointedly. "What do you think of all these differences?" he asked.

"Well," answered Mackenzie deliberately, "this place don't belong to we. It belong to the Americans, an' I am quite satisfied if I get a chance to earn a good bread from them."

Jones snorted contemptuously, despising such prudence.

"I couldn't earn as much in Jamaica as I earn here," Mackenzie continued, "an' the same is true of everybody who come to Panama. Then what is the use of complaining? I do me work, an' go to me own sports, an' I don't care what de Americans

U.S. Jones or
Racism

so long as them pay me an' don't interfere with me after workin' time. That is the only way to get on when you not in you' own country."

Jones felt the rebuke conveyed in Mackenzie's homely remarks. He was further disconcerted when Susan expressed her agreement with their friend.

"You right, Mr. Mac," she said sharply. "If people did mind them own business, an' didn't go out gamblin' every night, it would 'elp them better than interfering wid what don't concern them. All that Jamaica people know to do is to say that the Americans don't treat them good. Then what them come here for? If you know you goin' to find fault, you better stay home. I don't want to go where the American people don't want me. If I was in me own country it would be different; but I am foreign, an' I can't expect everything me own way."

Mackenzie looked pleased when he heard his opinions thus openly appreciated. Jones looked still more disdainful.

"There is no accounting for diverse tastes," he remarked loftily. "I read one time in a book that if you bray a pig in a motor he will return to his wallow, and though present company is always exceptional I must beg to convey my entire dissension from the opinions that present company have expressed. These Americans are a rude set of men, an' I don't temporize with them. But, of course, if some people like to be treated like a dog, they can continue to put up with it."

Mackenzie frowned and would have answered, but Susan was before him.

“ You goin’ to be rude to Mr. Mac now, after all his kindness to us ? ” she asked tartly, and Jones, who guessed that Mackenzie, for all his placid exterior, was a man who could not be insulted with impunity, denied that he had any such intention. He informed Susan that he had known Mackenzie for years, whereas she had only known him for months, and that he would not allow any female to suggest that he could think of insulting so firm and tried a friend as Mac. Susan was satisfied with this speech, and Mackenzie was glad not to be compelled to take offence. He did not want his friendship with Susan and her lover to end abruptly. A few minutes afterwards the two men went out quite amicably together.

On another occasion—Jones had now been four months in Panama—he complained of the difficulty which every one experienced of saving money in that country.

“ You can save if you really want to,” was Mackenzie’s reply. “ I know plenty of men who send money home to Jamaica regular. Some things is dear, but if you are economical you don’t need to buy dear things all the time.”

“ You are warm you’self, eh, Mr. Mac ? ” asked Susan, who had a great respect for the power of money, and no little curiosity concerning those who possessed it.

“ So-so,” he replied, smiling. “ I save a little when I was in Jamaica, an’ I been working steady in the Zone for about four years. Them pay me pretty well, an’ I don’t spend all I earn.”

"I don't believe in living mean," was Jones's remark, which he strove to make appear as a statement applicable only to himself and his inclinations, but which Mackenzie knew was intended as a reflection on the disposition and habits of John Mackenzie. On this occasion, too, Susan took him up sharply.

"It's not living mean to try an' save money," she snapped. "Fools make feast for wise man to come an' eat. An' when you spend out all you' money an' don't 'ave one farthing to rub against another, you will begin to say, 'I wish I did know.' Better you save what you 'ave, than cry when you don't 'ave it."

Jones made no reply to this, but sulked a little. He was beginning to dislike Mackenzie and his prudence and his sensible way of looking upon life. Mackenzie was embodied criticism, eloquent even in his silence, and no man likes a critic on his hearth. And though Jones did not think that Susan had any particular liking for Mackenzie, yet her agreement with that person's remarks, especially when those remarks were intended as a sort of rebuke to Samuel Josiah Jones, annoyed him more and more every day. He was no longer pleased when Mackenzie came to see them. He avoided Mackenzie now.

✓
Bchism
between
Jones +
Mackenzie
now keenly
felt.

CHAPTER V
THE SUBSCRIPTION PARTY

ONE afternoon Susan was sitting alone in her apartment when the door was abruptly pushed open and three young women, friends of hers, rushed in. They were so excited that they did not even trouble to apologize for their unceremonious entrance.

"This is a business visit!" exclaimed the first, who appeared to act as leader of the others. "We come wid a written invite to a subscription dance that some gentlemen givin' next week Wednesday at Mrs. Driscole house."

"You don't tell me!" cried Susan, delighted with the prospect of something new.

"Yes, see the invite; read it for you'self," said her friend, shoving into Susan's hand an open envelope containing a gilt-edged card with letters of gold, which Susan hastily pulled out and perused.

The invitation was addressed to

MISS SUSAN PROUDLEIGH
and
S. J. JONES, ESQ.

and set forth that "A unique entertainment in the form of a refined dance will take place (D.V.) at

Mrs. Driscolé's establishment. Your attendance is earnestly requested: subscription, two and a half dollars for males, ladies free if brought by gentlemen. Refreshments will be provided; subscriptions payable three days in advance. Only ladies and gentlemen will be admitted: R.S.V.P."

The card was signed by four persons describing themselves as "The Dance Committee," and Susan read it over three times with pleasure. It was the most stylish thing in the way of invitations that had yet come her way, and she argued from the elegant appearance of the invitation card, as well as from the amount of the subscription asked, that the dance would be a very high-class affair indeed.

"Lots of people goin'?" she asked, and the leader of the girls promptly answered:

"Any amount. Invitations post to all parts of the Zone, an' some young men as far as Empire coming on Wednesday. I take six to deliver meself, an' I bring yours. You will come?"

"I will try an' get Sam to bring me," said Susan; "I would really like to come."

Then the young women departed to invite other ladies to the dance, and the next day, after talking over the matter with Jones, Susan sent ten shillings to the Dance Committee.

She was glad of the coming diversion. Mackenzie had been removed some three weeks before to Culebra, some forty miles away "up the line," and Samuel still persisted in spending his evenings with his gaming companions. She could go out when she pleased, and this she often did, but she was now bitterly dis-

contented with Jones. She could not accuse him of positive unkindness, and he was as generous as ever. But she felt that he neglected her, and this she resented. He readily consented to go with her to the dance, however, which pleased her greatly.

Wednesday evening came in due time, and she and Samuel started out early for the dance. It happened to be a fine evening, for Colon; it was warm, but had not rained for a couple of days. There was a moon visible, and a clear blue sky. In spite of these weather conditions Samuel insisted upon driving to Mrs. Driscole's in a cab, explaining as his reason that it was absolutely necessary to "do the thing in style."

Mrs. Driscole lived in Bolivar Street, where she made a mysterious living by providing for the amusement of her fellow-creatures. Her floor was at the disposal of anyone with money enough to pay for its use; to-night it was to be utilized by the Dance Committee and their guests, and she had pulled down a partition and thrown two rooms into one, which formed a dance-hall of fairly large size. In this and in two of the adjoining rooms the guests were rapidly assembling when Susan and Jones arrived. Dark ladies clothed in dresses of pink and white and blue, their well-combed hair plaited tightly and tied with white or pink ribbon, their necks and arms laden with silver and even golden ornaments; swarthy gentlemen, some in tweed suits, the more punctilious (and these were not a few) in regulation dress-suits—these formed quite a merry, laughing crowd. Many knew one another. Strangers were formally introduced, then immediately afterwards

introduced themselves, and the ceremony proceeded in this fashion :

" Mr. Smith, Miss Brown ; Miss Brown, Mr. Smith."

" Glad to meet you, Miss Brown. My name is Ezekiel Smith."

" The same I am glad to meet you, Mr. Smith ; my name is Rosabella Brown."

Then they would shake hands politely, and Mr. Smith, or whoever the gentleman might be, would invariably declare that this was the hottest night he had ever known, an opinion with which the lady would invariably agree.

Susan glanced round the ball-room as she entered, her eyes lighting up as she saw so many gaily-dressed people. The room was decorated ; the musicians were tuning their instruments. Jones whispered to her that he would shortly return, and went to join some men whom he knew. Susan just then caught sight of the girl who had brought her the invitation, and started to go over to speak to her. Half-way across the room she halted suddenly as a young man turned and looked, surprised, into her face.

" Susan ! "

" Tom ! "

Thus they greeted one another. Then Susan put out her hand, which Tom shook lightly.

" I knew you was in Colon," he said at once, but speaking quietly. " You' sister, Catherine, write me last week to answer a letter I write you about a month ago, an' which she open an' read. She said you leave Kingston with a young man named Jones, an'

that you only write them once since you leave home. Susan, you think you treat me fair ? ”

“ What you mean by if I treat you fair ? ” she asked, almost hissing the words. “ From the time you leave home till the time I come to Colon, you ever send anything for me ? You only write me one letter, an’ you surely couldn’t expect me to live on wind in Jamaica ? If I didn’t come here wid Jones, I might have been dead of starvation by this time.”

Everybody was talking and laughing, and the musicians still were coercing their instruments into the proper pitch of musical perfection. But Susan was uneasy lest they should be overheard.

Her answer staggered Tom for a second or two, but he put the question that had been in his mind ever since he had heard from Catherine : “ Well, what you goin’ t’ do now ? ”

“ Do ? What you expect me to do ? ” was her answer.

He hesitated as to his reply, and she saved him the trouble of replying.

“ See here,” she said ; “ let us understand one another this same time. I don’t want you to make any trouble here between me and Jones, for I not leavin’ him to come to you. Y’u leave me alone in Jamaica, though I beg you hard to bring me wid you. I come here with another young man, who pay me passage an’ been supporting me all the time I am here, an’ so what was between you an’ me is dead an’ gone. I don’t want no sort of confusion here now. Y’u hear ? ”

Tom Wooley heard and his heart was as water.

He subsided, not finding words with which to blame the fickle fair. He had been cruelly used; he felt sure of that. But he knew that he might be still more cruelly used, and by Jones, who, if he might lack Susan's sharp tongue, might more than make up for that disadvantage by his hard fists. Thomas Wooley was a man of peace when sober, and by no means belligerent when drunk. So he merely answered, "Yes, Susan," and asked her to point out Jones to him.

That gentleman had already noticed the whispered conference between the two, and was actually going up to them when Tom made his humble request. Susan decided that the best thing to do was to introduce them, and this she did, remarking at the same time that Tom was a friend of her family, and had been very kind to her parents.

As Samuel Josiah heard the name, he remembered what Mother Smith had told him about Tom and Susan on the night before he left Kingston for Colon. The story had long since passed out of his mind. Now also he recalled what his friend, Professor, had said about the case in which Susan had figured, and he observed that Susan was anxious to speak of Tom as a sort of casual friend. Tom Wooley was short, so Jones looked down upon him. And from the lofty standpoint of physical as well as intellectual and financial superiority he condescendingly addressed the young man who had once been Susan's lover.

"How is it I never see you in Colon before?" was his question.

"I workin' up the line," said Tom—"at Pedro

Miguel. But I used to be in Colon, an' as I get an invitation to the dance, I come."

"I see," said Jones; "well, come an' have a drink, Mr. Wooley, which is the best thing we can do when we boys meet together from Jamaica."

Tom accepted the invitation. Susan heard and was delighted. She was certain that Tom would say nothing about their old relations in Jamaica, and she was equally certain that Jones could know nothing of those relations. Again, she felt, her luck was in the ascendant. Then some one touched her on the arm, and, turning, she saw Mackenzie.

The two moved quickly to a corner of the room, for the dancers were now preparing to begin a waltz. Mackenzie explained that he had received an invitation to this party, and almost at the last moment had accepted, thinking that Susan would probably be there. He had come over to Colon by a late train. "Sam don't seem to like me much now," he remarked; "that's why I don't take a run over on a Sunday to see both of you, though I find it sort of lonely up at Culebra."

Then he asked her to dance, and she consented, and they joined the slowly whirling groups.

The room was terribly warm. Although the windows were all wide open, no breath of wind was stirring that night, and the movements of the dancers in the crowded "ball-room" caused the perspiration to stream from their faces and drench their bodies. Only West Indians would have found pleasure in dancing under such circumstances, and even these felt the discomfort of the heat after a time.

“ Lord ! it hot ! ” panted a fat lady as she bounded across the room—they were now dancing a set of lancers. “ I suffocate,” giggled a thin creature, as a burly fellow clasped her to his breast. But still the musicians played with undiminished energy, and still the dancers danced. And the stamping of feet upon the floor ceased only when one dance was at an end and a new set was being formed.

Tom had two drinks with Jones, and then returned to the dancing-hall, where he stationed himself against a wall, watching Susan and reflecting on his forlorn state. Those two drinks had reduced him to a maudlin condition, and just then his loss appeared to him as the one calamity of the world, though he had managed to bear it with equanimity since leaving Jamaica. Jones had also returned, had danced once with Susan and once with another lady, and then had adjourned to the refreshment-room, where, on a long table surrounded by chairs, stood a number of bottles containing various liquors, and some huge dishes filled with ham, beef, and chicken sandwiches. A few men were seated round this table, and these Jones joined. Conversation ensued, and this, probably because of the drink imbibed, soon turned to topics connected with their old life in Jamaica. Being Jamaicans, these men had grievances. Being British subjects, their grievances were against the Jamaica Government.

“ De Jamaica Government don't take enough care of we,” observed a heavy-looking man, who, when in Jamaica, had displayed extraordinary ingenuity in evading the payment of his taxes. “ We 'ave no pro-

tection in dis place, an' so these foreigners here can treat a Jamaican like a dawg."

"Thet is a fact," agreed a dapper little fellow who sported eyeglasses, and who was a clerk in one of the mercantile houses of Colon (he had been a lawyer's clerk in Kingston). "There is no protection here whatever. A man's rights are not regarded. The labourers are badly treated and have no redress. Representations should at once be made to the British Government about the Jamaica Government, who are neglectful. It is my intention to write to the Jamaica papers in *re* the matter."

Jones at once recognized in this speaker a man of distinguished ability. He asked him to have a drink with him, and then made his contribution to the conversation.

"You are right," he said. "There is no justice or jurisprudence in this place. I am a British subject, but it's no use a man going to the British Consul here, for he don't even want to listen to you.

"It's more than hard," he continued reflectively. "A man can't get a good job in his own country, an' when he come to a God-forsaken foreign land he has no protection at all. In Jamaica you have to die of starvation, an' here you lucky if you don't die of neglect."

"In Jamaica it is only taxes you hear about all de time," said the heavy-looking man. (All his remarks invariably gravitated towards the subject of taxation.) "The Gov'nment don't care what become of you so long as them can get the taxes. It's a shame!

"Look what them do wid a man down here. I live

out at Gatun an' them won't even let me keep a female helpmeet in a respectable way. Them want me to married! Now don't you see that if the Jamaica Government did look after us as it should, all that sort of advantage couldn't be take of a man?"

"Yes," assented Jones. "I have a female meself, an' I have to live in Colon because they won't let her come to Christobal. They put me to any amount of expense, all for the sake of form."

"The thruth of the matter," observed the erstwhile lawyer's clerk, is this: "the American methods are conducive to immorality. If a man leaves his gurl in Colon, how is he to know that some other fellow is not going after her?" He put the question with an air of conviction. He himself had a great reputation for gallantry, and might be supposed to be speaking from experience.

"You know, you are right!" exclaimed Jones, staring at him with semi-drunken gravity. This aspect of the situation had apparently not occurred to him before. Now, however, it began to loom large in his muddled brain. He grew indignant. He voiced an imaginary wrong. "Fancy," he cried, "just fancy a man working hard all day an' supporting a female in comfort an' proficiency, and another man goin' to the house in the daytime an' enjoying himself at my expense!" He foresaw himself being wronged, all through the neglect of the British Government and the faulty methods of the Canal Administration.

"Ah!" sighed the ex-lawyer's clerk sympathetically, "a man has a lot to put up with in this country. He cannot be too careful. What I say,

The advantage that the Jamaica govt doesn't even have is having to money

gentlemen, is: don't trust any wemen, not even you' own mother."

This advice strongly appealed to Jones. It inspired him with a desire to be vigilant. That young man, Tom Wooley, who was even now in the dancing-hall where Susan was—what base designs might he not be harbouring against the domestic peace of Samuel Josiah Jones? He had been warned against Susan. Her friendliness towards Tom was apparent. Yes, he was not being treated fairly, he was sure of it; neither the Government of Jamaica nor Susan was treating him fairly. He became suddenly angry. "Gents," he said, rising, "I have enjoyed you' company, but a man must protect himself. An advantage is being taken of poor Samuel. I must go inside an' look after me rights."

The heavy man nodded a solemn acquiescence, and Jones, with lurching steps, proceeded to the dancing-hall, where the dancers were now clapping their hands and stamping their feet in a perfect ecstasy of enjoyment.

CHAPTER VI

JONES DEMONSTRATES

JONES entered the room with a stride that was intended to be impressive. Unhappily, the one or two persons who observed it merely laughed, and this did not tend to sweeten his temper. He glared round the room, and presently saw Susan dancing with some one he did not know; his eyes searched the company again. He was looking for Tom; the desire uppermost in his mind just then was once and for all to prevent that young man from ever thinking of Susan in the light of a lover, or even as a friend. "This thing got to stop at once," he muttered. "I must demonstrate."

What he intended to do, precisely what steps he proposed to take to banish all amorous thoughts or conjugal ambitions from the mind of the offending Tom Wooley, he did not know himself. He was perfectly satisfied that just then he was bent upon the accomplishment of an utterly heroic task; something had to be done and he was the man to do it. He smiled proudly as he thought of his entire devotion to duty. His eyes soon found the man he was looking for.

Tom was still leaning against the wall, and still engaged in following Susan's movements with re-

proachful glances. The influence of those two drinks was upon him still, and he too imagined that he presented a romantic figure, that his appearance at that moment constituted an eloquent appeal even to hard-hearted Sue. She had seen him all the time without appearing to do so. Now and then her upper lip curled with conscious contempt. Susan had no respect for the lover sighing like a furnace; such a man was "too soft," in her opinion.

It happened that Jones caught sight of Tom at a moment when the latter's gaze was more than usually ardent. Susan was whirling by her ex-intended at the moment, and her eyes caught his; the next moment she was a couple of yards away. But Jones saw what he instantly believed to be an exchange of meaning glances. Straightway he became convinced that a most dishonest plot was being hatched against his domestic happiness.

Nothing could, in his opinion, surpass the dignity with which, to the intense amazement and confusion of the dancers, he strode across the room towards where Tom was standing. He shouldered the men aside, brushed the women away as if they did not count, disturbed and brought to an abrupt termination the dancing, and so, of course, aroused the ire of a score of persons at once. Notwithstanding his tremendous dignity, he found the maintenance of his equilibrium a task of exceeding difficulty; he could not for the life of him understand why the floor was so uneven and why the electric lights would persist in moving out of place. Nevertheless he succeeded in planting himself before Tom, and then, with por-

tentious solemnity, and unheeding the indignant wonder of the guests, he addressed his rival.

"Mr. Wooley," said he, "I don't want no quarrel to mar the felicity of this festivity; but I shall have to interrogate you on one point: where did y'u know Susan from?"

Tom was startled, both by the question put to him and by the attitude of the questioner. At the moment his mind was unpleasantly dominated by a sense of Jones's height and strength. He discreetly answered, "From home."

"I know you must know her from home," replied Jones severely, "for I am not a fool, though you seem to take me for one. But . . . but that is not the question. The position is this: what did you have to do wid her at home?"

Tom realized that it might not be safe to tell the truth. He hurriedly explained that he had known Susan casually, through her being a friend of his sister—a being of hitherto unknown existence.

"But how," persisted Jones, with a cunning leer, "how if she was only an acquaintance through you' sister, you could take such a interest in her parents? She didn't tell me anything about you' sister a little while ago. An' a man like you isn't going to be friendly with old people for nothing."

Tom saw that his questioner was trying to trap him, that Jones entertained suspicions which evasive answers might only inflame. Tom noticed too that an astonished group had gathered round them, and that the men especially did not seem to be kindly disposed towards Jones. He became defiant.

“What right have you to ask me any question about meself?” he demanded, endeavouring at the same time to edge away from Jones.

“What right I have?” asked Jones, as if the question were an act of high treason. “What right I have? Well! What right have you to be here? That is what I got to know to-night. Y’u think I didn’t see you when you was whispering to Susan before she introduce your miserable carcass to me? What right I have to ask you any question? I will soon tell you! Come outside an’ let me beat the skin off you’ body! Come outside and let me gyrate upon your personality! I will show you the difference between me and a—a——” But here Samuel Josiah lost the thread of his speech, and could not remember the comparison he wished to institute. Nothing, however, would satisfy him but that Tom should immediately proceed outside to undergo corporal punishment, and as Mr. Wooley firmly declined that invitation, Jones abruptly grabbed him by his shirt collar, proposing to remove him by sheer force.

This of course was the signal for an uproar. A dozen men sprang forward to drag Jones away; the women shrieked in fright; Susan, terror-struck at the attitude of Jones, uttered the word which rose so easily to the lips of all frightened Jamaican women—“Murder!” A peremptory rap at the outer door, followed by the tramp of feet, was the immediate answer to the clamour and exclamation.

Jones, confused, and, if the truth must be told, not a little frightened himself, stared around him in

bewilderment. Tom, seeing so many friends at his side, became heroically valiant and manfully glared at his foe from behind an impregnable barricade of two strong men. But his look of defiance gave place to one of fear when three diminutive-looking persons entered the room. They were dressed in the uniform of the Panamanian policia.

The insignificant size of these policemen gave no indication of their ferocity when roused to anger. They had been feeling of late that it was incumbent upon them to do something which should show how thoroughly they realized their obligation to maintain law and order. They had heard the cry of "murder," they knew it came from Mrs. Driscole's house. At once they determined to make an example of her and of some of her guests, being moved to that moral determination by the certainty of the prisoners being able to pay to the Republic a fine, and of Mrs. Driscole herself effecting a compromise with them in so far as her share in the disorder was concerned.

The moment the guests caught sight of the policemen, they rapidly made a lane through which the little men could advance towards the offenders. It is regrettable to relate that so anxious were one or two of the company to escape even the appearance of evil that they did not hesitate to point out Jones and Tom as the culprits to the preservers of the peace.

The two young men were sensible enough not to make any effort to move or to resist, being aware of the Panamanian policemen's habit of arguing with their clubs instead of with words. As for Mrs. Driscole, she appeared on the scene, fat, trembling, obsequious,

and protesting volubly in broken Spanish that she was innocent of any intention of breaking the laws of the Republic. As she implored the policemen to come back the next day, so as to give her the opportunity of proving her innocence, they left her alone. They knew she would be able to offer substantial proof (*in specie*) of her ignorance of any crime with which she might be charged. But they had already found Jones and Tom guilty, and so they motioned them towards the door with some not very gentle prods from their clubs.

This indignity brought tears to the eyes of Jones. Only in the last resort would a Jamaica policeman have ventured to enter a private house when a dance was going on. And the most he would have done, in the absence of visible wounds, would have been to take the names of the proprietor and the parties accused of disturbing the peace. Yet here was he, Samuel Josiah Jones, being dragged off to gaol by men he would have laughed at in Jamaica!

In his excitement he completely forgot Susan, who was at that moment almost frantic with terror. She knew nothing about Panamanian law, and, of course, feared the worst. Sam might be sent to prison without the option of a fine; she herself might be arrested as the first cause of the quarrel. It was Mackenzie who came to her rescue. He had not interfered with the young men; he had been keeping his eye on Susan all the time. When Tom and Jones had been taken away he went up to her. "You better come home," he said.

When they got outside, she broke down completely.

"You think him will go to prison, Mr. Mac?" she asked, between her sobs.

"Prison? what for?" said Mackenzie. "Them can only fine him to-morrow; that's all."

"But what about his job?" said Susan, who never quite lost sight of the financial aspect of any question.

"His job is all right," Mackenzie replied. "What happen in Colon don't concern the people in de Zone."

"Then I don't too sorry him gone to the calaboose," said Susan spitefully. "Him is always boasting 'bout thinking him can do what him like! To-night will teach him a good lesson."

"Jones have no lesson to learn, Miss Sue," said Mackenzie sententiously. "He is a young man that will always get himself in trouble. Him talk too much. What did he want to fight the other young man for to-night?"

"Because I did know Tom from home," replied Susan.

"You was friendly wid him?" asked Mackenzie bluntly.

"Yes."

"Did Jones know?"

"No; I will tell you why I didn't tell him."

She told Mackenzie quite truthfully all about Tom.

"There was no occasion for Sam to go on like that to-night," she added in conclusion; "I wasn't goin' to 'ave anything to do with Tom. I am not that sort of gurl, Mr. Mac; if I have one intended I stick to him. But Sam not behaving himself now, an' I going back home to Jamaica."

They had arrived at her home, Afraid to be left

alone, yet also fearing that if Mackenzie went in with her there might be some talk about it amongst the neighbours of a suspicious turn of mind, she stopped and hesitated.

"It is late," said Mackenzie, "but I want to have a talk with you, so I will come in for a little." After this, of course, she could say nothing.

"You mean to tell me," he said, as he sat down, "that Jones not goin' on no better than before?"

"No, Mr. Mac; him gamble too much, an' stay out late every night. He won't hear what I say to him at all."

"What you goin' to do?"

"I make up me mind. I am goin' back to Jamaica."

He was silent for the space of a minute. Then:

"Instead of goin' back, why don't you get married?" he asked.

The proposal was made so simply—for Susan understood it as such quite well—that it took her breath away. She knew that Mackenzie liked her, but it had never occurred to her that he would ever want to marry her. He had been a good friend, but had never shown any sentiment; he had even tried to induce Jones to keep in her good graces. Now that she had said that she was returning to Jamaica (though, in spite of her emphatic words, she was not at all sure that she meant it)—only now did Mackenzie reveal his innermost feelings.

She was surprised. Confused too, for she did not quite know what answer to give. She began picking at an end of her handkerchief with her teeth, while she revolved in her mind this strange, unexpected

turn of events. Marriage meant a great deal to her. It would give her position, security . . . and she had more than sufficient excuse for leaving Jones.

Nevertheless she hesitated to agree. Mackenzie was fully twice her age. She liked him as a friend, not as she had liked Samuel; and marriage—that was very different from an engagement.

“If you go back to Jamaica, what y’u going to do?” Mackenzie asked, seeing that she could not make up her mind.

“I don’t know,” she answered frankly.

Mackenzie was well aware of the importance of the proposal he had made. It was much to offer marriage to Susan, for though she was good-looking and a capable housewife, and would easily find some one to take care of her if she deserted Jones and remained in Panama, there were not many men in his position who might be willing to marry her. And if she returned to Jamaica her chances of a comfortable living would not be many. But he also knew that Jones was a much younger man than he, a more dashing kind of man; and perhaps Susan would prefer another of the same type, even though he might not offer her marriage. He, Mackenzie, however, would not break his heart if Susan refused him. There was not much passion in his composition.

Susan remembered how Jones had promised to marry her, and then had broken his promise. She had never quite forgiven him that. Then the habit of drinking might grow upon him. She was well aware that he drank, not so much through inclination, as from a desire to vie with others who did so. His

ambition was to be considered "a sport," but he might become a drunkard. And she had no claim upon him.

Mackenzie was a steady man. If she married him, she could become a member of a church. That would mean a definite rise in the social scale; her respectability would then be beyond challenge, beyond question. The ring on her finger would be the outward and visible sign of her right to respectful treatment on earth below, and also the promise of an uninterrupted passage to heaven in the unfortunate event of death. When she had thought of all these things she came to a provisional decision.

"I can't answer you right away, Mr. Mac," she said, "for it is like dis. When a gurl goin' to take a step like marriage it is right she should think well what she doin'. Don't I right?"

Mackenzie nodded his agreement.

"Well, then, I will write y'u on Friday an' tell you me answer. I know you will treat me kind, Mr. Mac."

"Tell you what we better do, then," said Mackenzie, who believed in businesslike arrangements. "If you write me on Friday morning, I will get the letter during the day. If it is all right, I will get a licence from de judge at Culebra, an' he will perform the ceremony when you come. When you think you will come?"

"Saturday. But I would prefer a parson to marry me."

"That not easy, for we don't have time. The judge married almost everybody in de Zone. You going to tell Jones?"

“ No ! Why you ask dat ? ”

“ I don't see why you shouldn't tell him. Him would only talk an' bluster, but him is not the sort of man to do anything. Howsoever, follow you' own mind.”

He said good night without any attempt at endearment. Susan saw him downstairs ; it was very late. Being much too tired to do any thinking, she went to bed and fell asleep, spitefully hoping that Jones would reflect upon his conduct all night in the calaboose of Colon..

CHAPTER VII

SUSAN'S LAST EFFORT

ON the following morning Jones was fined ten dollars for a breach of the peace—a light sentence, since the police had at first been inclined to charge him with attempted murder. Tom escaped with a fine of five dollars, presumably because he had not been murdered; and both men were severely warned that the next time they appeared before the court it would go hard with them, and that in the meantime the police would be instructed to keep an eye upon them.

In addition to this Samuel lost half a day's pay, to say nothing of some hours in a cell shared by insects which vigorously disputed its possession with him.

It was an embittered Jones that went home that afternoon. His friends, instead of going to bail him, had avoided the vicinity of the calaboose; Susan herself had not come near him. He had been deserted by those who should have rallied to his cause, though he himself would have stood by them to the end. He solemnly swore that he never again would put his faith in Jamaicans.

Susan waited until he had voiced his complaints, and had eaten his dinner. Then she opened her attack.

" Sam, you not ashamed of you'self ? "

He was, but was not prepared to admit it. That would be a lowering of his dignity. " What for ? " he asked her sullenly.

" That you goin' on in this way to make me fret. You quarrel, an' fight, an' drink, an' gamble, an' won't hear what I say. You think you goin' on right ? "

" But what is all this for now ? " he demanded angrily. " Instead of feeling vex that them wanted to hang me without a trial in Colon, you begin to ask me all sort of foolish question. You want to provoke me ? "

" I don't want to provoke y'u, but I am going to ask you one plain question. Don't you think you should try to behave you'self now, an' marry me, after you bring me to Colon an' make me mind disturbed night an' day ? Suppose the policeman did kill you last night : what position I would be into to-day ? "

" You mean to say you going back to all that foolishness again, Susan ? " he cried, scandalized by her persistence in stupidity. " I am not going to talk about marriage, an' as I can't have peace in this place, I am going out." Then, before Susan could make any further remark, he seized his hat and left the room in a temper.

Then Susan locked the door, took pen, ink, and paper out of one of her cupboards, and sat down to write. She had given Samuel a last chance. He had answered her as he had done before. In a sentence or two she informed Mackenzie that she would leave Colon for Culebra by the second train on Saturday morning.

Then she indicted a letter to her father. This was an important epistle, for she calculated upon its being shown to a large number of persons in Kingston. She informed her father that "When these few lines come to hand, hoping it will reach you in the same good health it leave me, your affectionate daughter will be Mrs. John Mackenzie, for I am going to married to a nice gentleman working with the American people up at Culebra. Jones is too bad. He meet Tom the other night at a dance, and make a row and I have to fret too much. But I wouldn't leave him all the same if I wasn't a girl that like religion as you brought me up, and beside it is an honourable life to get married. Tell Kate and Eliza them must follow my example, for God bless me and smile on me, and I have everything I want and Mackenzie care for me, otherwise him wouldn't want to put a ring on me finger. If it wasn't that I always fear the Lord this good luck wouldn't happen to me, and I going to pray for all of you. Tell Kate and Eliza them mustn't keep any bad company in Kingston, and make Maria and her old obeah mother know that I married, for it will hurt them. Tell mammee and Aunt Deborah that I will rite them.—Yours truly loving daughter,

"SUSAN."

Then an idea occurred to her, and she added a postscript.

"I send some money for all of you out of what I save. It is a wedding present."

This wedding present consisted of five pounds. Only once before had she written to her people, and then

she had enclosed three pounds. She thought, and rightly, that she was acting generously by them.

She regarded this composition with no little pride, then, though fatigued by such unwonted mental exertion, she proceeded to compose another letter. It was brief and to the point.

“DEAR SAM,—When I ask you Thursday evening after you leave the jail if you was going to keep your promise on board ship and marry me you say no. Alright then. I am obliged to leave you for I am going to marry another gentleman who you know. Mr. Mac has been good to me, and when you get this letter I will be Mrs. Mackenzie, but if you did behave yourself I wouldn't go away from you but it is all your own fault.—Yours affectionate,

“SUSAN PROUDLEIGH.”

She folded these letters, enclosed them in envelopes, and carefully addressed them. She would post Mackenzie's that evening. To-morrow she would buy postal orders for five pounds and then register the letter to Jamaica; in the meantime the letters that were to be posted the next day were carefully locked away by her in a little box which she kept at the bottom of her trunk. Susan had carefully observed how absconding wives acted in moving-picture dramas. These wrote their last farewells in the space of five seconds, read them over with frowning brows, sealed them, and placed them in a most conspicuous position in order that they should not by any possibility be overlooked. A wife of this type would scarcely have left the house before the husband would return, and there, on the table, would be the letter waiting for

→ moving picture model
him, as large as life. But he never saw it at once. Some occult influence, apparently, kept his eyes away from it. He would look round the room, search the ceiling for the missing one, scrutinize the floor, survey the atmosphere, and would be on the point of leaving the room when his eye would fall upon the table and the letter would be seen. This procedure would probably give him just sufficient time to rush into the street, summon the motor-car that always attends upon the movements of repentant husbands, and dash off to the railway station or the ship's dock, or the house to which his wife had fled. A second more and he would have been too late. In the moving-picture world, however, time itself is subordinate to the imperious demands of domestic felicity, and the reconciliation takes place dramatically with a public embrace.

That Jones might rush to the railway station, she knew. But instead of a reconciliation there might be a quarrel. There might be an arrest. She concluded that she would post Sam's letter at one of the stations at which the train would stop while on the way to Culebra; by the time he received it she would have been already married. She went out and posted Mackenzie's letter, called on a friend to discuss the scene of the preceding night, and returned home to find Samuel waiting for her.

He was much earlier than usual. The truth is, he was still very much frightened and wished to run no further risks with vigilant policemen. He had opinions to express, and he sought the security of his own dwelling to give utterance to them; Susan gathered

him go, then hastily made her final preparations. She packed all the things she needed into a trunk and a straw "grip," ran downstairs, summoned a cab, had her trunk brought down, and gave the key of her apartment to a neighbour, whom she asked to hand it to Samuel when he should come home that afternoon. Then she drove to the railway station at Christobal, half-fearing, half-wishing that Jones might see her. In a few minutes she had passed through the iron gates of the station and had taken her seat in a second-class carriage of the train.

She was conscious now of a strange sensation somewhere about her heart. There was a tightening there; there was a lump in her throat; the inclination was strong upon her to quit the train, to turn back, to leave marriage and Mackenzie alone. She was nervous, excited, but she did not feel happy. In a vague kind of way she realized that she was cutting herself off from the past, entering a new life. . . .

The train moved out of the station. It gathered speed and flew towards Culebra. She looked out of the window, seeing the long low range of buildings in which lived the coloured employees of the railway; she saw the verandas on which the clothes were hung out to dry, where the food was cooked, where fruit of all kinds was exposed for sale and healthy-looking children played to their hearts' content. Soon the train was running through the swamp outside of Colon and on the mainland of Panama. Long grass grew in the black water, a thick jungle where fever lurked, and deadly tarantulas and all sorts of evil things; but the swamp was passed and now green pastures

appeared, and in the distance she could catch a glimpse of green low-lying hills.

The train stopped every now and then at the Labour Towns along the route. Masses of wooden buildings clung to hill-sides, the forest grew beyond them, defiant, the riotous vegetation of this strip of tropical America striving ceaselessly with man for the mastery. These towns seemed alive with workers, there was activity everywhere, an eternal movement. And every now and then an almost interminable train of cars, laden with rocks and earth dug out of the great Cut at Culebra, would rush at full speed by her train with a thunderous deafening roar.

On and on, through the forest. Monteliro was reached, and here she asked a fellow-passenger who had arrived at his destination to post Sam's letter for her. Frijoles, and now she saw the turbulent Chagres, the problem of the Canal Administration's engineers, rolling peacefully, a broad and shining river, between its verdant banks. It stretched away into the distance, travelling through a luxuriant country to the sea, its surface lighted up by the sun and breaking into iridescent flashes of silver light.

She saw it all, but half unconsciously. The nature of the ground began to change. The soil was red; low, rounded hills went rising one after another to the far-off horizon; the towns were becoming more numerous too, each one of them a cluster of slate-roofed buildings with well-constructed streets and paths winding in and out amongst them.

San Pablo, Gorgona, Matachin; the land was rising now. Black earth and huge black rocks proclaimed

the volcanic nature of the soil. The country became more open, the forests had disappeared. She was nearing Empire. The next station after that would be Culebra. There Mackenzie would be waiting for her; there, in at the latest a couple of hours hence, she would become Mrs. Mackenzie. That thought had never left her mind; it now obsessed her to the exclusion of every other thought. So she was actually going to be married! It was not the sort of wedding she would have preferred, not the sort of ceremony she would have had in Jamaica. In that country the bridegroom would have hired three carriages at least; and six bridesmaids, all dressed in white, would have waited upon her in the church. And all the guests would have been gaily attired; the women unaffectedly excited, the men striving to show how imperturbably serene they could be even in the face of such a crisis. She pictured the scene; her triumphal parade in a carriage to the church, with the black-coated man beside her who was to give her away—her father, of course, though she did not think he became the position well. She was beautifully dressed; a long veil flowed over her head and shoulders; in her right hand she carried a huge bunch of lilies and white roses. The ceremony over, she returned with her husband to the house where the wedding feast was prepared. As she appeared at the door a choir of female voices, led by her friend, Cordelia Sampson, burst into song—"Let us open the Door to the Children, the Door of the Kingdom of Heaven." Then would come the congratulations, and inquiries would be made of the spinsters as to

when they would follow her good example and make a few men supremely happy; something which, as Susan knew, they were quite ready to do at any moment, the only obstacle being the reluctance of the men to be made happy.

And then the wedding feast. She saw the long decorated table covered with cakes and sweets and glasses, and at the head of it all, towering above everything else, the bridal cake. Behind this cake stood herself and her husband, but he did not resemble Mackenzie. His face, his form, his voice, his language, his gestures, were those of Jones; it was Jones who had met her at the church door, Jones who had said, "I will," Jones who was with her now, ready to respond to the toast to the bride and bridegroom. The speeches were stereotyped: she already knew them by heart. She and her husband were likened first to a pair of turtle-doves, then afterwards to a pair of white pigeons, the winged creation figuring prominently as types of matrimonial constancy and bliss. Then Isaac and Rebecca would be mentioned, and some ambitious speaker, anxious to excel in oratory, but rather weak in scriptural knowledge, might compare them to Ananias and Sapphira. Eventually she and her husband would leave while the dancing was going on, first taking care to make such desperate efforts to escape unobserved that the departure would become as public as a well-advertised show. There would be a shower of rose petals, a chorus of cries—
"Culebra!"

The train stopped. Looking down upon the station and the railway line was a large building the veranda

of which was adorned with a flowering vine. And other buildings beside and behind this one, and steps cut into the high sloping bank which led up to them. Scores of people were hastily descending from the train at this station, she amongst them. She looked round. "The train arrive in time to-day," said Mackenzie pleasantly.

That afternoon she became Mrs. Mackenzie.



BOOK III

CHAPTER I

THE FAMILY ARRIVES

"THIS hill really hard to climb, an' de cramps is troubling me feet so much that it make me feel funny," said Mr. Proudleigh dolorously.

"The longest journey must hend at last," his sister consolingly observed, as Mr. Proudleigh halted in the middle of the steep path and gazed upwards at the height which yet remained to be climbed.

"If you did know you couldn't walk it, pupa, you shouldn't come," said Catherine irreverently. "Old people shouldn't try and do what them know them can't do."

"Y'u don't have no feelings for you' poor ole father, Kate," replied Mr. Proudleigh sternly. "If I was a young gal, I would treat the old folkses respectably. There is a commandment in de Bible which say that forty she bear destroy the children that mock at Elijah, and——"

"You are misquoting de Scripture, Jim," cried his sister; "an' though Kate should treat you respectfully, which is your own daughter, yet I really

thinks you should make an endeavour to reach Susan house before night come down."

Mr. Proudleigh groaned, but struggled manfully forward. After the party had toiled slowly upwards for another couple of minutes they saw coming towards them two young Americans busily engaged in conversation. When these drew near enough Mr. Proudleigh accosted them, giving them his favourite military salute.

"Gentlemen," he panted, "can you direct de old man to where Mrs. Susan Mackenzie live? De Lord will bless y'u ef you can render——" But the young men had passed on without even looking at him.

"Well, what manners!" exclaimed Mr. Proudleigh. "Nobody ever treat me like dat before!" With this remark he made a movement as if he would sit down by the roadside, perhaps for the purpose of reflecting on the discourteous treatment just received.

But Catherine was obdurate. "You can't sit down, pupa," she insisted, with something of Susan's severity. "You got to try an' walk it, even if you tired. An' don't ask any more American the way to Susan's house, for them not going to answer you, an' it is not to be supposed that them can know where everybody live. If we see a man from Jamaica we can ask him; but we not goin' to meet anybody if we loiter here."

Again Mr. Proudleigh groaned, and again he feebly tottered forward, too exhausted now to indulge in any further observation.

Presently they came to more level ground; as they reached this they saw yawning, to their left, a tremendous chasm, into the depths of which they plunged

their eyes affrighted, for they had had no idea of what they would come upon. The three of them halted simultaneously, Mr. Proudleigh delighted with any excuse to pause for a moment. They were accustomed to the steep precipices of Jamaica, declivities of a thousand feet and more, with almost sheer perpendicular walls, vast openings in the earth, to peer down into which might make one sick and dizzy. But this was different.

On either side of the great Cut had been carved gigantic terraces, a sort of giant's stairway, and along the whole length of these terraces, as far as their eyes could reach, were railway lines, and along these lines long trains were passing continuously, and men were everywhere below, moving up and down, and looking like pygmies in the distance.

It was but a small section of the Culebra Cut, and not the busiest, that Mr. Proudleigh and his women-folk saw that afternoon. Little given as they were to speculation or to thinking about things that did not directly concern them, they perceived that a great mountain had been cleft in twain by the hand of man, and the wonderful signs of intense energy that the busy scene below presented could not fail to impress them. But not for long. Mr. Proudleigh was weary, and so was more intent just then upon finding out where Susan lived than upon admiring the work that was being carried on before his eyes. Miss Proudleigh, on the other hand, perceived a comparison between the dividing of Culebra Hill and the parting of the waters of the Red Sea for the safe passage of the escaping Israelites. The latter she

naturally approved of. But this work on the hill afflicted her mind with misgivings.

"If the Lord did intend the hill to cut in two," she said, as they resumed their walk, "He would have cut it Himself. But now man think he can improve God's handiwork, an' p'rhaps he is only provoking the Lord to wrath."

"That is so," her brother agreed; "dis Canal may bring a judgment. If them offer me a job on it, I won't teck it! What them want to dig out all dis dirt for? I remember that when the Car Company was layin' de electric car line in Kingston, I dream one night——"

"You will have to both sleep an' dream out here to-night, sah, if you go on talkin' foolishness an' don't hurry up!" exclaimed Catherine, now thoroughly impatient. "If them didn't commence diggin' the Canal, Susan wouldn't married, an' you would now be in Jamaica instead of here."

Viewed as a contributory cause of Susan's good fortune, Mr. Proudleigh instantly agreed that there was a great deal to be said for the Canal. He would have explained its good points at length, but Catherine absolutely refused to listen. In silence, therefore, they continued upon their way.

They could already see before them a number of wooden buildings, one, two, and three storeys high; it was obvious to them that they were now approaching a town of no inconsiderable size.

They saw people too, and they gladly observed that some of these were coloured men. Catherine undertook to question one of them. Did he know Mrs. Mackenzie? He did not, but thought that Catherine would easily

find the person she was seeking if she inquired at the quarters where the coloured people lived. These were a little farther away, and there was nothing for it but that they should proceed thither without delay.

Mr. Proudleigh would have protested, but even he realized that protests would be of no avail. Happily, they had not a long distance to go. And when the old man caught sight of the neat verandaed wire-screened cottages provided for the skilled coloured employees of the Canal Commission, his spirits revived wonderfully. Catherine soon found some one who knew where Susan lived. This man was kind enough to guide them to the place.

It was a four-roomed single-storey house, built upon high foundations and provided with a comfortable little veranda. Though Susan's relatives had been expecting to find her comfortably situated, this house was distinctly superior to anything they had imagined she would have. Mr. Proudleigh immediately calculated that in Jamaica its rental value would be at least two pounds a month, and the class of persons who could afford to live in such residences were, from his point of view, very well off indeed. As the front door and windows were closed, Catherine timidly knocked at the door. "Come in," said a voice, which they at once recognized.

They opened the door and entered.

Susan was sitting in a rocking-chair, sewing something that looked like a waist. As she caught sight of her visitors she started up with an exclamation.

"Kate! Papee! What's the matter? Why you come?"

The persons thus addressed faced her a little con-

fusedly. Miss Proudleigh remained in the rear, thus discreetly leaving it to the others to bear the brunt of Susan's questioning.

"Me dearest daughter!" exclaimed Mr. Proudleigh, evading any direct reply just then by a magnificent display of paternal solicitude, "I can't tell you how you' poor ole father is glad to see you! From you leave me in Jamaica I been fretting after you, an' now to think dat I see you wid me own eye in your own mansion!"

He seated himself as he spoke, somewhat disconcerted to observe that Susan showed no inclination to kiss him, but still continued looking at him and at the others with a puzzled stare.

"What's the matter?" she asked again. "Where is mammee an' Eliza? Why y'u come here?"

"Mammee an' Eliza quite well, Sue," said Catherine. "Them both remain behind in Jamaica." She paused, leaving it to the others to explain why they had come to Panama. She had followed her father's example and sat down. So had Miss Proudleigh.

"The sea voyage was very rough, Susan," remarked the latter lady, as though a recital of her sufferings would sufficiently explain her reason for coming to Panama, as well as relieve the obvious embarrassment of the situation. "I never was so sea-sick before. I couldn't move for a whole day."

"Nor me," asseverated Mr. Proudleigh promptly. "I never sick like dat before. I thought I would vomit me heart out, an' de more I sick, the more de vessel roll. But I comfort meself wid the reflections that I would soon see me own daurter again, who was

married to a noble gentleman ; an' when I dwelted upon that, it sort of seem to me that I didn't sick so much."

He glanced at Susan's face to see how this authentic account of the effect of fatherly affection on sea-sickness had appealed to her. Not very much encouraged by her look, he hurried on.

" I nearly died ; nevertheless, thanks be to God, I survive me agonies, an' now that I see you once more, I can die in peace. You remember dat old man in the Scriptures, Sue, who say, ' Lord, now let Thy servant depart in peace ' ?——"

" You mean to tell me, pupa, that you only come here to see me, and then die afterwards ? " demanded Susan.

" Well, not exactly, Sue, for I are not prepared fo' death. "

" Then what y'u come for ? "

Driven to his last ditch, Mr. Proudleigh determined to offer no defence, but to cast himself upon the enemy's clemency.

" Sue," said he pathetically, " you don't appears to be glad to see me. But if it was you who did come to Jamaica, I would have killed the fatted calf for you. " This reference to the fatted calf was not only intended to convince Susan that she would have been welcomed by him, but also to indicate that bodily refreshment would be most acceptable at that moment.

Susan would not immediately take the hint. But she had by now recovered from her first feeling of astonishment and was beginning to be glad to see some of her people once more. She knew her father and her aunt, however ; she was well aware that they would have written to tell her of their coming had they

thought she would have approved of the reason for it. She was still suspicious; they had as yet explained nothing. She turned to Catherine with a view of getting at the bottom of the mystery at once, when her father, as if suddenly inspired, started out without further circumlocution on the perilous path of truth.

"The fact of de matter, Sue," he said, "is that I did always want to come to Colon. An' when I got you' letter that say you was going to married, an' receive the five pounds, for which God is goin' to bless you, if Him don't bless you already, I say to you' mother: 'I am goin' to follow me daurter to Colon an' keep her company, for she must be lonely.' An' I tell them to sell the things in the little shops, which was not doin' too well since you lefted us, an' I advise them all to come wid me. But you' mother misjudge you, an' say you wouldn't like it; but I know you wouldn't mind, for it is me that bring you up since you was born, an' look after you, an' train you in the way you should go, an' I persuaded meself that you was not goin' to be ungrateful. But you' mother wouldn't come, an' Eliza had to stay wid her; but your aunt and Kate come with me, an' they are sensible, for you always hear me say I would like to come to Colon, an' if you didn't want me to come you wouldn't send five pounds for me in you' letter."

"Then you mean to tell me, pupa," cried Susan, "that—that y'u come here to live in this house, an' didn't even write to tell me?"

"We wanted to give you a pleasant surprise, Sue," said Miss Proudleigh, to whom prevarication did not appear as a heinous offence.

" You mean you know that I wouldn't want you to come, so you keep it secret!" exclaimed Susan. " I never hear of such a madness before. What y'u going to do now? You can't stay here : Mackenzie wouldn't like it."

Catherine had been fearing some such announcement. Now, in self-defence, she said, " I didn't want to come, Sue."

" But you are more all right than pupa an' Aunt Deborah," said Susan. " You are young an' can work ; an' I don't think Mackenzie would mind if you stay with me. But Aunt Deborah an' papee shouldn't come here at all, for them don't have much use for old people in this country."

" Hexcuse me, Susan," said Miss Proudleigh with impressive dignity, " but I objects to being called old. I am only forty."

" I thought you was fifty," said Susan rudely.

" You right, Sue!" exclaimed Mr. Proudleigh. " I am sixty year of age, an' I remember the very day you' aunt was born. I don't see why she want to hide 'er age ; age is no disgrace, an' if a ooman keeps herself respectfully she should have no concealment from her fambily. Now, when you' aunt was born——"

Shocked by the desertion of Mr. Proudleigh at a moment when it was vital that the invading forces should present a solid front to the enemy, Miss Proudleigh deemed it advisable to leave the age question severely alone and adopt a pacific attitude before her brother should adduce the damaging testimony of days and dates against her. She cut him short with a diplomatic remark.

" I am not young an' strong like you, Sue," she

said, with a propitiatory smile, "an' the Lord have not blessed me like you, though I am not ungrateful for His manifold kindness. But I didn't come here to live on you. Things is very hard in Jamaica, an' as I know that you married an' have influence over here, I thought as you might help me to get a little dressmakin' or washing so as to keep me independent. I don't want anything but work."

"Nor me," said Catherine sturdily. "Nobody can tell me that I can't make a good living in Panama, though I couldn't be a servant."

Mr. Proudleigh said nothing. Now that the talk was of work, and he was actually in Panama, he did not care to remind anyone that while in Jamaica he had never lost an opportunity of proclaiming his readiness to earn his own living whenever the chance of so doing should present itself to him.

But Susan wasn't thinking of his capabilities just then. In her aunt's suggestion she saw a way out of the difficulty. "You can get plenty of washin' if you want it," she said quickly, "either up here or in Colon. You an' pupa will 'ave to live together by you'self, but Kate can stop with me."

"I prefer to go back to Colon," said Kate. "I like what I see of it, an' this place look dull."

"It dull for true!" agreed Susan, "an' though I would like you to stay with me, I know Colon livelier than up here."

Mr. Proudleigh, who had been secretly hoping to spend at least some months in the comparative calm of Culebra, did not approve of the suggestion that he should live with his sister or that he should return to

Colon. Nor did he like Susan's reference to the dullness of the labour town in which she lived. It did not argue a contented mind. The house she was mistress of, the furniture she possessed, the leisure she evidently enjoyed seemed to him enough to make any woman happy for the rest of her life, especially if to all these things could be added the blessing of a father's presence and words of cheer.

"You should be very comfortable, Sue," he suggested. "A young married woman like you shouldn't have a thing to fret her."

"Don't you are now a member of society, Sue?" asked her aunt.

"Yes; I belong to de Baptist church up here, an' I going to join the choir."

"And don't you' husband treat you good?" inquired her father.

"Of course! I didn't say him didn't!"

This sharp answer, given in the form of a threatening question, checked at once the impending flow of Mr. Proudleigh's interrogatory. But further to prevent any more personal inquiries, and remembering that her relatives must be hungry, Susan invited them into the dining-room, where they found a table covered with a clean cloth, a meat-safe, and a few chairs. She took some cold food out of the meat-safe and placed it before them, offering the older folk, in addition, a little Jamaica rum, which Mackenzie always kept in the house. This they drank at once, Mr. Proudleigh secretly hoping for a further supply of the same liquor. He expressed his astonishment at the thirst created by the Panamanian climate, then prepared himself to dine.

CHAPTER II

CATHERINE LEARNS SOMETHING

SUSAN was no longer annoyed with her people for their unexpected appearance. Now that it had been decided that they were to live by themselves and do something to earn their living, she felt glad that they had come to Panama. They would not be very far from her; she could go to see them fairly often; the old associations, severed when she left Jamaica, were renewed once more. With her elbows on the table and her entwined fingers supporting her chin, she watched them eat with a pleasant glow of hospitality. "Tell me all about home," she said. "You ever see Maria?"

"No," said Catherine; "but I meet Hezekiah one day, an' him tell me that Maria hear that you married: somebody write from Colon to tell her. She will never get a man to put a ring on *her* finger. You ever see Tom an' Jones since you married, Sue?"

"No; I don't think them ever come up this way; an' since I married, going eight weeks now, I never leave Culebra once."

"Jones never write you?" asked her aunt.

"No! Him couldn't do that. I have nothing more to do wid him."

"I never did like dat young man," said Mr. Proudleigh with grave deliberation. "He talk too much, an' him always using big words dat I couldn't understand. I never thoughted that you would be happy with him, Sue."

"Did Jones ever do you anything, pupa?" asked Susan sharply.

"Me? No. Him couldn't do me anyt'ing. I wouldn't make him take a liberty wid me!"

"An' when you used to borrow a shillin' from him every now an' then, behind my back, though you know you couldn't pay him back, he ever refused you?"

This little matter of the loans Mr. Proudleigh had hitherto regarded as an entirely private business arrangement between Samuel Josiah and himself; indeed, he had always prefaced his request for a loan with a speech on the wisdom of not letting one's left hand know what one's right hand did. He had never failed to intimate clearly that Susan was one of those symbolical left hands that had always better be kept in ignorance of all important financial transactions between man and man. But now that, to his intense surprise, Susan mentioned his past obligations to Jones, he asserted with assurance, "I goin' to pay him back every farden. I will write an' send de money." An excellent resolution, though he did not trouble to mention when he would write or where the money was to come from.

"Well, seeing that Jones was kind to you in Jamaica, I don't see why y'u should say you don't like him," Susan continued. "We didn't get on too well sometimes in Colon, for him was a little wild an'

he got into bad company. That is why I leave him an' married Mackenzie. But I don't 'ave anything to say against him, for him didn't stint me in anything, an' him never ill-treat me."

"I always liked Mr. Jones, though I never borrow any money from him," said Miss Proudleigh untruthfully, pleased at being able to get even with her brother for his recent attempt to establish her age at fifty. "He was always polite an' gentlemanly."

Mr. Proudleigh had in the meantime filled his mouth to its utmost capacity, with a view of showing that he could not without grave inconvenience take any further part in a conversation which was becoming unpleasantly personal. Catherine had finished eating. Seeing this, Susan invited her into the kitchen, on the excuse that she wished to prepare something for Mackenzie.

"You have it dull, Sue?" asked Catherine, as soon as the two found themselves alone.

"Lord, yes! Every day it is one thing over an' over. I know some of de people here, but you can't make a dance when you like, or 'ave much merriment."

"But you have you' husband."

Susan twisted her mouth slightly, a facial contortion which Catherine interpreted as meaning that Mackenzie's existence did not contribute materially to making life bright at Culebra.

"Mac is all right enough," Susan explained, "but him is very quiet an' serious."

After a moment's hesitation, she added:

"Jones was livelier."

"Then why you leave Jones?"

Susan let the question pass.

"Marriage is dull," she said: "you are not your own mistress. It is true you 'ave a honourable position, but what is the good of that if it don't make you any happier?"

With unconscious inconsistency she continued. "Sam promised to marry me when we was at sea, but he wouldn't do it afterwards. It would have been better for him if he did keep his word."

Catherine was looking at her narrowly as she spoke. She saw quite clearly that Susan was not satisfied with her present situation. And yet she was in a position that hundreds would have envied.

"Perhaps if you did wait, Jones would have married you," Catherine suggested.

"I don't think so. Him was wild an' foolish, an' thought that I care for him so much that I wouldn't leave him. If he was different I would be with him now, even if him didn't married me."

Catherine looked wise. "I always say it is better not to married too quick," she observed; "for you may find you make a mistake, an' then you can't do nothing."

But here Susan thought that perhaps she had said too much, even to her sister. So she remarked, with emphasis, that, after all, she was very comfortable, and that Mackenzie was kind to her and never quarrelled with her. "I don't 'ave a word to say against him," she asserted truthfully.

Then she and Catherine rejoined the others, for she was now expecting her husband at any moment.

He came in presently, glanced inquiringly at Susan,

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marriage

who was about to say who the strangers were, when Mr. Proudleigh, who for a week had been rehearsing a little speech he had prepared to greet Mackenzie with, stood up in haste and unceremoniously interrupted his daughter. The old man had been an Odd Fellow in his younger days, and had frequently figured as "chaplain" in the lodge. He now chose to regard Mackenzie as an embodied Odd Fellows Society, and forthwith addressed him as such :

"My noble king! When first I hear that you married Miss Susan, who is the best daurter I have, an' when I hear about you from all de people who come back to Jamaica from here—for I can tell you you are well bekown—I say to meself: I will arise an' never be happy till I see me son-in-law. An' here I come, though sea-sickness nearly kill me, to welcome you into de fambily; an' I can tell you at once that I are going to do everything to make you comfortable. We don't acquainted well yet, but when we are acquaint——"

What would happen when the further acquaintance hinted at by Mr. Proudleigh should have developed, will never be known. For just then Mackenzie quietly put a stop to his oratory by remarking :

"So you are Sue's father? I am glad to see you, sir," and then shook hands with him.

He greeted Miss Proudleigh and Catherine with similar cordiality, assuring them that he was happy to see them. Then they all sat down.

"Come on a trip, or to do business?" he inquired of Miss Proudleigh, who somehow he took to be the leader of the party.

" Things being bad in Jamaica," that lady replied, " I took a thought an' came with me brother an' niece to see if I could get a little work in Colon. I am a hard-working woman, an' so long as I can make an honest living, I are satisfied."

" Quite right," said Mackenzie; " nothing like independence, ma'am. You goin' to stop too, sir?" he asked Mr. Proudleigh.

" Well, yes," said his father-in-law; " I thinks I will. I like up here well; it's a nice climate."

" Well, you can stop here a few days; glad if y'u would," said Mackenzie hospitably, but this limited invitation finally put an end to Mr. Proudleigh's lingering hope of being invited to stay for good. " I hope Sue been treating you good?" Mackenzie went on, " and that we have something nice fo' supper. Sue, we must get some beer an' spend a nice evening. It's not all times we have friends from home."

He asked to be excused while he went out to get the beer. Both Catherine and Miss Proudleigh concluded that he was a kind man, easily satisfied, and generous in a thoughtful, cautious sort of way. But Mr. Proudleigh felt that Mackenzie's invitation to him implied a narrow and unappreciative spirit. Mr. Proudleigh already voted Mackenzie a failure as a son-in-law.

That night they sat up until late discussing the condition of Jamaica. From Mr. Proudleigh's remarks, a stranger would have gathered that a perfectly peaceful island was just then on the eve of revolution. He did most of the talking, Mackenzie agreeing with what he said with all the politeness of a host.

For four days did the visitors remain at Culebra.

Susan tried to prevail upon Catherine to stay with her for good, but that her sister would not do ; she was bored at Culebra. She noticed that Susan and Mackenzie seemed to get on very well with one another, and that Mackenzie was apparently quite satisfied with his marriage. But she was convinced that Susan was not. " She don't love him," thought Catherine ; " she don't happy. Better she didn't married."

But though she felt sorry for Susan, she would not share her loneliness. She went with her father and her aunt to Colon.

CHAPTER III

THE MEETING

IT had been arranged that Susan should go to see her people as soon as they had settled down in Colon : two weeks later she set out on the journey to the little town she knew so well and missed so much. She started in the forenoon, her plan being to spend the night in Colon and return to Culebra the next day. In less than two hours she arrived, and, taking a cab, drove to the house where her relatives now lived, they having written to give her the address.

She was effusively welcomed by them. They had two small apartments in one of the numerous tenement buildings of Colon. Miss Proudleigh, although preferring dressmaking as a more genteel occupation, had become a private laundress, as more money could be made that way. She had hired a girl to help her ; particularly, to go for and to take home the clothes, for that neither she nor Catherine would consent to do. Catherine assisted with the ironing. They were pleased to find that they earned four or five times as much at this work as they would have done in Jamaica. This almost compensated for the menial character of the work. Mr. Proudleigh discovered elements of dignity in it. His only contribution was gratuitous advice.

Catherine had news for Susan.

"Guess who I meet in Colon, Sue?" was her first remark, after Susan had taken off her hat.

"Jones!" said Susan instantly.

"He an' Tom. Them tell me all about the row, an' Jones come here sometimes during the day an' in the evening. Him may come here to-day," she concluded, with a glance at her sister to see how she took the news.

Susan felt her heart leap as Catherine mentioned the possibility of Jones's calling at the house while she was there. But she affected indifference.

"I don't want to see him," she said; "but it won't matter."

"Of course not," observed her aunt, "for you are a lawfully married woman now."

"An' nobody can take dat from you," Mr. Proudleigh insisted, as though some attempt to rob Susan of her married state was not at all unlikely.

"Nobody need try," laughed Susan, pluming herself upon being Mrs. Mackenzie; "I have me marriage certificate."

"That is a very good thing to have," Mr. Proudleigh agreed. "But y'u needn't fret that Jones won't treat you respectful in dis house: he have to! But I must tell you, Sue, that him is a very decent young man. He confine to me all his troubles; an' I must really tell you that I thinks y'u treat him hard, for he is a noble young man."

From these remarks Susan gathered that Jones was once more advancing to her father small loans, to be repaid at a hypothetical future date. The old financial

relations had been re-established between the two men. But she was not displeased to hear her father speak highly of Samuel. She did not even resent the old man's mild reproach.

When twelve o'clock came, she found herself anxiously wondering whether Jones would call that day. From twelve to two o'clock he would not be working; he would have ample time for a visit. Her aunt and Catherine were ironing on that part of the veranda upon which their rooms opened. She sat on the veranda talking to them, and every now and then she would glance down into the street to see if anyone she knew was passing. She saw some acquaintances, but always with a feeling of disappointment; as two o'clock drew near she grew silent, a change which Catherine was not slow to notice. When the hour struck and she had to recognize that there was no possibility of Samuel's coming that afternoon, she made no effort to conceal from herself that she was bitterly disappointed: in her inmost heart, also, she confessed to herself that during all the journey from Culebra to Colon her great hope had been that she should see him, meet him. For what? She had her reason ready. She told herself that she wanted to know how he had taken her sudden departure, how he had fared in the intervening ten weeks, how he would greet her, and whether he had been captured by some other woman. When she reflected on the possibility of his having been captured—just as though his personal responsibility in that matter must be almost nil—she became fiercely antagonistic towards the unknown woman. She resented her existence, hated her bitterly.

*She's
disappointed
that she
doesn't
get to
see
Samuel*

During the rest of the afternoon she was rather moody ; but when six o'clock came she grew cheerful and talkative once more. An hour passed, and then Catherine suggested that they should go for a walk about the town. She agreed.

As they went along, Susan peeped into all the cafés that they passed. She well knew the old favourite haunt of Samuel, and she led her sister past it ; but, though the doors were wide open as usual, she saw no sign of Samuel. They called on one or two of Susan's friends, and to these the story of her marriage was related ; her hearers had no doubt whatever that she had acted wisely in leaving Jones ; there was but one opinion on her excellent good fortune. The congratulations she received heartened her greatly ; it was much to be a married woman ; now she knew she had done a sensible and proper thing. It was half-past nine when she and Catherine went back to the house.

" A stranger is upstairs," said Catherine, as they ascended the steps ; " that is not papee's voice."

Susan paused for a moment, her heart beating violently. " It is Jones," she whispered.

Catherine listened. " Yes," she said ; " him must have been here a long time, for it is late already. Y'u not coming up ? " she asked, for Susan was standing still.

Slowly Susan followed her sister. The latter entered the room first. Susan stepped in after her with a well-assumed air of indifference.

Some one rose. She heard his voice addressing her.

" Good evening, Mrs. Mackenzie. I hope I see you

well? Your husband's health is propitious, I presume?"

She was equal to the occasion. "Good evening, Mr. Jones. Yes, thank y'u, Mr. Mackenzie is quite well. He would 'ave sent you his compliments if he did know I would meet you."

She sat down. Their eyes met.

"That don't matter," said Jones, most loftily. "Compliments are only words, an' nobody don't mean them. I am not sending anybody any compliments. I have no friends, Mrs. Mackenzie, an' I compliment nobody. A man don't know who to trust in this world."

"Quite true, Mr. Jones, quite true," observed Miss Proudleigh, who had never forgotten Susan's reception of her at Culebra. "There is but one Friend who we can trust, an' to Him we can take all our troubles. When man desert us an' play us false, we can take them to the Lord in pr'yer." In this way the good lady endeavoured to convey to Jones her opinion of Susan's general behaviour.

Jones enjoyed Miss Proudleigh's sympathy. He felt that he was amongst friends. He had helped them with his advice since they had been in Colon, and Mr. Proudleigh had confessed to him that in Mr. Proudleigh's opinion Mackenzie was not fit to unloose the latchet of Samuel Josiah's shoe. At that moment Susan was at a disadvantage.

He was looking at her narrowly. Her sojourn at Culebra had improved her: he did not think he had ever seen her look so well before. She was singularly attractive. Dressed in cool white, she

faced him self-possessed, while on the third finger of her left hand gleamed a broad band of gold, the symbol of her new condition. Ever and again his eyes lingered on that ring. He hated it. But he determined to show he was indifferent, as indifferent as she appeared to be ; in his most bombastic manner he resumed the conversation.

“ I am thinkin’ of returning to me native land. The temperature of Panama is deleterious to my constitution, an’ they have no decent administration in the country. Some people, of course, are contented with it. If you kick some people it will please them. But Samuel Josiah Jones is of a different characteristic ; besides, I am one of those men who can make a living in me own country, an’ I didn’t come here to pass all me life digging dirt for American people.”

“ I don’t suppose anybody else come here fo’ good, either, Mr. Jones,” replied Susan sharply, feeling it incumbent upon her to defend her absent husband against all covert attacks. “ I expect meself to go home before long.”

“ Is Mac gwine to Jamaica, Sue ? ” asked her father quickly. “ For, ef so, I wouldn’t mind takin’ a trip meself, an’ I could come back wid you.”

“ I don’t know what Mackenzie is goin’ to do, papee,” answered Susan severely. “ But perhaps, as you an’ Mr. Jones is so friendly, you can go wid him.”

“ Oh, that’s all right ! ” exclaimed Jones. “ I can take the old man. I have the cash, an’ no one ever say yet that Samuel Josiah was mean. When I am goin’, old massa, you can come along.”

“ Thank y’u, me son ! ” Mr. Proudleigh burst out.

"You is the sort of young man I did want for me son-in-law."

He had no sooner spoken the words than he regretted them. They expressed his true sentiments, but how would Susan take them? Catherine laughed.

"Wishes don't alter facts," said Miss Proudleigh sourly, "though some people, in spite of all they may pretend, would be glad if facts could be altered."

Susan understood this remark and hated her aunt very thoroughly at that moment. "I suppose you been wishin' for a lot of things you never get—eh, Aunt Deborah?" she said. "You must 'ave wished to get married for a long time before you got old, but I hear you never even had an intended."

"What!" cried Mr. Proudleigh, before his sister could hurl the full force of her scorn at the offending Susan, "my dear daurter, you don't know you' aunt. You grow up an' find 'er in religion, but she was a little devil when she was young. I remember one night me father half-murder her because she used to stay out late, an' a young man beat her one day because she was carryin' on wid another young man, while she was engage to de first one. But when she come near forty, of cou'se, an' she see she was getting old, she teck to religion an' becomes an example to you young people."

"You are an infernal liar!" cried Miss Proudleigh fiercely, roused now to bitterest anger by this gratuitous detailing of her early history, and entirely forgetful of the virtue of Christian forbearance and godly conversation in her desire to maintain her claim to having always led a pure and spotless life. "Since you come

to Colon I don't know what come over you! All you seem to want to do is to make fun of me, an' abuse me character; but as you remember so many things that never happen, you might as well remember dat it is me who is helping you to live in Colon, an' not Susan."

"This don't need any quarrel," observed Jones hastily. "If I did want to quarrel I could find plenty of reason, but I bear all the ill-treatment I receive in silence, being disposed thereto by an equanimitous attitude of mind."

"That is the same like my attitude of mind," peacefully remarked Mr. Proudleigh, "for if there is a man that don't like confusion it is me. I didn't mean to vex Deborah at all, an' I beg to ask her pardon as she get offended by what I say. In fact, I don't see how she should think I could want to insult me own sister before a perfec' stranger like Mister Jones, an' she is very wrong to think so. But it is because I am old an' poor. Ef I was a young man, an' earning me two pounds a week, all de sort of words dat everybody give me now I wouldn't hear at all. But when a man is poor, dog can bark at him an' him can't say a word; so everybody take an advantage of me an' tell me what them do for me, though them never remember what I do for them. However, I apologize to Deborah, an' I excuse her, for she was always very ignorant."

"When you thinkin' of goin' home, Mr. Jones?" asked Susan with a view to putting an end to the dispute between her aunt and father. She knew how spiteful Miss Proudleigh could be, and was well aware that if her usually mild parent was once thoroughly

annoyed, the recital of his grievances and wrongs would form the main topic of all conversations for the next three or four days.

"I haven't determined on a date hitherto, Mrs. Mackenzie," Jones replied, "but I contemplate a speedy departure from these regions. If I wasn't a man of strong mentality, all the sufferings I have had to put up with in Colon would drive me mad. But I have a solid brain, an' what would kill some people passes by me like 'the idle wind which I regard not.' That is Shakespeare," he explained.

"Well, it's a good thing to be able to go home when y'u like, Mr. Jones, an' you are an independent man with no responsibility. My 'usband have to work hard to keep his wife in comforts, so he can't travel about like you, an' go out to see his friends an' enjoy himself every night. Some people like to 'ave everything, you know, without any responsibility, but Mackenzie is different."

"I don't know anything about your husband, Mrs. Mackenzie," Jones answered superciliously. "He and I was never friends in Jamaica: we didn't walk in the same street at all. Of course, when a man come to a place like Colon, he get to know a lot of people he would never know at home. I moved in good society in Jamaica. The very night before I leave for Colon I was entertained by a few high-toned educated friends of mine, an' if I had paid attention to what one of them say to me, I wouldn't have been made a fool of here. But I was always of a confiding an' trustful disposition, an' put a lot of faith in females."

A sarcastic laugh from Miss Proudleigh, directed

at Susan, welcomed this remark. But Susan took no notice of it.

It was now past ten o'clock, and Catherine was repeatedly yawning. Jones rose to leave.

"This has been an unexpected pleasure, Mrs. Mackenzie," he said, as he bade Susan good night. "If we do not meet again, you may say to Mr. Mackenzie that y'u saw me here in excellent spirits." He flourished his hat and bowed as he spoke, then marched with stately step out of the room.

"Dat is a perfec' gen'leman," said Mr. Proudleigh. Susan thought so too.

After that visit to Colon, Culebra became more distasteful than ever to Susan. In spite of her possession of "comforts," her life seemed to her to be singularly uninteresting; she felt that she had nothing new to expect, she experienced no pleasant thrill of anticipated adventures; she loved excitement, and at Culebra, except for the accidents, there was nothing like excitement to look forward to. She might have children. But though she possessed the instinct of motherhood as fully as any other normally developed woman, the coming of children seemed to her to be a mere matter of course, something too that would bind her down more tightly to her humdrum existence as Mackenzie's wife. She began to regret even the days in Jamaica when she had the shop—days that now seemed so very far away, though only a few months had passed since she had come to Panama.

She had no doubt now, she no longer strove to conceal from herself, that she had made a mistake

More
on Susaak
for distasteful
marriage

in marrying Mackenzie. He was a good husband, a steady man ; but he was over forty and very uninteresting. She could not even quarrel with him : he did nothing to provoke a quarrel. If she was petulant, he was patient ; if she became a little unreasonable, he yielded with a good humour which she instinctively felt was not the result of weakness. She stood in some awe of him ; as a friend he had been altogether desirable, but now as her husband she discovered that his disposition was alien to hers ; she respected but could not care for him.

She could not even complain that he restricted her liberty, for he did not. She was free in reason to go where she liked ; if she had not left Culebra but once since her marriage, that was not because she could not have done so had she wished. The situation, clearly, was hopelessly annoying. As some one had to be blamed for it, she blamed Jones.

It was all his fault. He should have acted differently. It was not because he had refused to marry her that she had left him. It was because he had taken to drinking, gambling, and bad habits generally ; because he had made himself objectionable and might at any moment have found himself within the four walls of a prison. She had chosen the best way of escape open to her, and everybody agreed that she had acted wisely. She was in no way at fault.

But this self-vindication did not tend to console her, for, by an apparently perverse arrangement of things, she was the sufferer while Jones was as free as air. Susan was too intelligent not to feel that, however tragically Jones might conduct himself just

now, he was likely to find consolation as time went on. She believed profoundly in her lasting influence over every man who had fallen in love with her; there was Tom's case as an illustration. But she doubted whether that influence would keep anyone like Jones from falling into the clutches of other women, especially as she was married and separated from him for ever. "The same way he could do without me before I know him, he will do without me now," she thought ruefully; and this was the more certain if he should return to Jamaica. And if he did return, what chance would there be of his coming back, in a hurry at any rate?

Besides, even if he did come back, how would that help her? They now met as acquaintances merely. She addressed him as Mr. Jones. He spoke to her as Mrs. Mackenzie. Everything was as it should be from the point of view of propriety: he treated her as a married woman ought to be treated. Yet she would have much preferred a bitter quarrel with him, an open flinging of reproaches from one to the other, passionate upbraiding. Why, she did not exactly know, save that the sarcastic politeness of both, and the thinly veiled innuendoes they had indulged in at her relatives' house on the night of their meeting, seemed to her a mere sham: they had not spoken to one another as they would have liked to speak. They had merely acted a part.

She wondered if all married women felt, as she did, that marriage was an awful bore. And she wondered if her endurance could stand the strain of that boredom for years.

CHAPTER IV

THE NIGHT OF THE FIRE

“**M**ACKENZIE,” said Susan one evening, some four days after she had been to Colon, “you ever see Jones?”

“No,” he replied, “I don’t think him ever come this way. An’ I never hear anything of him; perhaps he gone back home.”

“I don’t think so,” Susan said, “for Kate tell me when I was in Colon this week that Jones go to see them sometimes. I was thinking that maybe him will get married himself.”

“Cho!” laughed Mackenzie, “Jones is never goin’ to do anything. Some girl may marry him if she really want to get married, and can take him to a church, but it will be she who will do it. You take my word for it, some day Jones is going to go back to Jamaica widout a cent in his pocket. He will have nothing to show for all the time him spend here.”

“I think so meself,” agreed Susan; “he don’t steady at all like you, Mac.”

This direct compliment, at the expense of Jones too, pleased Mackenzie not the less because he felt it was deserved. He smiled complacently.

“I always thought from the first time I see you in

Colon, Sue," he said, "that you was too good for a fellow like Jones. He has his good points, for he can work hard an' he know his work. But him like to show off too much, an' he never know his own mind."

"You think I should speak to him if I ever meet him? You see, he may go to see me family when I am there, an' I wouldn't like to speak to him if you didn't like it."

"Why, of course you can speak to him; I don't see why you shouldn't. He don't do you nothing, an' I don't see why he should vex because you leave him to get married. If I see him meself I will speak to him: an' if him don't choose to answer it will be all the same to me."

"You right, Mac. If you hold out the hand of friendship an' Jones don't choose to take it, that's 'up to him' as the American people here say. An' I will follow your advice and speak to him if I ever see him, for I don't bear anybody malice."

"Malice is foolishness," said Mackenzie emphatically. "If I was to meet Jones up here I would invite him to come an' spend a evening in me house. I don't know if him would come, but that would show him that I have no bad feelings towards him."

She said nothing to her husband of her having already met Samuel Josiah. But now she felt that she could with a clear conscience be polite to Jones when next she should see him; and perhaps, after that meeting, she might tell Mackenzie of it . . . that would be wise. She was going to see her people again, but she must not seem in any hurry to do so; she must force herself to wait. She allowed two weeks

to elapse before she went, taking care to let Catherine know by letter beforehand the day on which to expect her.

She arrived in Colon in the afternoon, and that evening Jones came round to the house. He expected to meet her.

For a little while they discussed indifferent topics ; then suddenly Susan gave a sharp turn to the conversation and surprised everybody by saying :

“ I hear that I have to congratulate you, Mr. Jones.”

“ Me ? What for ? ” he asked.

“ I hear you goin' to get married.”

“ You don't say ! ” exclaimed Mr. Proudleigh, immediately becoming interested. Jones had been coming so often to see them, and had been so obliging in the matter of the loans, that the old gentleman had begun to think that a match might be arranged between the young man and Catherine.

“ I never hear of it before,” said Jones, “ but people always know a man's business better than he know it himself.” (Mr. Proudleigh's face lighted up with pleasure.) “ I have nothing more to do with any woman, Mrs. Mackenzie, an' don't intend to.” (Here Mr. Proudleigh's hopes fell to zero—a common enough occurrence.) “ Women do me enough already in this world. I have been fooled once, but that was not my fault. If I allow anybody to fool me again, however, I would be more than stupid.”

Susan's question had been deliberately put for the purpose of finding out if Samuel's affections were still unengaged. She was therefore delighted with his reply. But she answered to the point. “ I didn't

know you ever was married before, Mr. Jones, so you couldn't have been fooled."

"P'rhaps it is a very good thing him was newer married," observed Miss Proudleigh caustically, leaving her meaning to be understood by Susan.

"Perhaps so," replied Susan promptly, "for if Mr. Jones was married him might have all his wife's old relations wanting to live on him."

"It's not a matter of relations," said Jones, "for when I put me hand into me pocket, I can always find money there to help anybody. But females are not to be trusted; and as I don't take away anybody's wife, I wouldn't like anybody to take away mine."

"I agree wid you, Mister Jones," said Mr. Proudleigh; "but you don't have no occasion to worry you'self, for as you not married, nobody can teck away you' wife." He laughed as he ceased, being proud of his logic.

"Well, marriage is not everything," said Susan; "but as I hear that Mr. Jones was goin' to get married—I forget who tell me—I thought I would mention it so as to congratulate him. But since it isn't true, I congratulate him all de same."

"I thank you kindly," said Jones with a sweeping bow, "and without indulging in any process of vituperation, I venture to submit that some people would have a better life with Samuel Josiah Jones than with other men I could mention. Some married people have it dull, you know. Now I am a sport, an' anybody who is along with me must enjoy themself."

Susan immediately credited her aunt with having been talking about her to Jones. Her suspicions were just. Yet Jones had said enough to indicate

that he was still regretting her desertion of him, and this established a sympathetic understanding between them: they were both partners in misfortune.

"What that word, 'vituperation,' mean, Mister Jones?" inquired Mr. Proudleigh, who was interested in polysyllables but sometimes found that Jones's terms left him bewildered in a maze of hopeless conjecture.

"It means," said Jones, beginning an explanation which might have left the old man no wiser than before, when a shout in the street attracted their attention, and they heard a babble of voices and the sound of hurrying feet.

"Fire!" cried Mr. Proudleigh, moving quickly towards the veranda. "What a place Colon is for fire! Almost every week dere is one."

"They say the American doctors burn down the houses when they can't cure the fever any other way," said Jones, hurriedly following Mr. Proudleigh to the veranda.

"The people burn it down themself when them want to rob," was Miss Proudleigh's hypothesis, which probably did account for many of the fires which afflicted Colon.

From the veranda they could see a red glare against the north-western sky, and a great volume of smoke surging upwards. The glare grew brighter every moment; denser became the smoke.

"It's a big fire!" cried Susan excitedly, "an' nearly all the house in Colon is of wood. It may burn down de whole town!"

"I gwine to see it!" Mr. Proudleigh exclaimed. "I never miss a fire yet." He hurried into the room

for his hat, spurred to unusual activity by the prospect of enjoying one of his favourite amusements.

"But suppose it come this way, pupa?" cried Catherine in a frightened tone of voice. "What about we clothes and other things?"

But Mr. Proudleigh was already half-way down the stairs, and calling out loudly to ask if they were not going with him. Miss Proudleigh refused to move, not being willing to leave her room to the mercy of wandering thieves. Catherine, after a moment's hesitation, ran after her father. Jones and Susan went out together.

The street below was crowded. Half the people in Colon were running towards the scene of the conflagration, shouting "Fire!" with all the power of their lungs. Cabs tore through the narrow thoroughfare, mounted men appeared from nowhere and began to urge their horses through the hurrying throng with a fine disregard of other people's safety. The excitement was contagious; it infected Susan and Jones, who, hand in hand, began to run also, immediately losing sight of Catherine and Mr. Proudleigh and thinking only of themselves. Soon they came to the spot where a huge crowd was collected near a block of wooden buildings, some of which were now blazing furiously. Fortunately there was no wind, so the sparks were not carried to any considerable distance. But they rose to a tremendous height in the heated air, and at that moment thousands of anxious people were wondering whether a single house would be left standing in Colon when morning dawned.

The fire brigades were on the spot, the town brigade

as well as that from Christobal. The men worked like demons. Long silver streams poured upon the blazing buildings; uniformed men in shining helmets swarmed up the sides of the doomed structures, splintering and smashing the woodwork with their axes, giving fierce battle to the yellow monster which leaped from roof to roof, roaring dully as if glorying in destruction. The Panamanian police were everywhere, the little fellows running about and clubbing out of the way whoever ventured too near the burning houses. Soon it was seen that the flames were threatening to leap across a narrow street, the houses in which were already warping and blistering under the terrible heat. If those houses should once ignite, it would be with the greatest difficulty that they could be saved.

A sudden scattering of the crowd indicated that the police were impressing men to help them fight the fire. They seized every able-bodied man they could lay their hands upon, tolerating no show of resistance; people on the outskirts of the crowd, knowing that an unpleasant time would be in store for them if once they were impressed, were hastily making off, and Jones, who was among them, thought it eminently wise to follow their example as quickly as possible. Pulling Susan by the hand, he hurried away. When he thought that he had put sufficient ground between himself and the police he halted. From where they now stood they could still see the flames fighting their way upwards, and the huge masses of heavy black smoke spreading like a pall over the town.

"I hope them won't hold pupa," panted Susan,

staring with wide-open eyes at the curling smoke and lurid sky.

"They wouldn't bother with him," Jones assured her; "he is too feeble; in fact, he shouldn't be in that crowd at all. It is the strong men they looking for to-night. They will try to hold people like me an' Mackenzie."

Mackenzie's name slipped out almost without Jones knowing that he had pronounced it. It showed that Mackenzie occupied a large portion of his thoughts in these days. The mention of the name also led to a question which seemed strangely out of place at a time when Colon appeared to be threatened with wholesale destruction.

"You an' you' husband ever talk about me?" he asked Susan.

She was surprised at this question, so out of keeping it was with her thoughts just then. Still staring towards the fire, she said, "Why you ask that now?"

"Because I would like to know what you say about me, an' this is the only time I can ask you. I suppose Mackenzie laugh at me an' think I am a fool to let him take you away from me so easy?"

"Why you always like to talk disagreeable things, Sam?" she answered, unconsciously dropping back into her old familiar way of addressing him. There was no pretence now; there was a touch of regret in her voice as she went on:

"Mackenzie is quite up at Culebra, an' you is down here. I going back to-morrow. What's de good of talkin' about him?"

"But can you tell me now that you don't sorry

you leave me, Sue; that you are as happy as you used to be? I don't make any pretence like you. I miss you, an' I tell you so plain."

"It was your fault, Sam. Before I went away I ask you if you was going to keep you' promise to marry me, an' you say I was talking foolishness. I knew Mackenzie was going to act differently, and, after all, him do for me what you would never do."

"That is the way you put it. But you didn't tell me Mackenzie offered to marry you. You stole away from me like a thief in the night. If you had told me you were going, and why you were going, I wouldn't have made you go, an' we would have been married to-day. But you didn't give me a chance to know. Why? I could have done you nothing if you had told me."

There was so much in what he said, that for the space of a few seconds Susan remained silent. Then she answered.

"You talk like that now, Sam, but you would have talked different if I had told you. I was afraid."

"Afraid," he repeated bitterly, "though I never lift me hand to you in me life! An' suppose it had come to a big quarrel or a fight. You was living in the same house with a lot of people: what could I do you? An' if I did make a fight, the wrong would have been on my side, an' you could have left me with a clear conscience. How is it now? You mean to tell me that every day of you' natural life you going to be content with the same sort of life you living now? I know all about it. You can't prevent you' people from talking. Besides, I know something about

Culebra; and I know Mackenzie. An' if it is bad now, what is it goin' to be later on? You are going to be miserable, you going to fret, you going to wish you were dead; an' so, for all your name is Mrs. Mackenzie, an' you have a ring on you' finger, and all the comforts you want, I don't see that you are as well off as before you got married. So what is the good of it?"

Out there, in the streets of Colon, in the town where, as she now so keenly remembered, she had had so many hours of happiness, Susan felt the full force of Samuel's words. Both of them had forgotten the fire. Their own affairs were of supremest importance in all the world.

"It is no use talkin' now," she said dismally. "What is done can't be undone."

"That is true. You make your own bed an' must lie on it."

"We live an' learn," said Susan. "You can't know if you don't try."

"What's the sense of tryin' once if you can never try again?"

She said nothing, and he continued, as if talking to himself:

"You can't marry again, once you're married; that's the hard part of it. You leave me, but you can't leave Mackenzie. . . . You can't. . . . But, Sue, you can! Let us go away from here to Jamaica!"

No such proposition had definitely formed itself in his mind when he first began to speak. The suddenness of it was a revelation to himself. Yet the idea must have been lurking somewhere at the back of his mind, for he had never entirely given up Susan. Now

too he went on as though the whole course of their future conduct had been carefully thought out by him.

"We can go to Jamaica, Sue, an' we'll be all right there. I will arrange all about the passage; you can come down here from Culebra the night before the ship sail, and we can leave in the morning. You needn't say a word to anybody, not even your own people; you can write them when you are in Jamaica. When we get there, Mackenzie can only divorce you, for he can't do you anything in Jamaica. But even if he divorce you, it won't matter, for I will marry you then. Mackenzie take you away from me, so it is only fair if I take you away from him. What you say?"

"No, Sam! This is different. When I leave you I wasn't married; I was me own woman; now I am not. It would be a disgrace for me to go away wid you an' leave me lawful husband. Besides, it would be a sin. Don't you know that if a married woman 'ave anything to do with another man it is seven years' trouble for both of them?"

It came into Jones's mind at that moment that, if such were the case, there must be large numbers of persons in Central America and the West Indies enduring long seven-year periods of tribulation just then; but he only said, "That's all foolishness, Sue."

"It is not. Marriage is a different thing from every other thing; that is what I learn, and that is what nobody can take out of me head. An' suppose Mackenzie was to divorce me. You think I would like to have me name disgrace like that?"

"Then what we going to do?"

For answer, Susan began to walk slowly in the

direction of her people's house. There were many persons in the streets now. The fire was burning still, but had been mastered; the fear that it might consume the whole town had passed away. People were beginning to return to their homes, all talking about the danger which they had escaped. The street in which they were was filled with the murmur of excited voices.

They walked on, Jones at her side. "Pupa must be gone home," she remarked. "We better go back too."

As she spoke she saw a man who was passing in the opposite direction turn and look at her and her companion. She glanced over her shoulder to look at him, Jones also turning to stare. The man had stopped and was staring.

They both recognized who it was, and Susan nodded her head. The man returned the bow, but Jones looked at him as if he were a post. "That is the jackass," he said, "who cause all this trouble;" and he spoke loudly enough for Tom Wooley to hear.

They continued on their way, arriving at the house in a few minutes. There they found Mr. Proudleigh relating his wonderful experiences at the scene of the fire. He and Catherine had been separated in the crowd, and he related how the police had tried to induce him to assist in extinguishing the fire, and with what arguments he had effectually prevented them from laying sacrilegious hands upon his venerable person. A story which showed that the old man had in him the makings of an ingenious newspaper reporter, and which was listened to by his sister with every manifestation of profound disbelief.

CHAPTER V

THE ANONYMOUS LETTER

MR. THOMAS WOOLEY had never been credited with strong moral convictions by anyone who knew him. Among his mild boasts, uttered in the company of congenial companions, certain alleged breaches by him of the seventh commandment had frequently flourished: to gain a reputation for gallantry he had not scrupled to libel himself. But on that night when he saw Susan and Jones together in the streets of Colon the sacredness of the marriage tie appealed to him strongly; he felt that a great wrong was being done to marriage as a civil and religious institution, and he remembered that he himself had been badly treated by Susan and by Jones. That, he decided in his mind, had been freely forgiven. He was magnanimous. But Susan was now a wife, and it was clearly wrong that she should have anything whatever to do with Jones, who was, in Tom's opinion, a desperate and malignant character who pretended to be friendly with you at first for the purpose of ill-treating you afterwards.

Tom argued that, shocked though he was, he had no right to interfere personally with Jones. He would not remonstrate with him on the evil tenor of

his way. But he reflected with intense satisfaction that Mackenzie was, if anything, Jones's physical superior, as well as the rightful lord and master of Susan. Mackenzie, then, could read to Jones a much-needed moral lesson, could deal with Susan as an outraged husband should, and, generally, could do all those things which Tom wanted to see done, but could not do himself.

The problem was, how to acquaint Mackenzie with the atrocious actions of Susan and her lover? Tom felt that he had been a martyr. He had suffered much because of Susan. But martyrdom, he was convinced, should not be allowed to go beyond reasonable limits, and should, as a general rule, be carefully avoided whenever possible. He had lost his situation in Kingston, he had been roughly handled and fined in Colon. These things he had endured without murmuring. He was now prepared to become an active agent in the work of Susan's moral redemption, and, incidentally, in the deserved punishment of Jones; he had no doubt whatever that in endeavouring to call Mackenzie's attention to the wrongs of which that injured man was still ignorant, he would be performing a highly meritorious act. But caution must be displayed. Jones was very likely to take a singularly narrow-minded view of his action, if he should ever think that he, Tom, had meddled with his affairs. There was only one way in which to approach Mackenzie, and that was through the medium of an anonymous letter—a letter so worded that suspicion could not possibly fall on Tom Wooley. Tom had been removed to Christobal. Early the

next morning, with a fine feeling of noble endeavour, somewhat mingled with apprehension lest, in spite of all his efforts, his identity should be disclosed, he sat down and wrote to Mackenzie.

The morning after this, on calling at the Post Office on his way to work, Mackenzie was handed a letter which he opened and read as he slowly walked away.

"DEAR SIR," it ran, "this is to inform you that things are not quite straight. Everybody has a respect for you, and it would be a shame if a friend of yours do not let you know that your wife is not behaving towards you as she should." Here Mackenzie stopped reading and glanced at the end of the letter to see from whom it came. It was signed, "A True Friend," a signature that left him none the wiser. He continued reading.

"Your wife is always in Colon with Jones, the young man she was with when you married her. I see them together over and over, and this is not right, for she is your wife and should think of your feelings. I therefore take this opportunity of making you acquainted with the facts."

Mackenzie read the letter twice, then studied the handwriting: it told him nothing. He folded the letter, carefully placed it in its envelope, put it away in his pocket, and went thoughtfully to his work.

Susan had returned the day before. She had told him all about the fire, of which he had already read a sensational account in that morning's papers. She had told him that she and her relatives had run out to see the fire (which is what he knew they would have done), that they had met Jones in the crowd,

and that she had spoken to Jones. There was nothing improbable whatever in her story. He remembered that he himself had advised her to speak to Jones if she should ever meet him. This anonymous letter said that she was often in Colon with Jones. But he, Mackenzie, knew that Susan had only been twice to Colon since she had been his wife. So that assertion was a lie. The person who had written the letter, whoever it was, must have seen Susan speaking to Jones on the night of the fire, but Susan had not kept that a secret. This man too, who signed himself "A True Friend," must surely bear Susan a grudge, and perhaps was also an enemy of himself. For the fellow evidently wanted to make mischief, and that no true friend would do. Mackenzie did not like the letter; it worried him a little. He did not care to have Susan's name coupled with that of Jones: the association was not pleasant. But he did not, for he could not, believe the story. He decided he would show the letter to Susan later on.

He handed it to her when he went home for lunch.

"You have some enemy in Colon, Sue," he said; "or it is my enemy. I get this letter to-day, an' it is no good person write it. I wonder if it is a woman?"

Susan took the letter and glanced at the handwriting. She knew it at once. Although Tom had tried to disguise his handwriting, and believed he had succeeded, his endeavour had been at best a clumsy one; she gave no sign, however, that she knew the author of the anonymous communication; she did not wish Mackenzie to seek out Tom and demand an explanation, which might be very in-

convenient to her. She read the letter slowly. She realized that the attempt to make it appear that she was continually meeting Samuel had defeated its own end. She felt that only a fool like Tom could have blundered so badly. He hadn't even mentioned the fire, so eager was he to conceal his identity. Her heart was beating quickly, though she tried to appear unconcerned. She strove to control her voice when she spoke.

"It's a wonder the person who writes this letter didn't say I was two weeks wid Jones," she said, as she handed the letter back to her husband. "That's the way that worthless people tell lies on other people! They want to rob me of me character because them is envious of me!"

"Well, it is what you have to expect," said Mackenzie philosophically. "I know you only go twice to Colon to see you' family, an' Jones have his work to do during the day, so he couldn't be with you."

He said this more for the purpose of setting her mind at ease than because he was any longer interested in the subject of the letter; but Susan was inwardly too anxious to let the matter rest there. None of her relatives, not even her aunt, would betray her; but suppose some other person should follow Tom's example? A bold idea suggested itself to her. "I wonder if it is Jones himself write it?" she remarked.

Mackenzie was surprised at the suggestion.

"Why y'u think so?" he asked. "Jones wouldn't tell a lie on himself?"

"I don't know about that. P'rhaps him think you couldn't say anything to him, but might want

to quarrel wid me. Men are bad, an' Jones might want to get me into trouble because I wouldn't take much notice of him the other night when I saw him at the fire, as I told you."

Mackenzie looked at the letter he still held in his hand. He shook his head; the handwriting was not like Jones's.

"He may have begged one of his friend to write it," urged Susan.

"Maybe," admitted Mackenzie; "it may be Jones. But I wouldn't like to accuse him till I was sure: that would be foolishness."

"Well, don't notice it, then," said Susan, pleased with Mackenzie's prudence. "I don't care what anybody say about me, so long as me conscience don't trouble me an' it don't put you out. But I wouldn't like anybody else do me a thing like this again, for my character is all dat I have, and what one person do another may do."

But as Mackenzie preferred always to deal with facts and not with possibilities, he let the subject drop, and by the time he returned to his work that afternoon he had ceased to think about the letter.

Not for an instant, however, did Susan cease to think of it. She was desperately frightened. As she had said to Mackenzie, what one person had done another might do, and then Mackenzie would begin to grow suspicious. She feared to meet Samuel again, yet she wanted to see him at least once more: she wanted to warn him. How could she see him? . . . If she risked a meeting some enemy of hers might learn about it, and this time she might not be able

to find a ready excuse. It is true that Mackenzie had told her she should be polite to Jones if she should see him, but at that time no anonymous letter had coupled her name with that of her former lover. And to meet Jones the very next time she went to Colon would of a surety have a suspicious look.

Should she write to him? Letters went astray sometimes, and Samuel was careless.

Then what was she to do?

She worried herself all that afternoon, trying to think a way out of the difficulty. Suppose Mackenzie should meet Jones and mention the letter to him? Jones might say something about his meeting her at her people's house . . . and then!

She felt sick of the difficult position in which she found herself, wearied to death; she had a sensation of being tied hand and foot, of being a prisoner; she longed for release, and she knew that only one avenue of escape was open to her. She could leave Culebra, leave Panama, and go back to Jamaica with Jones. She would be happier there, free, more like what she used to be before her marriage. What did the hardships and discontents of that time now seem to her? They were as nothing; she remembered only that she had been happier, and what was the good of marriage if it brought but boredom and disgust? But there was the divorce court to think of also, and her terrible fall from respectability. Even if Mackenzie did not take the trouble to divorce her, she would be a byword amongst those persons who should know her as a woman who had left her husband for another man. She could not face that shame.

She decided that she must wait. Nothing might happen in the next couple of weeks. At the end of that time it would not seem at all strange if she went to Colon to see her people ; then, if she met Samuel, she would tell him of the letter and put him on his guard.

She felt grateful to Mackenzie for his confidence in her. Such confidence displayed by a man like Tom would merely have awakened her contempt ; but she saw that her husband was perfectly sincere, and determined to take her part against her traducers. Had he doubted her he would have shown it at once, he would have made inquiries, and the sequel would have been terrible. That, she argued, would have been unjust to her. She had done nothing deserving of blame. She had met Jones twice ; she had not told her husband the truth about those meetings ; but on the other hand she had refused to fly with Samuel, and on that demonstration of virtuous feeling she greatly preened herself. She had behaved splendidly ; after such conduct it would have been most unjust if Mackenzie had acted any differently from how he had acted. And to think that it was Tom who had tried to injure her ; to think too that nothing painful could be done to him ! She thirsted for revenge, yet she knew that Tom must escape scot-free. The slightest attempt at reprisals might but lead to exposure. The thought that she could not pay back Tom with heavy interest was like wormwood to her soul.

When Mackenzie came home that evening she again brought up the subject of the letter. She thought that if she dwelt upon it, showed no anxiety that it should be forgotten, her husband's mind would be cleared of

any shadow of suspicion that, unknown to himself, might be lingering in some dark corner there. Mackenzie laughed as he listened to her extravagantly expressed wonder that anyone should be base enough to lie against another person anonymously.

"I remember," he said, "about eight years ago, when I was workin' at the Jamaica railway, somebody write a letter about me to de manager. He didn't sign his name, but I knew all the time who it was, an' the manager knew it too. The man wanted me job, an' he accuse me of robbin' the railway's goods an' sellin' them outside. But I was more than a match for him. I could account for every screw that pass through me hand. All that man ever get for his lie was to lose his job, an' that teach him not to write letters against other people in future."

Mackenzie had never forgotten that incident. It had much to do with his disbelief in anonymous letters.

"So it is not me alone that them try to injure," said Susan, glad that her husband had also been attacked by an anonymous scribe. "However, I not going back to Colon."

"That's stupidity," said Mackenzie. "You goin' to make a lie trouble y'u? You must go an' see you' people sometimes."

This remark was just what she wanted to hear; her husband himself had now advised her to go to Colon when she wanted! But she would not avail herself of this advice to rush off to Colon. Although her inclination was to do so, she fought against it, forcing herself to wait. Her patience and prudence were rewarded when, five days after, her sister Catherine appeared at Culebra.

CHAPTER VI

SAMUEL'S DETERMINATION

CATHERINE had come by one of the afternoon trains ; as she had calculated, she found Susan alone.

" I bet you you don't tell me why I come here to-day ? " she said to her sister, dropping her voice as though she had an important secret to impart.

Susan expressed her inability to guess, but, with the anonymous letter always in her mind, became feverishly curious to know what had brought Catherine up to Culebra. Was some scandal about her being circulated in Colon ?

Catherine produced a sealed, unaddressed envelope and placed it in her sister's hand ; Susan broke the seal ; the letter was from Jones.

Catherine observed Susan's start of surprise and alarm. She hastened to explain that Jones had not posted the letter because he would not take the risk of its falling into any other hands except those of Susan. He had not even addressed the envelope, lest, inadvertently, the handwriting should be seen and recognized.

" Samuel pay my trainage from Colon to up here, an' back again," said Catherine. " I didn't want to

come, but he beg me hard, an' I thought it was better I bring the letter than that him should ask anybody else."

She looked inquiringly at Susan, anxious to learn what Jones had written about.

Susan said nothing. She was reading and re-reading the letter. It was written in Samuel's most grandiloquent style, and opened with a declaration of his intention to poison himself, throw himself on a railway track to be run over by a train, drown himself, or commit suicide in some other unpleasant manner if he were compelled to endure much longer his present agony of mind. He wanted to see Susan to tell her "something very important." He had to see her, and he begged her to go to Colon as early as she could. He ended by saying that he was leaving for Jamaica in a week's time, wishing as he did to die in his own country, and that she would never cease to regret it if she let him leave Panama without seeing her. She must tell Catherine if she would go to Colon, and when.

There was a postscript: "And when I am departed hence, forlorn and forsaken, you will eventually come to find that your desertation of me was a catastrophe worse than ever you have known; but alas! it will be too late."

"You know what Sam write to me about?" said Susan, searching Catherine's face with her eyes.

Catherine shook her head negatively. "Him want you to leave Mackenzie?"

"Not exactly. Him want to see me, but I can't go to Colon just now at all."

"Why? No harm can be done. Nobody will know why y'u go."

“ Wait till I tell you something,” said Susan, and she told Catherine of her conversation with Jones on the night of the fire, of their accidental meeting with Tom, and of how Tom had acted. She had intended to keep all this secret, but now was glad to have some one to whom she could confide her cares.

Catherine listened, breathless, but not surprised at what she heard about Jones. She had never been deceived by the formal conversations he had carried on with Susan on the two occasions they had met at the house in Colon. But with Tom’s treachery she was disgusted. She had once entertained a kindly feeling for him ; now she felt contempt. All her sympathies were with her sister, and she agreed that it might indeed be a risk for Susan to go just then to Colon ; she had better wait for some time longer.

She proposed to return to Colon the next morning, and she promised to explain to Samuel why Susan could not see him just then ; she also promised to warn him against Tom, at the same time impressing upon him that any rash action on his part could do no good but might merely create an unpleasant scandal. All this agreed upon, Susan professed herself satisfied, then immediately added, “ But suppose Sam go away without I see him ? ”

That was possible. She did not take seriously his threats of suicide ; they were merely intended to frighten her. But that he was thinking of returning to Jamaica she could well believe. His restlessness and impatience might easily cause him to do that, and quickly, and . . . and she wanted to see him again.

"Tell him," she said to Catherine after a pause, "that he must 'ave patience."

"But patience for what?" asked Catherine, and Susan could give no answer.

The following morning Catherine returned to Colon. That evening, when Jones came round to the house as agreed, she quietly took him out on the veranda and told him the result of her mission.

When they went back into Mr. Proudleigh's room, Jones solemnly walked up to Mr. Proudleigh and shook hands with him.

"Old massa, you have nothing to do with it," he said—"nothing at all."

Mr. Proudleigh immediately agreed that he hadn't, and then anxiously inquired what it was with which he was so entirely unconnected.

"You know that I loved your daughter, didn't you?" asked Jones.

"In course!" agreed Mr. Proudleigh briskly. "Dat is what I always say. I 'ave seen many a young man all in love all times, but I never see one like you. Your love is true love, Mister Jones, like mine when I was young an' good-lookin'. I remember I was in love wid three different young lady at one time, an' I couldn't say which one I love de most. One day——"

"Very well," said Jones, who was more anxious to air his grievances than to listen to the youthful idylls of Mr. Proudleigh. "Y'u know that I take her away from Kingston, Jamaica, an' bring her here?"

"Sartinly. I was down at de wharf de day you leave. Sun was hot that day, me friend!"

“ Very well. And y’u know that I bring her here an’ look after her kindly, an’ nearly went to prison for her ? ”

“ Yes, y’u tell me all about it. But she say it was your fault ; but, as I tell her, a young man——”

“ Very well. Now tell me fair an’ square : do you think Susan acted right to leave me in ruinate in the manner visible ? ”

“ Well, to tell y’u de truth, Mister Jones, you is looking very well just now. Ef I was you, I wouldn’t bodder me head about a young lady that act so foolish as to leave me an’ go an’ married. De same thing happen to me once, but it didn’t make a tooth in me head ache. An’ if you want another han’some intended, there is Miss Catherine——”

“ Please to leave me out of you’ conversation, pupa ! ” came peremptorily from Catherine, and Mr. Proudleigh halted promptly in the midst of his match-making endeavour.

“ It don’t matter how I look,” said Jones angrily : “ it’s how I feel. If it wasn’t for one thing, I would throw meself in the sea this very night.”

“ That would not be Christianlike, Mister Jones,” said Miss Proudleigh, who had been listening attentively to the conversation. “ We must patiently bear our crosses. Besides, I don’t see what you worrying you’self about, for therè is some things that is a good riddance. Y’u don’t see it now, but you will see it later on.”

“ That may be true, but I am speaking of now an’ not of later on,” said Jones. “ I want you all to under-

stand that I have been driven like a lamb to the slaughter by Susan Mackenzie. She get married without my knowledge ; she took away all the money I give her, an' what she used to take from me when she thought I didn't know ; an' now she is living like a king at Culebra. If it wasn't for me she might have been in Jamaica to-day keeping a little shop, without an extra five shillin's. Yet when I send her sister to ask her——”

“ What y'u going to say now ? ” cried Catherine, seeing he was on the verge of blurting out what he had agreed should be kept a secret.

“ What I am going to say I am going to say,” replied Jones impetuously. “ I am goin' away to Jamaica, an' I send an' ask Susan to come an' tell me good-bye and have a talk before I go. What she do ? She say she can't come ! Is that a decent way to treat a man, especially a man like me ? When she left me I bear it in silence, though I might have been very disagreeable. Yet now she treat me like if I was a dog ! ”

This angry outburst was received in silence by those who heard it. They had never seen Jones in a temper before.

“ You know what I am going to do now ? ” he asked after a moment's pause. “ I am going straight up to Culebra to tell Susan what I think of her ! ”

“ Y'u can't do that at all, Mr. Jones,” said Catherine firmly. “ I told you already why Sue can't come now, an' you must remember she is married an' dat her husband wouldn't like y'u to bring no confusion into his house.”

" Her husband can go to the devil ! " exclaimed Jones. " Who is her husband ? "

" But suppose him meet you an' have a fight ? " said Mr. Proudleigh, thinking that such a prospect might have a deterrent effect upon Jones.

" If Mackenzie can fight, I can fight too," replied the young man. " If he don't interfere with me, I won't interfere with him. But I am going to Culebra."

" Well, Mister Jones," said Mr. Proudleigh, " if you determine to go, I can't stop y'u. But do, I beg you, don't say dat we know anyt'ing at all about it. You see, I don't 'fraid of any man in de world, but quarrel is a thing I keep out of. Mackenzie is me son-in-law, so I can't say nothing against him, but y'u know what I think ; an' if you take my foolish advice you wouldn't go to Culebra."

" Don't call my name, whatever you do," said Catherine. " I sorry I have anything to do wid your business, for I can see you going to act like a fool. And after all, what can y'u expect Susan to do ? If you go an' make any trouble now, her husband will believe what that liar, Tom, write an' tell him."

" What is dat ? " asked Mr. Proudleigh quickly, but Catherine refused to reply. Her reticence, coming after her allusion to Tom and Mackenzie, caused the old man to feel that the situation was more perilous than he had thought it was.

As for Miss Proudleigh, she loudly lifted up her voice in denunciation of sin and its consequences, this time with a good deal of sincerity born of fear.

" Susan have much to answer for," she cried ; " she bring all this trouble on herself an' her husband

an' Mr. Jones. Your sin will find you out, an' who shall flee from the wrath to come! I have nothing to do with it. She is me niece, but she never treat me respectfully. She deserve all she going to suffer, and she going to suffer for true! But I sympathize wid her, for we are told not to bear any malice."

As the old lady seemed to be trying to qualify for the position of a modern Jeremiah, Catherine brusquely demanded if she wanted all the people in the house to hear what she was saying.

"They will all hear soon enough," replied Miss Proudleigh grimly. "There is going to be war an' rumours of war."

"An' I am going to make the war," said Jones fiercely. "I make up my mind to die."

"Don't do that, me son," implored Mr. Proudleigh. "Death is not a thing to meck fun with. Wait an' have patience."

"Patience for what?"

As Mr. Proudleigh could not say, he merely suggested that Jones had better not act rashly, but Samuel would not allow his mind to be affected by such advice.

He took his hat.

"When you goin' to Culebra?" asked Catherine, wondering if she would have time to warn Susan.

"Why you want to know?"

"Never mind, if y'u don't want to tell me!" she snapped, "but take care what you doin'."

"I know what I am doing," answered Jones, and left the room.

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" You think him will really go ? " Mr. Proudleigh inquired anxiously of Catherine, after the door had closed behind Jones.

Catherine pondered a moment.

" If him could go to-night, him would go," she said ; " but he can't go to-night. To-morrow him may change his mind. Jones is a man that will do a thing in a temper, but not otherwise."

Catherine's estimate of Samuel's character was shrewd. But it is not always possible to foresee the actions of any human being.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT HAPPENED AT CULEBRA

IT was raining at Culebra—had been raining for days. For miles and miles the sky was overcast, hour after hour the rain came down, now swiftly and in showers, now in a light drizzle which gave to the surrounding country an aspect of greyness, a cheerless, depressing hue.

It was between eight and nine o'clock in the forenoon; her husband had gone to his work and Susan was busying herself with her household duties. She was pensive, moving about as one who had no energy; her mind was not set about what she was doing, her thoughts were far away.

She knew that Catherine must have told Jones on the previous night her answer to his letter: she was wondering what he had said, whether he had determined to go back to Jamaica without seeing her, whether all was over between them now. . . .

There was a knock at the front door: she went to answer it. She opened the door: on the veranda stood Samuel, the last person in the world she expected to see at Mackenzie's house that day.

"You!" she exclaimed. "What y'u doing up here?"

She stood guarding the doorway, as if to prevent him from entering; she was trembling all over with fear, not of Jones, but lest her husband should unexpectedly return and find Samuel there.

“ You not going to let me in ? ” asked Jones, with a note of pleading in his voice ; “ I have only come to have a talk with you.”

“ You shouldn’t come,” she answered. “ What a trial is this ! I told Kate to tell you I couldn’t come to Colon now, an’ here you come to Culebra to make trouble. What’s the good of all this, Sam ? ”

She did not wait for him to answer.

“ You must go right back,” she insisted, “ for the neighbours goin’ to tell Mackenzie dat a strange man come here to-day, an’ if you stay an’ him find out it is you, he will believe what Tom write an’ tell him. You can’t remain here, Sam.”

Her words, her earnest manner, her evident determination not to let him enter, left Jones at a loss what to do. He had taken the early morning train to Culebra; he had left Colon for the purpose of speaking his mind to her: he wanted to relieve his feelings. While in the train he had kept his courage up to the sticking point; again and again he had rehearsed to himself his grievances; even when he left the train and was climbing the hill he felt that he would be able to go through with the scene which he had pictured. But when he neared the house which was pointed out to him as Susan’s, he had been conscious of some hesitation in his mind, of an inclination to pause and consider whether he was acting wisely. He had fought down that inclination; he was now

standing face to face with Susan. But she, though frightened, was resolute, and he stood before her perplexed, uncertain what to do.

"You going to stay at the door all day?" he asked her.

"No, for I don't expect you goin' to remain here."

"You not even going to ask me to take a seat?"

"What for?"

"I am tired. I didn't sleep all last night; I walk from the train station to this house, and all you do is to insult me like a dog. I only came here to tell you good-bye. I am taking the steamer to Jamaica to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes. I don't want to stop here any longer."

Her eyelids fluttered; she gazed at him in blank silence; she felt that he had spoken the truth, had made up his mind to leave Panama. In a little while he would return to the station, in a few hours he would be on his way . . . home.

The patter of the rain on the roofs and ground played a heavy accompaniment to the beating of her heart. Through the thick atmosphere came steadily the booming sound of dynamite explosions in the Cut. Boom, boom, boom: the heavy noise assaulted the ear, but she herself was conscious only of a deadly stillness within her. Suddenly Jones put out his hand. "Good-bye," he said.

For answer, she stepped backwards. "Come in and sit down a little, if you tired," she said.

He entered, glanced carelessly around him, and

sat down. She left the door open, threw open all the windows also, as if there were a dead body in the house. Anyone passing could see them, no one could imagine or say that she was entertaining Jones clandestinely. "Mackenzie shouldn't come back before half-past twelve," she remarked; "but if he come you must tell him that you come up here to tell him an' me good-bye."

She sat at some distance from him, and by one of the open windows.

"What you going to do in Jamaica?" she asked.

"I don't know, an' I don't care. I should never have come to this place. In fact," he added, breaking out a little, "I am goin' to kill meself!"

"Stop talking stupidity, Sam," she said quietly: "you know y'u not goin' to do nothing of the sort. I suppose at first you thought you would make a quarrel wid me up here?"

He feebly protested that such a thought had never entered his mind, but knew that he did not convince her. He was aware now that a quarrel at Culebra would have been a hopelessly foolish thing.

Both of them fell into silence after this. There seemed nothing more to say. Both of them appeared to be listening to the rain, to that persistent booming of the explosions; both of them were wondering if this were really their last leave-taking.

One question formed itself again and again in Susan's mind: "Would it not be better to sacrifice respectability, religion, and go with him?" Sitting face to face with him, knowing that to-morrow he would be on his way to Jamaica, the answer "Yes"

was whispered to her from her heart. As if he knew what was passing in her mind, he asked her suddenly :

“ And you won't make up you' mind to come with me, Sue ? ”

If “ Yes ” rose to her lips, she resolutely shut them. A few seconds passed before she replied.

“ Something tell me, ‘ Better not, ’ Sam. But I am sorry. ”

She covered her face with her hands.

“ Kiss me an' tell me good-bye, Sue. ”

He had risen and was standing over her. She got up, glanced quickly outside : no one was passing. She kissed him.

He left the house, walking hurriedly away. She fell back into her chair, crying as she had never cried before.

Jones walked rapidly in the direction of the Culebra station. He knew that Susan cared for him still ; he believed that if he waited and persisted he would be able to break down her resolution. But he might have long to wait, and he did not feel equal to that. His work at Christobal had become a dreary drudgery. It would be better to go back to Jamaica, and that he would do the next day.

He did not blame Susan now ; he felt for her nothing but kindness and affection. It was Mackenzie he blamed ; Mackenzie it was who had inveigled her away from him : Mackenzie was the cause of her unhappiness and his. But even while he thought this, he felt in his heart of hearts that he himself had been the first cause of Susan's desertion of him. He had promised to marry her and had broken his word. He

had made a fool of himself in Colon. He sought for excuses for his conduct ; he found many ; yet his self-accusation persisted : conscience was by no means dead in Samuel Josiah.

He reached the station ; there he learnt that there would be no train leaving for the next couple of hours. This delay he had not foreseen : he wondered what he should do with himself in the meantime. He could not return to Susan's house.

He lounged about the station for a few minutes, but his thoughts troubled him and inaction was irksome. He must do something, he would walk about a little : he turned his back to the station and took the road leading down into the Culebra Cut. He had never been inside the Cut before. Troubled in mind as he was, the scene there made demands on his attention. Soon he was looking about him with wondering eyes.

On either hand of him rose lofty walls of rock and earth, carved into wide terraces which formed the buttresses of the mighty Cut. He was walking along one of these terraces ; on it and on all the others train lines were laid. The trains were passing up and down, powerful engines dragging twenty, thirty, forty dump-cars laden with the stones and dirt that had been dug out of this part of the Canal ; and at the bottom of the ditch and along the sides of it steam shovels were at work.

He watched these shovels curiously. He saw long cranes attached to engines, and at the end of each crane an iron box with a movable lid and bottom. The crane swung round, was lowered, the iron box or

mouth bit into a pile of earth and rock shattered by dynamite, gorged itself, swung round again until it hovered over a dump-car. Then the bottom of the box opened slowly and a mass of earth and stones was poured into the car. Again the shovel swung back, and again and again was this process repeated. He remembered that Mackenzie was engaged on one of those steam shovels, and thought that perhaps he was, without knowing it, watching Mackenzie's shovel at work. Then he resumed his walk, thankful that he had worn his waterproof that day, for now black and heavy rain-clouds were brooding over the Cut.

He walked along rapidly, knowing that he had not much more time to spare. The farther on he went, the more intense became the activity of the works, the more impressive the scene around him. Thousands of men were earnestly at work; groups of West Indians were manipulating the air-drills which bored the holes for the dynamite charges, scores of steam shovels were toiling to remove the heaped-up debris, dozens of steam-engines were hurrying to and fro and sending forth shrill screams. From the escapes of the steam shovels came puffs of greyish smoke, from the funnels of the engines a thick black smoke was belched, from the air-drills little spurts of steam darted, and from all around came the heavy detonation of dynamite discharges, shaking the earth.

Penned in by the high walls on either side, the smoke drifted hither and thither, forming a gloomy pall. The cliffs of Culebra flung back the deep boom of the explosions, the hurrying trains seemed to threaten at every moment to come into violent collision. Jones

saw West Indian labourers carelessly carrying boxes of dynamite on their heads and shoulders, and remembered that many a man had, through his carelessness, been shattered to pieces in an instant. He saw more than one of them trip and the boxes they carried almost hurled to the ground. The men laughed. Familiarity with danger had rendered them contemptuous of it ; but Jones shuddered ; he could not appreciate the indifference and recklessness of these workers.

Boom, boom, boom : that sound dominated every other. It was answered soon by a thunder-crash from above, and then the driving rainstorm burst over Culebra. The rain came roaring down, an opaque volume of rushing water ; objects a yard or two away were completely blotted out of sight ; the blackness of night was above. But still he heard the whistling scream of the trains, still the heavy detonations warned him that the dynamite was blasting the solid rock. Nothing could be allowed to stay this work ; the men, clad in their waterproofs, toiled on ; the deafening noise ceased never for a moment.

He was drenched in spite of his cloak. Yet, because of the awful heat, he was in a profuse perspiration. He began to think he had lost his train after all ; he would have to wait until another one came in from the city of Panama. Happily the downpour was ceasing ; it was too violent to last. He waited until it became a drizzle, cast a regretful glance before him, for he wished he had been able to go farther on, and was about to retrace his steps when a shout from some men in front of him caused him to look hurriedly

opposite, towards where these men were pointing with wild gestures.

Then he saw a sight that almost paralysed his heart. The mountain-side immediately opposite to him was slipping, coming down with a rush, as though it had been struck by an invisible hand and was being hurled to the bottom of the chasm. Hundreds of tons of loosened rock and earth were crashing downwards, and the horror-stricken men who saw what was happening were shouting, screaming, gesticulating, for well they knew the fate of any who should be struck unawares by the swift-descending mass. Jones started to run, then stopped, apprehensive of what might happen next ; he could not be certain that the wall which towered above him, or even the terrace on which he stood, might not also suddenly slip away. His mind was dazed ; he felt that he had been very near to death, and, for all he knew, might be near to it still.

He looked about him ; hundreds of men were running towards the huge pile of debris below. He noticed that the train lines down there had been torn away and twisted as if they were merely wire ; some machinery had been dashed to pieces. Was anyone killed ? he wondered.

People were clambering down the sides of the terraces ; he ran towards them, joined them, and found that he could descend without great difficulty. All the men seemed to know in what direction they should go ; he heard them saying to one another that the rock-fall had not been unexpected, that the engineers had noticed cracks some days before, which had led them to believe that once again Culebra

would put their patience to the test. He gathered that on this particular section much work was not being done ; perhaps, then, no one had lost his life. But the men were not certain ; the slide was a bigger one than ordinary. Thus talking in snatches and exclamations, slipping, climbing, running, they reached the bottom of the Cut.

Here a crowd was already collected, a crowd working with might and main, digging away at something as if their lives depended upon it. Jones pushed his way to the front ; he saw that the diggers were at work upon the earth and shattered rock that covered a steam shovel partly. This shovel had been in operation when the slide occurred ; had it been a few yards farther back it must have entirely escaped. As it was, the men who manned it had had no warning, had not been able to leap clear of the machine and get away in time. It was doubtful if they were yet alive ; but nothing was being left undone to save them, if they could be saved.

“ Who are they ? ” Jones heard one American in the crowd ask another. “ Any white men ? ”

“ Two, and a coloured man,” was the answer : “ poor fellows.”

The news spread ; dark faces turned ashen with horror. A thousand people waited to hear if there was any hope—or none.

“ What’s their name ? ” Jones kept on asking of persons who paid no attention to him. At last one of them who worked in this part of the Cut, hearing the question, replied, “ The white men name Jackson an’ Campbell ; the black man is Mackenzie.”

Jones went suddenly cold. "Mackenzie?" he repeated. "Mackenzie being suffocated to death?" He fought his way to where the men were digging. The thought uppermost in his mind was that his old friend was dying, dying horribly. "Good God!" he exclaimed, and the next instant, seizing a shovel from the heaps which had been hurriedly brought up, he was digging amongst the labourers like a man gone wild.

Not as his rival, not as the husband of Susan, did he think of Mackenzie now. For those few moments of his life Jones was utterly unselfish.

Somebody caught him by the shoulder and pushed him back; his assistance was not needed.

"Careful now," said a commanding voice; "bring 'em out carefully."

"Here's one," cried a man, an American like the first.

"Back there, back!" came a peremptory order. Four doctors were already on the spot; the crowd was being forced back; the same remarkable organization that made the building of the great Canal a matter of routine and order was in evidence at this tragedy too. It took less than a minute for the doctors to pronounce their verdict. The men had been killed instantly, could not have realized what was happening.

The bodies were placed upon stretchers, and the stretchers were hoisted into a railway car. The people began to return to their temporarily interrupted work. Tragedies were not rare at Culebra. One cannot build a great canal without loss of life.

Wet, muddied, horror-stricken still, Jones slowly followed the returning labourers, intending to get out of the Cut as quickly as possible. He realized that the man who had stood between him and Susan had been removed; but the manner of Mackenzie's removal terrified him. Had Mackenzie sickened and died, it is possible that Jones would have seen the hand of Providence in the circumstance. But this sudden death—a death, too, which might so easily have overtaken himself had he been on the opposite side of the chasm—seemed to him to be somewhat devilish; he was afraid. He vehemently told himself that he had never wished Mackenzie dead, though he knew he had often done so; then he said to himself that he had never meant his wish. Whether he had meant it or not, it was realized. He was startled by the fact. This was no good thing: why should Mackenzie have died like that, just then? He forgot the two white men entirely.

He got out of the Cut at last, wondering if he should go and tell Susan the terrible news. He decided that he would not: she would probably have heard it already, and he was not exactly the one to inform her how Mackenzie had come to his end. But there was something he could do. He hurried to the telegraph station and dispatched a message to Susan's people in Colon, telling them what had happened and advising them to come over to Culebra without delay. After that he went to the coloured section of the town; he saw many people in and about Mackenzie's house. So Susan knew. He went back to the railway station to await the arrival of Susan's relatives.

He sat down on the edge of the platform, thinking of all that had happened that day. If Susan had left the house with him and they had afterwards heard of this death! What a narrow escape it had been! And then with his mind's eye he saw Mackenzie as Mackenzie had greeted him on the day of his arrival in Colon, a cordial, helpful friend. He saw him as a visitor, always contented and happy in the house. He saw him as a corpse on the stretcher, suddenly struck dead. "Poor Mac," he muttered again and again, "poor Mac; poor fellow." And he cried like a child in contrition and sorrow.

CHAPTER VIII

SUSAN'S LUCK

WHEN the train from Colon came in, Miss Proudleigh was one of the first to step on to the platform, closely followed by her niece and brother. The old man was dressed in a suit once black, but now of a greenish tint and shiny as though it had been polished; he also wore a bowler hat of a pattern that had probably been fashionable thirty years before, but of which few specimens could at this time have been extant.

Catherine and her aunt were attired in white ironed dresses and new straw hats trimmed with black ribbon. Samuel saw that they had come ready-dressed for the funeral, which must take place on the following morning. The severity of Miss Proudleigh's demeanour indicated that she was about to officiate at a very important function, and the large straw fan which she carried in her right hand would have informed anyone who knew the lady that she had not brought forth her favourite symbol of authority without a determination to establish her claim to precedence and power at any cost.

Jones approached the little group. "I was waiting for you," he said.

"Then you mean to tell me y'u not arrested?" was the startling question of Miss Proudleigh. "There seems to be no law at all in Panama!"

She edged away from Jones as she spoke, looking as she did so towards an American policeman who was strolling about the platform.

"What am I to be arrested for?" asked the young man, surprised. "What's the matter with you' aunt?" he said to Catherine. "She takin' leave of her senses?"

"Didn't you' telegram say that Mackenzie dead?" asked Catherine.

"Yes; but what is that to do with me?"

"I know it wasn't you dat kill him, me son," Mr. Proudleigh now observed. "When I get you' telegram, I said to meself: 'Mister Jones is a man like me. Him talk a lot, but he wouldn't hurt a fly: him is too afraid of de court-house.' But Deborah would insist it was you dat kill Mackenzie, for you leave the house last night in a blind temper, an' you come up here to-day, an' Mackenzie dead very sudden."

"It is very suspicious," said Miss Proudleigh. "I don't understand it at all."

"Well, it is not everything y'u can understand," said Catherine practically; "and it couldn't be Mr. Jones that kill Mackenzie, otherwise him would be in jail."

"Dat is so," agreed her father; "only, I hear dat in Panama y'u can pay ten dollars an' kill anybody you like."

"That is all stupidness," said Jones impatiently;

“ it is the Canal that kill Mackenzie, not me. What was I goin' to kill him for ? ”

A snort from Miss Proudleigh was her only comment on this speech. She was not willing to be persuaded that Mackenzie had not been a victim of the machinations of Samuel and her niece.

As they went on, Jones explained how Mackenzie had come by his death, and how he himself had been a witness of the tragedy. All of them had heard before of the lives which the Culebra Cut had claimed, and now as Jones spoke doubts rose once more in the minds of Mr. Proudleigh and his sister as to the wisdom and propriety of human beings attempting to unite two oceans.

“ I always thought that some great disaster would occur because of the iniquity of man in trying to join what God separate,” said Miss Proudleigh ; “ but I never dream that de disaster was to come on me own family ; for, after all, Mackenzie was my nephew-in-law.”

But she did not seem unduly oppressed by the calamity. She found abundant comfort in the prospect of a funeral, and in the opportunity now given her of bewailing in public her irreparable loss. She could now proclaim her past forebodings and hint at other tragedies that would shortly follow upon this one. Properly managed, this funeral could not fail to afford some edifying exhibitions of religious fortitude, Christian resignation, and personal piety, mingled discreetly with an insulting attitude towards those whom she might happen to dislike.

As for Mr. Proudleigh, at that moment he was

chiefly afflicted with fears for his personal safety. If a landslide or something like it could kill Mackenzie, there was nothing to prevent a landslide from killing him. This was a dangerous country.

"We will have to leave this place as soon as poor Mackenzie is in de grave," he remarked, as he laboured on. "What y'u goin' to do wid you'self, Mister Jones?"

"When?"

"To-morrow. After we bury me son-in-law."

"I don't know," said Jones.

"You staying up here wid Miss Susan?"

"That would not be proper," observed Miss Proudleigh sternly. "It is none of my business, an' I don't want to interfere. But if the day after Mackenzie bury, a young man should stay in the same place with the widder, them will put her out of any church she belong to."

"I don't think Susan can stay here much longer, now that Mackenzie is dead," said Jones. "She will have to leave soon, for the American people will want the premises."

"Well, she better come back to Colon wid me," said Mr. Proudleigh; "an' now that Mac is dead, Mister Jones——"

But Samuel, guessing the nature of the old man's forthcoming proposition, hastily interrupted him with another recital of that day's tragedy. He was still speaking when they arrived at Susan's house.

All the doors and windows were open, and three or four persons were moving about within. These were friendly neighbours who had come over to help Susan with her dead.

She was expecting her family. As a matter of fact she had telegraphed to them. But having received Jones's message earlier, they had left for Culebra before Susan's telegram was delivered at their house.

She was very quiet and composed. When the news of Mackenzie's death had been broken to her she had shrieked in terror. Her first thought was that there had been a fight between Samuel and her husband, and that the latter had been murdered. A few words of explanation relieved her mind of this horrible fear, then she wept bitterly as if stricken to the heart. She had never cared greatly for her husband; but his sudden death, the overwhelming memory of how, that very day, she had had to fight against the temptation to abandon him, the recollection of all his kindnesses, touched her to genuine sorrow and regret. She recovered her self-possession a little later on and straightway set about making preparations for the funeral. She was still engaged on these when Samuel and her family arrived.

She hardly appeared to notice Jones, who kept himself in the background. She suffered herself to be embraced by her father, who thought it proper to assure her that he had hastened to comfort her, though he himself was grief-stricken and could not say when he should be able to take an interest in life any more. Mr. Proudleigh then deposited his hat on a table and elaborately wiped his eyes. This ceremony being gone through, he sat down.

But Miss Proudleigh would not sit down. She took Susan by the hand. "It is the will of God,"

she loudly proclaimed, " an' men can only say, ' Thy will be done.' We must be prepared to meet our God. We must take up our cross an' follow Him. Husband-o, son-o, mother-o, wife-o, when the call come we must give them all up to Him who gave them life. We cannot rebel, for the Lord gave an' the Lord taketh away—blessed be the name of the Lord. We cannot prevent the tears from flowing, for that is nature ; but the heart must be submissive."

She paused to note the effect of her words, which she considered sufficiently stirring to move Susan to tears and the other people in the house to sympathy. But most of the people there did not know Miss Proudleigh and were paying no attention to her ; Susan remained dry-eyed ; Catherine appeared unsympathetic. Only her brother seemed attentive, and as she did not regard him as an audience worth having, she concluded that spiritual consolations had better be reserved for a later occasion.

" You can go into the dining-room an' wash you' hands an' face if you like, Aunt Deborah," said Susan quietly. " It is fixed up."

" What about the body ? " demanded Miss Proudleigh.

" The body fixed up already. Everything is arranged. Some of Mackenzie's friends looking after the funeral."

It was bitterly disappointing to Miss Proudleigh to find that she had been forestalled ; still, opportunities for usefulness might present themselves later on. She went into the dining-room as invited, feeling that Susan's calmness was most unbecoming

at such a moment. A widow, with a proper sense of what was expected of her, should have given way to a wild outburst of grief at the sight of her sympathizing family.

Presently Susan asked her aunt to go into the room where Mackenzie's body was laid out. Mackenzie had been struck mainly by descending masses of earth; thus he had escaped disfigurement. Miss Proudleigh glanced at the set face, saying with real feeling, "Poor fellow; just as if he was sleeping." Then she mastered this inclination to weakness, and, laying her hand upon the cold, sheeted figure, she shook her head determinedly. "Not enough ice," she said.

"Quite enough," replied one of Susan's helpers, a young woman who had developed a marked fondness for assisting at funerals.

"You will excuse me," said Miss Proudleigh with great firmness. "I bury a lot of my relatives an' friends, an' therefore it stands to reason that I must know about de treatment of corpses.

"Mr. Mackenzie was my nephew-in-law, an' I know he would like to bury decently an' in a good condition; in consequence of which I would advise his wife to take my foolish advice an' get some more ice. Susan, 'ave you a little gurl?"

"One is outside," Susan answered.

"Send 'er for more ice!"

"All right, Aunt Deborah," said Susan resignedly; "you can send 'er."

This was a victory of considerable importance; it placed Miss Proudleigh in charge of all arrange-

ments affecting the corpse. She adapted her voice to suit her new dignity and now spoke in impressive stage whispers.

But where was Samuel? Susan had lost sight of him; he had quietly slipped out of the house after observing how she was conducting herself; he was glad to see her calm and collected, but a certain delicacy of feeling warned him that he should not remain in the house just now. He was damp and dirty; but there were shops in the town where he could buy some ready-made clothing. He bought a suit and was allowed to put it on in a room behind the shop; if it did not fit him well, at least it was clean and dry.

The day's work was over in the Cut; everybody he met was talking about the accident. He noticed that they all spoke well of Mackenzie; he wondered whether, if he had died like Mackenzie, his acquaintances would have spoken like that of him.

The rain had ceased entirely, but the sky was sombre still. He remembered that he had eaten nothing from morning, but he had no appetite, did not feel like eating. He lingered about the houses and the shops till long after darkness had fallen. At about eight o'clock, he went back to Susan's house.

He entered and silently took one of the many chairs that had been borrowed from friendly neighbours for the accommodation of the people who had come and were coming to sit up for a few hours with Susan. Every one was quiet and reverential, and those who talked did so in low and mournful tone.

A solitary light was burning in the room where the body of the dead man lay. Those who wished to do

so, stole into the room and peeped at it, then stole back gloomily to their seats. The subdued conversation was about Mackenzie in particular and death in general, and when an elderly woman remarked that Mackenzie was a man who could always be depended upon, and groaned by way of emphasizing her remark, Miss Proudleigh groaned also, as though parting with Mackenzie had been one of the most awful experiences of her life.

Then the young woman who had contradicted Miss Proudleigh in the matter of the ice felt it incumbent upon her to say something.

"I remember poor Mr. Mackenzie when he first come up to Culebra," she said. "Such a quiet, mannerly gentleman. And to think he die so sudden!"

"In the midst of life we are in death!" retorted Miss Proudleigh aggressively.

"I not stayin' here one day longer than I can help it," said Mr. Proudleigh earnestly. "I never did want much to come to Colon at any time; but me children wishin' to see if them could make a good living over here, I say to meself, 'I mustn't desert them. Don't care what happen to me, it is me juty to go wid dem.' So I come here, but I not goin' to stop any longer, because it must be a very funny country where a hill-side broke down without nothing do it, and kill me son-in-law. Ef I are to die, I want to die in me bed in Jamaica."

"Parents must devote themselves to their children," said one of Susan's neighbours.

"That is what I 'ave always done," said Mr. Proudleigh with dignity. "But if Susan take my advice,

she will go back wid me to Jamaica as soon as she bury her husban'. I can't teck any more risk in Panama."

"The Lord is strong to save, wherever His people are," remarked Miss Proudleigh rebukingly. Her laundry was proving very profitable, and she needed no further evidence to assure her of the omnipresent care of Providence.

Just then the young woman who had already angered Miss Proudleigh, feeling that she was being eclipsed, went up to Susan, and, throwing her arms about the widow's neck, exclaimed, "My heart bleed for you," and audibly wept. But Miss Proudleigh was mistress of ceremonies, and Susan herself was now subject to her aunt's authority. That a stranger, an insolent stranger, should have dared to set the example of tears in the midst of a conversation, was more than Miss Proudleigh could stand. Extraneous sympathy must not be allowed to pass the bounds set by decorum and established practice. Happily Miss Proudleigh knew that she was equal to any emergency. Whipping out of her pocket a hymn-book which she had thoughtfully brought with her from Colon, in a shrill and belligerent treble she began to sing "Peace, Perfect Peace." The hymn sounded like a declaration of war without quarter, and the sobbing young lady recognized it as such and struggled by means of louder sobs to maintain the position she had won. But Miss Proudleigh had great allies. For most of the guests, tired of talking or sitting still, joined in the hymn, singing with genuine feeling.

Rising and falling in measured cadence, the sound floated far away, and men and women in other houses

listened, thinking perhaps of the days when they too had watched beside the corpse of some one dear to them. Perhaps their memory was touched, and they thought of a grave somewhere on a mountain-side, under the shade of rustling trees, in some far-off West Indian island which they called home.

The singing ceased ; then another hymn, even more pathetic than the first, was started. All took it up, singing softly :

“ Days and moments quickly flying
Blend the living with the dead,
Soon shall you and I be lying
Each within his narrow bed.”

A picture of Mackenzie lying alone in the room, cold, motionless, swathed in dripping cerements ; a picture of him as he went forth that morning, cheerful, confident, strong, with never a thought of death in his mind, rose before Susan's mental vision.

She broke down and cried.

Jones wiped his eyes repeatedly.

Others were crying quietly. For the first time that night they felt themselves to be strangers in a strange land, men and women who had come to seek a livelihood in a foreign country from which, for all they knew, they might never return.

When Susan lifted her head a little while after, her eyes caught those of Jones. Each knew what the other was thinking of. In the forenoon of that same day they had wronged Mackenzie in thought, almost in act, and he had died without knowing it. But did he not know ? Did he not know now ? Neither one could boast of being free from superstition : what if

Mackenzie's spirit were near, reading all that was passing in their minds and hearts? Susan shuddered. Samuel's heart failed him in spite of his desperate inward struggle with his fears. They lowered their eyes again.

Twelve o'clock came, and most of the people rose to leave. Only a few would remain until the morning. Some, however, would return in time for the funeral. They all endeavoured to persuade Susan to go and lie down, and try to sleep, but she was afraid. She might dream. In her sleep Mackenzie's spirit might accuse her!

So all night she and Samuel sat in the same room, wakeful, alert, thinking over and over again of what had taken place between them a few hours before, and of the tragedy in Culebra Cut.

At six o'clock in the morning Miss Proudleigh began to set things in order, and, shortly after, the men who were looking after Mackenzie's funeral arrived. They worked quickly: by seven the body was in the coffin, which was lifted into the sitting-room uncovered, in order that all who knew Mackenzie might take last leave of him. Flowers were scarce at Culebra, but the mourners had gathered a few. These they strewed over the corpse, and the evergreens they had brought were arranged here and there about the room, giving to it a fresh and verdant appearance.

One by one the men and women who had come to attend the funeral stepped up to the coffin, gazed a little while at the dead man's face, and turned away. Then the minister, a young Englishman connected

with Jamaica, who had followed the people to Panama that they might still be kept in touch with the religion of their own country, arrived. The people made way for him respectfully, glancing at him with pride and admiration; he went up to Susan and shook hands with her sympathetically, speaking a few words which he meant to be consoling, but feeling, not for by any means the first time in his life, how poorly words express real sympathy. Then he was taken possession of by Miss Proudleigh, who led him to a chair which she had covered, for no very obvious reason, with a white lace curtain.

"Ready?" he asked her quietly, book in hand.

"Yes, minister; but" (she hesitated a little) "don't it is right to read the will first?"

"That depends," said the parson. "Does Mrs. Mackenzie want it read? Is there a will?"

Miss Proudleigh looked at Susan inquiringly. It was not usual to read the will before a funeral; but Miss Proudleigh feared that if she did not make use of the present opportunity she might never know what Mackenzie had left, and whether he had bequeathed his property to Susan alone or not. As for Susan, she was not anxious that her private affairs should be exposed, but her aunt was now the predominant person in the house, and she did not want to appear secretive. "My husband used to keep his papers in his own trunk," she said; "I will look."

In a minute or two she returned with a document which she thought must be the will; which it was. Miss Proudleigh took it from her and handed it to the minister, asking him to read it.

So the will was read. A small house in Kingston, ten acres of land in St. Andrew (not far from Kingston), a life insurance policy worth a hundred pounds, and all the money lodged in Mackenzie's name in a bank in Panama—everything was left to Susan. His will had been made three weeks after Mackenzie's marriage, and Susan knew that he had at least eighty pounds in the bank. She was well-off! That was her thought as the parson ceased reading. "It is my old luck!"—the words formed themselves in her mind: her good fortune, her luck, never seemed to desert her for long. She was a woman with property, money. She saw in the faces of the people in the room that they were surprised that Mackenzie had left so much.

Miss Proudleigh was conscious of a feeling of resentment, born of envy. But with it struggled a feeling of pride: she was glad that she had asked that the will should be read. For was she not related to all these riches; was it not she who had directed the funeral arrangements in the house of a man who had left his widow in so comfortable a position? There was dignity in her look and voice as she said to the minister:

"Minister, will we proceed?"

The offices of the dead took up but little time. Six strong men lifted the coffin, and, headed by the minister, the funeral cortège moved slowly out of the house.

Susan and her father walked immediately behind the coffin, the rest of the mourners following without regard to precedence. Mr. Proudleigh's thoughts were not of an unpleasant nature. Never had he

heard of any young widow like Susan possessing so much riches. He concluded that she must be worth hundreds of pounds, and to a mind which, for some years, had been content to think financially in terms of sixpence, shilling and eighteenpence, a hundred pounds meant nearly as much as a million. Never had he thought so highly of Mackenzie, never had he felt so pleased with Susan's marriage. Jones? What was Jones compared with Mackenzie? When would a man like Jones ever be able to accumulate a fortune? He was more likely to waste one; and here Mr. Proudleigh began seriously to think that Susan ought to be warned against having anything to do with Samuel Josiah in the future. Mr. Proudleigh saw his duty as a father plain before him, but gravely doubted whether he should ever muster enough courage to perform it. However, he, as Susan's father, a parent too who had always been tender and considerate, should now be comfortable for life. He marched bravely on, forgetting to be fatigued. Panama was not such a bad place after all, if you knew just when to leave it.

Catherine wondered at her sister's luck. She was not of an envious disposition; she felt quite able to make her own way in the world. But Susan seemed to be extraordinarily lucky; even incidents that at first appeared unfortunate were afterwards seen to have contributed to Susan's good fortune. Catherine wondered why this was so. She had been told at school that there was no such thing as luck, that one only got what one worked for or deserved. She was by no means assured that that was true.

And Jones? He too since the reading of the will had realized that a great change had taken place in Susan's financial situation. She was actually better off than he was—very much better off. She might care for him. But he could not forget that she had left him to marry Mackenzie, and only yesterday had refused to desert Mackenzie for him. Now therefore that she knew herself to be independent, how would she act? Many men would be glad enough to marry her now: she could afford to wait, and to pick and choose. She was vain; she would try to make the most of her improved position. She was very lucky. But there seemed no end to his ill fortune.

Susan alone, during that procession to the cemetery, did not dwell on her good fortune. After her first thrill of pleasure on hearing the terms of the will, she had become depressed and sad: she was again realizing that Mackenzie's kindness and thoughtfulness were of sterling worth. And he was dead, dead and gone for ever, this man who had done so much for her, and it was of him she thought. Soon they came to the cemetery. The funeral service was read, the grave filled, and Susan turned away, the one real mourner there that morning. But not the most demonstrative, for Miss Proudleigh, feeling that full justice had not been done to Mackenzie's memory, burst into loud sobs when the last spadeful of earth was thrown upon the grave, and had to be led away by two unnecessarily sympathetic men.

CHAPTER IX

JONES SPEAKS IN THE PREDICATE

“**W**HAT a lot of things happen to me since I come to Panama,” said Susan, as with her hands she smoothed out the black skirt, heavily trimmed with crape, which she wore.

“This is a world where y’u don’t know to-day what goin’ to happen to-morrow,” remarked her father, his tone suggesting that in better-regulated worlds one would know beforehand everything that was likely to occur.

“A few months ago I was only Susan Proudleigh,” the widow continued, “an’ I had to work for me living; now I am a widow and everybody respect me an’ sympathize with me.”

“You are more than a widder,” said Mr. Proudleigh; “you are a young ooman of property, an’ there is very few that can say de same thing.”

“For which we must be thankful,” Miss Proudleigh interposed. “Providence is always looking after the widow an’ the orphant; but sometimes they don’t deserve it, and that is why, peradventure, that some widows with their money go like butter against the sun. But Sue is not goin’ to be one of those.”

Since the reading of Mackenzie’s will Miss Proud-

leigh had come to see qualities in Susan which she had not been able to perceive during all the previous months she had lived in Panama. Cordial relations had therefore been re-established between the two, and Miss Proudleigh had now reverted to her long-ignored habit of seeing most things that concerned Susan from Susan's point of view.

"I am glad y'u make up you' mind to go back home, Sue, now that you not married any more, for the house which you' husband, who is now in heaven, leave to you in Kingston, needs somebody to look after it, an' you 'ave other property in Jamaica to see about. An' you can't trust no strange person to do it, for them will rob your eye out of you' head; and if you take them to law the judge may tell you to make up the case peacefully, like that time when you bring up Maria. Therefore," Miss Proudleigh concluded, "go and look after your business you'self."

"I 'ave nothing more to do with court-house," said Susan, "nor wid Maria and her mother either. They can't trouble me again."

"They have not troubled you at all," said her aunt. "All their wickedness have been turned aside, an' you have not dashed your foot against a stone. That is what I say from the first. You see what it is to 'ave faith?"

In her cheap black muslin dress (provided by Susan) Miss Proudleigh looked as though, by faith, she would be able to move mountains, if only she should determine to exert herself to that extent.

"Even Tom try to make mischief against me," continued Susan, still bent upon recounting her ex-

periences ; " but he didn't succeed any more than Maria an' her mother."

" Well, me dear daurter," said Mr. Proudleigh, " dat was because I was always having y'u in me thoughts. I don't know what you could do without me. Tom was a bad young man ; but when I kneel down every night an' thoughted about him, an' pray dat some harm would befall him because he was tryin' to disturb y'u, I felt that my pr'yer would be answered."

" Anything happen to him ? " asked Susan.

" Not exactly—yet," replied her father ; " but I hear this morning that him gone away to de capital with a female who used to beat her other intended ; an' don't you see dat if she could beat one, she will do de same with Tom ? "

Susan, knowing Tom as she did, thought it highly probable.

" Let him go about his business," she said, thus dismissing Tom and his affairs from her mind. " I am sorry, Aunt Deborah, that you an' Kate won't come home with me ; but of course you can do better here."

Miss Proudleigh nodded affirmatively. " But next year, please God," she said, " I will take a trip home to see how everybody is getting on."

It was the ninth day after Mackenzie's death. Susan had been allowed to remain for a few days in the house at Culebra, during which she had made arrangements for her departure from Panama. She had determined to go to Jamaica without delay, to see after her property there, and she was leaving to-morrow. But before going there was one function

to be attended to ; this was Mackenzie's Ninth Night, the final taking leave of Mackenzie's spirit, the last ceremony to be held in his honour. For this purpose she had come to Colon.

This Ninth Night is a survival of an African purification ceremony, the origin and meaning of which neither Susan nor her relatives knew. All that they did know was that the Ninth Night was a custom which it was not considered altogether proper to neglect, and yet which it was not considered altogether proper to observe after the manner of the lower classes. With these it tended sometimes to degenerate into an orgy ; in Miss Proudleigh's view it should only be a quiet prayer-meeting, a sort of love-feast, eminently respectable and edifying. The theory was that Mackenzie's spirit, though ultimately destined for heaven, was for some nine days fated to hover near those who had been connected with him, and might continue so to do for years unless the Ninth Night ceremony was performed. This theory not being countenanced by the churches, Miss Proudleigh defended it by pointing out that the soul was not the spirit ; and that though the soul went straight to heaven or to hell, after the decease of the body, the spirit, assuming the form of a ghost, might be unpleasantly present on earth. When this explanation was held to be unsatisfactory by some sceptic, Miss Proudleigh took refuge in asserting that it was all very well to scoff, but that plenty of people had seen ghosts and every one was afraid of them. Then she would instance the raising of Samuel's spirit by the Witch of Endor, a fact which could only be got rid of by being dismissed as untrue.

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On Ninth Nights both Susan and Catherine looked with some disrespect; they were of the younger generation. But Mr. Proudleigh stood up for them, not only on religious grounds, but because he knew from experience that much good cheer was provided at them, and many opportunities afforded for oratory. Therefore a Ninth Night was highly desirable. So Susan had decided to wait for the Ninth Night; and Jones, knowing that, had waited also, and had booked his passage by the same steamer in which she was going to Jamaica.

Susan and her people were now waiting for the guests. The room in which they sat was provided with a number of extra chairs; in the centre was a table covered with a white cloth; on the table were a few hymn-books and a Bible. The lamps were lighted, for it was already dark.

"Everything is prepared," said Miss Proudleigh, after she had announced her intention of going to Jamaica on a visit in the following year. "The chocolate is good chocolate, an' I parch an' grind the coffee meself."

"You 'ave any rum?" inquired Mr. Proudleigh anxiously.

"Plenty. You think we could ask people to come an' have a little quiet pr'yer and talk with us, and don't treat them decently?"

"No," agreed her brother heartily, and would have launched out into a lengthy account of those Ninth Nights at which he had not been treated decently, but that his sister refused him the chance of doing so.

"We have bread, an' bun, an' cake, an' fish, cheese,

bananas, an' rum, an' a bottle of whisky, an' lemonade, besides coffee an' chocolate," recited Miss Proudleigh with pride. "Mackenzie can't feel ashamed to-night!"

Mr. Proudleigh inwardly determined that, when the time came, he would make all these good things "look foolish." He complacently disposed himself to wait for that happy hour.

Presently Catherine came in, accompanied by a tall young man of her own complexion, who appeared to be very attentive to her. These were followed by other persons, and then the ceremony of the evening began.

Miss Proudleigh suggested a hymn, which was sung; then she volunteered to lead in prayer. This she did, taking the opportunity of reminding her audience, under guise of a general supplication, that she was not as other women were, but might more properly be likened to the ancient Deborah or to some other equally superior character, having been strenuous in following the light, and having, beyond the shadow of a doubt, set a noble example to all with whom she had come in contact.

She prayed for Susan, Catherine, and for all her other relatives, and she informed the angelic host that she knew that Mackenzie was in heaven, enjoying all the felicities prepared for the righteous before the foundations of the world were laid. Then she proceeded to review the events of the times as she had heard of them, and asked earnestly that peace should be established on earth. She did not forget the King and all the Royal Family. Jamaica was included as a place which sadly needed regeneration.

It seemed as if she would never cease, and her brother, who himself had prepared a nice little prayer for the occasion, began to feel jealous ; Deborah had touched upon every subject he had intended to deal with, and more besides. Susan felt decidedly bored. The guests began to shuffle uneasily on their knees. Warned by certain slight though ominous sounds, Miss Proudleigh at last brought her eloquence to a close. As she rose from her knees she began chanting the Hundredth Psalm. Everybody joined her. At that moment Samuel Josiah Jones entered the room.

Jones had left Culebra immediately after the burial of Mackenzie, and, yielding to the urgent advice of Miss Proudleigh, had not returned thither to see Susan. He had written to her, and had received in reply a brief letter telling him that she was going to Colon, to her relatives, as soon as her affairs at Culebra were settled. It was from Mr. Proudleigh that he had learnt when Susan was leaving for Jamaica. Susan's aloofness, he thought, might be due to grief, or to the circumstance that her husband was only a few days dead, or to her improved financial position, and a determination, the result of that improved position, to have nothing more to do with Samuel Josiah. Well, he would find out what it was. No woman should say that her money frightened him. He could always earn a good living, either in Jamaica or in Panama ; in a few years he could save as much as Mackenzie had saved, though he did not see any good reason why he should.

All eyes were turned on him as he entered the room and deliberately asked a youth to let him have

his chair. The youth had been sitting next to Susan. Jones installed himself in his place.

"Sorry I am late," he whispered, wishing at the same time that the people would sing more loudly. Miss Proudleigh seemed to divine his wish. Her voice shrilled out astonishingly.

"You are quite in time," said Susan quietly.

"No; I miss you every minute I am not with y'u."

"Sh-h. People will hear y'u."

"It is all *in camera*."

"You mustn't talk, Mr. Jones."

The "Mr. Jones" was disconcerting. But he would not be repulsed.

"I want to talk to *you*," he said.

"Later on," she answered, and would not pursue the conversation.

Hymn followed hymn, and the good things so freely provided by Miss Proudleigh (who had received an advance for that purpose from Susan) were duly handed round. The guests enjoyed them, eating and drinking to their hearts' content; and Mr. Proudleigh, reflecting that it might be long before he should assist at another Ninth Night, worthily led them on in this satisfactory effort. Then, when it was nearly twelve o'clock, he thought he saw his opportunity, and, forestalling his sister, he rose and intimated that it was his intention to make a few remarks.

"It is shortly toward midnight, dear friends," he began, "an' before we finish an' terminate this fir's' part of our gathering, we must call to mind certain things. Every meeting have an end, an' every end has a termini." (He paused to allow this term to have

its full effect upon the audience. It was one he had learnt from Jones.) "But before we proceed to bid Mackenzie good-bye," he went on, "an' the younger folkses begin to enjie themself, which is natural, for I remember that in de old days, which I always tell my fambily, for none of them know what I know, an' so to speak a man like me is expected to 'ave experience, an' as I was saying——" But the difficulty was that he could not for the life of him remember what he had been saying. His sister had given him no opportunity of speaking earlier that night, and in the meantime sundry glasses of rum and water had inflamed his ambition without strengthening his mind. There was now, therefore, a struggle between the orator and the liquor, and his refusal to own himself vanquished as he strove to recall what he had intended to say would have been magnificent had it not appeared to the audience supremely ludicrous. Mr. Proudleigh wanted to pronounce a eulogy upon Mackenzie. He had an idea that Mackenzie's spirit was hovering near, and he would have liked it to hear his speech. He felt that Mackenzie deserved special posthumous praise for having left Susan so comfortably off. He bravely began once more.

"Mackenzie was me son-in-law. He was a very kind young man. An' when he write me for Miss Susan" (here Susan stared) "I wouldn't refuse him. I say to him . . . I say . . ." Once again Mr. Proudleigh halted, and in the midst of the momentary silence the little clock on the shelf just above his head struck the midnight hour. A hush fell on the company as Miss Proudleigh sank upon her knees. That lady

afterwards declared that as the last stroke of the clock died away she had felt something like a cold wind rushing by her, as though an invisible presence were leaving this mundane sphere for ever; and after hearing of her experience Mr. Proudleigh also asserted that he too had been touched by Mackenzie's departing spirit that night. His sister, recollecting his condition, secretly doubted his story; but as moral support is always of value when proof is not forthcoming, she never contradicted him.

"Let us pray," said Miss Proudleigh when the clock had ceased to strike.

This time she prayed that all wandering spirits might find eternal rest, and that the dead might never be allowed to intervene in the affairs of the living. She made it known to all and sundry whose place was another world that, however much their company may have been pleasant and interesting when they were alive, the proper sphere for their activities now was heaven, where, she indirectly assured them, they would be far more happy than if they returned to earth. This prayer closed with a loud Amen from the assembled guests, who entirely shared the sentiments expressed by Miss Proudleigh. "Well, we are done wid poor Mackenzie now," she said, satisfied, as she rose from her knees.

Mr. Proudleigh, with his undelivered speech still in mind, understood from these words that the end of that speech would never be heard by that audience. He felt that an advantage had been taken of him, and his bitterness was intense.

It was a relief to the younger guests and members of the family when Miss Proudleigh signified that the religious portion of the Ninth Night ceremony was over, and Mackenzie finally dismissed to his last home. In a moment their emotions changed from grave to gay, and they all settled themselves down to gossip, joke, laugh, and otherwise enjoy themselves, while more refreshments were handed round. Every one present addressed Susan punctiliously as Mrs. Mackenzie. Jones still sat by her side, and his gestures and movements were marked by the company, whose chief diversion was to discuss the private affairs of their neighbours and friends.

"We can't always mourn," sententiously observed one young lady, who saw in Samuel a suitor for Susan's hand, and who wished to gain merit by indirectly suggesting that she personally knew of no reason for unlimited grief. "Life is short, an' when we 'ave done our best, we must do what we can."

An enigmatical speech, but well understood by those who heard it, and who saw the significant glance which the speaker directed towards Susan and Jones.

"Sorrow endureth for a night, but joy cometh in the morning," commented Miss Proudleigh. "Sue, will you take a little ginger-wine? Or do you prefer chocolate?"

"She prefer love," said Jones shamelessly. "Love is better than wine."

"Behave you'self!" cried Susan. "Y'u forget where you are?"

"After a storm there comes a calm, after a funeral,

why not a wedding?" said the lady who had previously suggested the futility of endless weeping.

"That's not the sort of conversation for a Nine-Night," primly suggested Susan. "I will never marry again, an' so what y'u say don't concern me; but still, this is not the time to talk about weddings."

"I don't know dat I agrees wid Sue," said her father. "Mister Mac is dead, an' if Mister Jones write me for y'u, I——"

But the old man, doomed it would appear to perpetual interruptions, was not allowed to complete his remark. Miss Proudleigh felt that the limits of decorum were in danger of being overstepped. She immediately and loudly began to tell of an arrest she had witnessed a day or two before in Colon, an arrest which had almost caused the death of the prisoner, he having been unmercifully clubbed by the policemen. This was an interesting topic of conversation, and while the company were discussing the demerits of the Republic's peace officers, Jones quietly suggested to Susan that they might go and sit together for a little while on the veranda.

She agreed, and they went out, remarked by all. But such pairings-off were customary; it was felt, moreover, that the widow had the right to do as she pleased, on account of her youth and her superior financial position.

She and Samuel sat on the chairs they took out with them, and, leaning over the veranda, looked down into the silent street. They had placed themselves where they could not easily be seen by the people in the room, though the door stood open.

After a few seconds Jones stretched out his hand and placed it on Susan's shoulder. "Sue," he whispered, "when you going to Jamaica?"

"To-morrow. Don't you know it already?"

"I am going with you."

"I can't stop y'u, Sam. The ship is for you as well as for me."

"Stop that foolishness, Sue. It is all very well when you makin' fun to talk like that. But now I am talking in the Predicate and in the verb To Be; I am serious. I am going to marry you."

"But suppose I don't want to get married again? I know what marriage mean, an' you don't. Besides that, I am all right now, an' I can live comfortable without anybody. When you could marry me y'u didn't, and I don't forget how y'u used to leave me in the night when we was together. It's better we remain apart, for what 'appen once will 'appen again."

"You know you don't mean what y'u say," replied Jones with conviction. "Jamaica is not Colon, and it will be all right when we get there. I will be steadier. I was steady there."

"Cho!" exclaimed Susan, but there was something in her voice which denoted satisfaction. "Y'u going to go on the same way in Jamaica as you went on here," she added.

"Well, we will have to make the best of it," said Jones philosophically, "though you know quite well I am not a drunkard. We will get married in Parish Church."

Fully a minute passed before she replied—

"As poor Mackenzie is just dead, don't tell anybody here about it."

When, two days after the Ninth Night ceremony, Susan and Jones, with Mr. Proudleigh standing between them, saw the grey-green mountains of Jamaica rising into view as the ship drew nearer the shore, they felt for the first time in their lives what a homecoming meant. Susan eagerly pointed out object after object as her eyes roved over the scene stretched out in front of her; Jones was enthusiastic; Mr. Proudleigh, contrary to his habit, was silent. But when the ship entered the harbour, and Kingston appeared, and he saw again the houses and the piers with which he had been familiar all his life, he broke his silence and spoke the thoughts that were in his mind.

"Fancy a old man like me go quite to Colon an' come back," he said reflectively. "Who is to tell what is gwine to happen in dis world! An' I leave me second daurter and me sister behind me! Well, God will take care of them, same as Him take care of me. I am glad to come back. I really glad."

"No place like home," said Jones heartily.

"That's a fact," was Susan's sincere comment.

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