WIDENER
HN NYU5 3

The CASE of SIR EDWARD TALBOT

VALENTINE GOLDIE

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

22625.48.2/1809

Harvard College
Library

FROM THE BOOKS
IN THE HOMESTEAD OF
Sarah Orne Jewett
AT SOUTH BERWICK, MAINE

BEQUEATHED BY
Theodore Jewett Eastman
A.B. 1901 - M.D. 1905
1931

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

GARDENSIDE BOOKSHOP
280 Dartmouth Street
BOSTON, MASS.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The Case of Sir Edward Talbot

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

THE CASE OF SIR EDWARD TALBOT

BY
VALENTINE GOLDIE
Author of "The Happy Garret," etc.

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
681 Fifth Avenue

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

23625.48.4100

Copyright, 1922,
BY E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

All rights reserved

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
THE BEQUEST OF
THEODORE JEWETT EASTMAN
1921

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The Case of Sir Edward Talbot

CHAPTER I

SEATED apart and unnoticed in the embrasure of a window, the girl surveyed with a serene expression of contentment the shouting assembly that crowded the long drawing-room from end to end. At the new arrival within the range of her vision of any woman, her grave eyes studied dispassionately and quickly every detail of her dress, subsequently returning to the contemplation of a man who formed the centre of a group almost immediately in front of her.

Admiration of his physical qualities could hardly have been the cause of this recurrent attention, for he was a smallish, quiet-looking person, by no means in his first youth. Possibly a sense of sympathy drew her to him; for, except for herself, he was the only guest in sight who had entirely preserved mental and physical coolness. His associates directed most of their remarks to him, with vehement cries and gestures; and he replied softly, seriously and with unvarying deliberation. The smooth, hairless face was one of the calmest imaginable; the lips gently smiling, the pale, luminous eyes alive with a polite receptiveness, the whole expression admirably

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

balanced and tolerant. From the demeanour of his satellites one would have guessed him to be something of a notoriety, and the conjecture would have been supported by the fact that he had a rather remarkable skull. Its size was not the result of any local exaggeration; it was big and solid in every part, with a slightly convex forehead; a head which must have inspired the highest admiration and respect for its owner in any phrenologist. The pale chestnut hair was cut as short as was consistent with admitting a parting, and brushed smoothly. The ears were oddly, even rather unpleasantly small, with a perfectly straight upper edge. Had not the malformation occurred in both, it might have been taken to be due to an accident instead of to a congenital defect. The jaw was firm, but not prominent, the skin fair and the mouth well cut. There was nothing beautiful nor even remarkable in the face, beyond its tranquillity. His general aspect was that of a man somewhere between forty and forty-five years of age.

It is scarcely possible to look at a person in one's immediate neighbourhood for many seconds without attracting his notice, and very shortly the glances of the girl and the object of her scrutiny met. Immediately she allowed her eyes to travel slowly and composedly past him; but his remained fixed, and when, after a while, she casually looked back in his direction he was still watching her.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

There was nothing impudent or challenging in his stare, which spoke only of an awakened interest; nevertheless it was sufficiently pronounced to cause one or two of his friends to follow its direction. The girl slightly turned her head away and began to interest herself in some newly arrived visitors; and while she was so engaged the man left his companions and sauntered down the room, to return a few minutes later in the wake of a portly, grey-haired lady, picturesquely dressed in a loose robe of lace.

"Little Shirley!" cried the elderly woman in a full rich voice which accorded with her dignified corpulence. "Sitting all alone and neglected! How very pathetic! I'd no idea you'd come, even. Couldn't you find me?"

"I did speak to you when I arrived; and really I've been quite happy sitting here watching the people."

"My dear, I haven't the faintest recollection of seeing you before, this evening. But there's such a crowd, isn't there? One's head quite spins. Do let me introduce Sir Edward Talbot to you; such an interesting man—but of course you've heard all about him. He's most anxious to know you. Sir Edward, come here! I want to introduce you to my friend, Miss Cresswell; and perhaps presently you'll take her and give her an ice or something. . . . How sweet of you to come, dear Clara! I was so afraid

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

that you might be too tired, after the theatre. Isidore has been asking anxiously after you. Will you come with me and find him?"

She moved off majestically, and Sir Edward Talbot, after bowing with affable dignity, took a seat beside Shirley on the little sofa.

"I hope you'll forgive me for forcing my company on you," he began in a pleasant, if rather expressionless, voice. "But you looked so cool and restful, and I soon get weary of strenuous warmth."

"There's been nothing to break my rest yet," she explained, smiling. "I haven't seen anyone here I know, so far, except Mrs. Cassilis."

"And she hasn't been looking after you properly? However, you appeared remarkably contented. I hesitated about disturbing you."

His manner clearly shewed that the approach of middle age had not robbed him of the pleasure to be derived from the society of an attractive woman.

"Oh, no! I'm glad to talk, though up to now I've been enjoying the clothes. That's my business in life, you see. I design dresses."

"Mrs. Cassilis was telling me. For Delbruck of South Molton Street, isn't it? I offer you my compliments. Several of the friends of whose company I feel proudest get their things there. Shew me some of your achievements here to-night."

"There's Mrs. Cassilis herself."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Really? That's quite a triumph. She looks delightful, and I know that she has the most innocently *baroque* taste. If she was left to herself she would probably make herself as flamboyant and angry in appearance as she has allowed this room of hers to become. It must need great tact and courage to deal with her in matters of adornment."

"I have to be obstinate now and then. But she's so handsome and stately that it's pretty easy to make a success of her. Some of the people who come to us really fill me with despair. It's almost impossible to think of any tolerable way of covering them, they're so—"

"Amorphous?"

"That wouldn't matter so much. No, I mean they haven't *any* shape; nothing to suggest to one any line, however fantastic. I should love to be able to refuse a customer occasionally, when she's an extreme case. But of course I'm not allowed to; and after all it's very good for me to have to get over difficulties that look impossible at first."

"I can imagine that it's a wearing profession—art, rather. But most art is tolerably exasperating, I'm told. May I ask why you took to it? Just for the love of the thing?"

"Oh no! Chiefly to make a living."

"In that case I congratulate you on having already made such a position for yourself. Were you all

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

alone in the world, then, when you set out on this career?"

There was a placid intimacy in his tone that robbed his questions of the suspicion of mere prying, and Shirley made no effort to discourage them.

"Not actually. My father was in India—he was a soldier—and my mother died years and years ago. I was twenty, and living with people who were paid to look after me. They were quite nice, but it was all very dull, and I was always hard up. So I tried this, never really believing that anything would come of it."

"I suppose you knew the people who run Delbruck's, did you?"

"Delbruck's wasn't going in those days. But I had a friend who kept a shop in Brompton Road. She admired the dresses that I used to make for myself, and offered me a job. I was with her for a year and a half. One of her customers was Emmeline Brook—she and her sister are Delbruck's, you know—and when she started her business she got me to come to her. Of course, it was a great lift for me; and my friend was awfully nice about it, and urged me to accept. The Brooks had a Frenchwoman then for their principal designer, but she had a row with them after a year of it and went back to Paris. So for the last three years I've had her place."

"That's to say that you are now Delbruck's. You

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ought to set up for yourself. I see no point in making other people rich."

"But they're awfully kind, and they pay very well."

"No doubt. They're afraid of losing you and most of their customers at the same time. In any case they should take you into partnership; but, if I were you, I should stand alone."

"That means capital."

"I don't imagine that there'd be any difficulty in finding that. So many rich people must know your genius by this time."

"Genius sounds very important," she said, laughing. "Honestly, I should only make a mess of it, I know. I've no idea of business. I'm more suited for a hireling."

"Anybody can learn business, if they like. But if it repels you, perhaps your father—"

"He's dead. He was killed two years ago."

A girl of seventeen or so, her yellow hair cut in a short straight shock, her eyes and cheeks bright with excitement, passed in conversation with a young man, whose shoulders and complexion told of military service. She nodded, smiling gaily, to the pair on the sofa, and went on her way, glittering like a Christmas-tree fairy in her dress of silver tissue. Her escort looked back over his shoulder at Shirley, and apparently made some inquiry about her of his companion.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"And you've no relations left at all? You live all by yourself?" Sir Edward continued with a grave sympathy.

"Yes. I've got a little flat in Wigmore Street. On the whole, I'd rather be alone, unless, of course, there was somebody I was really devoted to. . . ."

Talbot smiled.

"I suppose there will undoubtedly be someone before long."

"I dare say. Did you like Joyce Cassilis' dress? That's one of mine too."

"I thought that it was charming. Silver suits her exactly."

"Most things suit her, with that wonderful skin and colouring. She's very pretty, don't you think?"

"Very; and conceives herself to be even more than that."

"Oh, but all pretty girls are a little vain, naturally."

"Is that so?" His intonation, at times, very faintly suggested an American origin. "They don't all display their vanity."

"That's only because they're sly."

"Don't be so self-depreciatory. It's morbid."

"I'm very fond of Joyce."

"In that case I regret suggesting that she had any faults at all. I agree with you that she's an attractive and lively little person. I've know her since she was fifteen; but she's never really admitted me into

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the inner circle of intimacy. I am not old enough for that honour; and I know now that I shall never be."

"Surely she doesn't like old men?"

"You don't quite follow me. She considers that my mind is immaturely trivial. You must have noticed that she even patronises her mother a good deal; and she speaks of her three married sisters with a pity that is akin to love."

"She doesn't patronise me, so I suppose I must be old too," Shirley reflected with a smile. "But she certainly is rather grown-up for her age. I'm eight years older; but I never remember it when we're together."

"I'm glad she's kind to you. She can be very crushing when she likes. I speak from experience," he answered, with a burlesque ruefulness.

There was a pause, during which Shirley's eyes wandered over the company, returning to her companion with a swift obedience as he spoke again.

"You will think me very intrusive, I'm afraid; but there's a purpose in my question. It's not really an impertinence. You have lost someone else lately, besides your father?"

"Yes," she admitted, in a slightly hushed tone. "About the same time."

"Don't talk about it if it's distressing. Had you been engaged long?"

The girl shook her head dumbly; and her eyes,

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

after growing a trifle brighter, softened and darkened. Sir Edward sighed quietly and looked away.

"I'm surprised that I haven't met you before, either here or at Overbourne, as you're a friend of the family," he resumed presently.

"Yes. I've been here pretty often lately, but I haven't been asked to their country place yet."

"Have you known them long?"

"Not more than a few months; but they're so easy to get on with that it seems much more than that. You're an old friend of theirs, I suppose."

"I met them first two or three years ago, when I came over to England with a business introduction to old Isidore."

"Oh?" She hesitated, as if feeling that it was now her duty to ask a few questions, in return for all those which she had answered. "Were you in France, then?"

"No. I had been living for a good while in America."

"Really? I've always wanted to go to New York. They have wonderful ideas of dressing there, haven't they?"

"I believe so. I don't know the most fashionable parts well. Much of my time was spent in South Carolina . . . Charleston."

"Is that near New York?"

"Not very."

"You are an American, aren't you?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Dear me, no! I was born in Worcester, and educated in this country. But since those days I've made my home in various parts of the world. I like change."

Shirley seemed to reflect.

"You weren't at Oxford, I suppose?"

"Why not? Have I lost the famous manner?"

"I don't know what it's like," she confessed.

"I must try and reproduce it for you, if I'm not too much out of practice. Yes; I was there for a short time. I didn't take a degree."

"What was your college?" she asked quickly and gravely.

"Worcester."

There had been a perfectly noticeable pause before he answered, which suggested strongly that he had either been searching his memory—a manifest absurdity—or stimulating his inventive faculty. Yet he appeared too well-bred a man to believe that the fact of having been in residence at a University conferred upon one a distinction. Had there been the least trace of boastful vulgarity in his demeanour, an observer might have been excused for suspecting that his undergraduate days were imaginary. Shirley considered him with a certain eagerness.

"I suppose that was more than seven years ago?" she suggested, raising her eyebrows in delicate interrogation.

"My dear Miss Cresswell! More than seventeen

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

years ago, I'm afraid," he answered, with good-humoured regret. "But why seven?"

"Oh, nothing! I went to Oxford for the boat racing—Eights' Week, do they call it?—then; and I was only wondering . . . I don't remember Worcester College. . . ."

She broke off again, and looked down at her hands, turning a ring which she wore this way and that, so that the diamonds with which it was set threw off the light in little rainbow sprays.

"What was *his* college?" asked Sir Edward casually.

"Trinity," answered Shirley; and then looked up at him with startled eyes, as though the information had been drawn from her against her intention. His answering glance was both gentle and solemn.

"You've been through a tragedy. But half the world has been through similar, or even more dreadful ones, in the last five years. Our hostess of tonight lost her only son—her favourite child—in nineteen fifteen. Hardly a household in England escaped entirely."

"I know. I'm afraid that doesn't console me," she replied, dropping her eyes once more; and added, after a pause: "But I don't encourage myself, really. As a rule I'm all right. I can't think how we got on to the subject."

"You're all right," Sir Edward persisted, lowering his voice. "All right! What a lamentable

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

condition for anybody, especially for a beautiful young artist!"

The words were uttered in the cool tone of one who states a generally accepted fact. The girl's expression grew faintly uncomfortable, but she neither spoke nor looked up. Sir Edward contemplated her for some seconds with a speculative eye.

"You aren't one of those, I hope, who see anything pious or altruistic or luxurious in keeping alive the memory of a past sorrow?"

"Not in the slightest degree. I know that . . . that father, for instance, would want me to forget and be cheerful. Only it isn't so easy. I mean, it isn't easy to forget entirely, is it? One gets on well enough for a time; and then, if one's tired or bored or anything, things come back."

"Nothing's easy, until you know how to do it; and everything is, when you do. It's possible to make your emotions, your subconsciousness—yes, and your physical sensations, as they are called—as obedient to your will as sheep-dogs are to the shepherd."

"People have told me that before, but I suppose I haven't a strong enough will."

"Everybody's will is of the same strength."

"Oh, Sir Edward!" she protested, smiling again.

"Everybody's," he maintained. "Will-power is a force that runs through the animal world continuously and at unvarying intensity, as electricity may run round a circuit. Suppose that circuit to pass

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

through a thousand houses. One or two of the occupants, skilled electricians, might make the force do nearly all the domestic work; a larger number of smatterers would contrive to get a certain amount of light out of it, or a degree of warmth. The utterly untrained would be able to put it to no use at all; and the ignorantly rash would only succeed in giving themselves painful shocks. You and I and Mrs. Cassilis, let us say, have the same store of will-power to draw upon; but experience has taught her to use it better than you can, while I have consciously trained myself to control it better than either of you."

Shirley sighed a little.

"Well, I dare say I shall be cleverer at it in time. Persistence is everything, isn't it?"

"Persistence is something, but not very much. If you gave an intelligent savage a sewing machine, without any explanation of its uses—forgive me for heaping these analogies on you—persistence might enable him to do something with it in a few years' time. But it would save trouble to shew him, to begin with, how the thing worked."

"You mean that *you* can teach people to forget, when they want to; and feel what they like, and all that?"

He smiled.

"Much depends on the person taught. The will, as I said, is the same in all; but the intelligence

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

varies. I think that any one could acquire complete control of the will, if he lived long enough; but the better the brain, the sooner the thing's done. The modern beauty specialists profess to be able to give anyone the ideally perfect face; but, you will agree, they would have a shorter job of it with you than with me."

There were a few moments of silence, during which Shirley studied his serenity with curiosity.

"Yes, you look as if you'd done it," she said, with a note of envy in her voice. "Are you what they call a Christian Scientist?"

"Mrs. Eddy belatedly got hold of a part of the truth. She was a highly incompetent preacher, but her basis (which is, as you know, immeasurably old) was sound enough. Still, it was only a part. There is an ethical Christian Science, as well, which I should like to talk to you about some day; and that, to be sure is only another part of the orderly whole."

"I've no brains at all," Shirley warned him. "These subjects puzzle me dreadfully. I couldn't possibly recommend myself to you as a pupil."

"I'm not proposing to 'take up your character'; I know enough of you already. You are different —not in manner, of course. You haven't yet realised the quality of your mind, which, if I may say so, is unusually responsive."

"How can you possibly know?" cried the girl in

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

a sort of indignation, as if a reputation for stupidity was dear to her.

"It is so. How do you know that I am clean-shaven? Or that you will cool your cheek by waving those feathers backwards and forwards?"

"Mummy sent me to tell you that she wants to introduce you to somebody before you go, Edward, but that on *no* account are you to desert Shirley until you feel you've had enough of her," interrupted Joyce Cassilis. She was standing alone before them, looking down on the pair with a gleam of amusement in her eyes. She had a rather loud voice, like a boy's, and a certain air of defiant joviality which associated oddly with her pronounced femininity of appearance and her fairy dress. "Mummy put it rather differently—I've forgotten how, but that's what it came to. Shirley, do come upstairs presently and have a talk. I want to tell you something. Will you? Promise!"

"All right. When are you going up?"

"Directly. There's nobody left I want to speak to, and I'm getting sleepy."

"I'm proud of your frock," said Shirley. "It's a great success. Sir Edward approves too."

"Doesn't it look nice? You were right about the girdle, after all. Of course yours is much nicer; but then you always keep the best ones for yourself, naturally. I love you in black. . . . What shall I tell Mummy, Edward?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Tell her, my child, that I will certainly come as soon as Miss Cresswell dismisses me, and not before. You might add that I consider you an impudent monkey, and recommend you for a diet of bread and water. . . . I grow hot and cold with shame, at times," he continued, as Joyce departed, with a smile of self-assured scorn of his last words, "when I have permitted myself to address that young woman playfully. One feels as if, in a moment of forgetfulness, one had attempted to tickle an archbishop. . . . Well, I suppose I shall have to set you free in a minute or two, Miss Cresswell. That's the worst of these parties, and the best. One momentarily tastes a number of new personalities, and then the plate is snatched away, and a new course is put on. There's a charm about it, but often it's a very tantalizing one. To-night I've parted without regret from a number of dishes, all in the wrong order, too; grape-fruit, and trifle with too much jam and too little sherry, and Roquefort cheese, and plain roast beef; and now when at last I find one which I confess I should like to linger over . . . to what dare I liken you?"

"Porridge?" suggested Shirley, after consideration.

"How can you? However, I hope we shall meet again. In fact, unless you decide to the contrary, I shall see that we do. So prepare your excuses."

"But I should like it! Why not? I want to hear

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

more about your dodge for feeling just as you want to feel."

"The dodge shall be explained up to any point that you desire. Meanwhile—or in case you change your mind, or are only being politely mendacious—I should like to ask you this: Are you religious, as they call it?"

The question produced its frequent effect. Shirley looked highly startled and confused, and answered with a shamefaced haste.

"I—well, I go to church, you know. Not always, but. . . ."

"I quite understand. But at any rate you are a Christian?"

"Oh, *yes!*"

"And have you found that your belief consoles you at all?"

She hesitated.

"Yes, Of course, one feels that . . . well, everybody's going to meet again some day, aren't they? It's rather hard to remember, just when. . . ."

She broke off; and Sir Edward, having waited politely and fruitlessly for the end of her explanation, came to her rescue.

"In fact, it's never really consoled you the least in the world. You believe these promises, just as you believe that one day you yourself will die. You know it is so, and you feel it's utterly impossible."

"Anyhow, it's rather a long way off, and one

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

can't quite imagine what it's going to be like, can one?"

"I see that you don't accept the harp and crown idea literally. May I take it that you're not one of those who limit their beliefs to what they are able to extract unaided from the Bible?"

"I don't really know," Shirley confessed, half smiling, half apologetic. "I'm afraid I haven't read the Bible since I was at school."

"The Bible," Sir Edward gravely informed her, "is a great revelation. But it is only one of a number of similar keys to the mysteries; and to the uninitiated it is about as helpful as a German cookery book would be to an Irish general servant. No doubt, however, you have long realized that it covers, under a most elaborately devised cloak of words, some very awful and eternal truths."

"Yes. I suppose it does."

"You know that many have been brought to believe, by it and other writings, to say nothing of spoken words, that the visible world, like the speech of these prophecies themselves, is little more than a splendid and sombre curtain, purple shot with gold, behind which a vast stage is set for the unending drama of which only a few have yet been permitted to catch an occasional glimpse."

His manner, during the last few minutes, had changed from a rather formal friendliness to something that was almost enthusiasm of a restrained and

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

majestic kind, and the girl looked at him uneasily.

"Oh, but I think that's such an uncomfortable idea. Mrs. Cassilis believes in spiritualism. Is that what you mean?"

"Perhaps we may say that that's a little bit of what I mean."

"But surely you don't believe in all those things that go on in the dark, do you? Napoleon coming to tell you how he's getting on, I mean; and the furniture moving about; and knocks and bells, and tambourines, and all that."

"The thing has got, for many reasons, largely into the hands of vulgar or pedantic people, for many years now. But because quacks advertise electric belts, or furriers sell coats of 'electric seal,' we don't necessarily deny the existence of electricity, do we?"

"I shouldn't *think* so," said Shirley judicially.

"So what is commonly described as spiritualism; so with the fortunes that gipsies tell, and the glass balls which are common in upper rooms in Bond Street, and many other things, some still partly believed, some wholly discredited, some just beginning to come into their own. You have an open mind on the subject, Miss Cresswell, I'm sure."

"I hate being frightened."

Sir Edward smiled humourously at her air of distrustful appeal.

"You shan't be frightened. Fear comes from ig-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

norance. To know is to put fear behind you. . . . There is Mrs. Cassilis, looking at me in gentle reproach. I suppose I must go to her, although I'd much rather stay where I am."

He rose from his place, bowed with rather more ceremony than is usual in English drawing-rooms, and crossed over to his hostess, who forthwith introduced him to a young foreign woman of unbridled hideousness, of whom, it may be supposed, Mrs. Cassilis was glad to rid herself. Sir Edward, however, was clearly an admirer of other qualities in woman besides physical beauty; for he was soon in deep conversation with the ill-favoured exile, who, rolling great eyes of dubious sanity, submerged him in torrents of oddly pronounced French. After watching the pair, with a faint smile on her lips, for a few seconds, Shirley betook herself to an upper floor of the house, and passed twenty minutes or so in confidential talk, of a romantic nature, with her hostess' daughter in her pretty bedroom; at the end of which time she discovered that it was late, and that she should have gone home long ago.

As, gathering her cloak about her shoulders, she passed through the entrance hall, in conversation with a woman friend whom she had met on the stairs, she perceived Sir Edward Talbot watching her. He wore a dark overcoat, and carried a tall hat in one hand; and as she gave him a smile, he stepped forward at once.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Have you a carriage here, or will you allow me to give you a lift home?"

"Thank you so much," answered Shirley. "Mrs. Spens is taking me."

She was passing on, with a word of farewell, when he spoke again.

"I've made Mrs. Cassilis promise to give me another opportunity of meeting you," he said, gazing earnestly at her. "If she asks you to Overbourne for a week-end, do accept, will you?"

A faint tinge of pink crept into her cheek, but she kept her eyes on his with a laughing frankness.

"I will if I can manage it, of course. Good night!"

She stepped into the landaulette, in which her friend awaited her, and Sir Edward watched it thoughtfully as it fussed away; its place at the kerb being taken by a limousine of the most august size and taciturnity, which seemed all too large and luxurious for the single, small, quiet man whom it snatched away into the starry summer night.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II

THE flagged garden at Overbourne was an ideal retreat on such a day as this Saturday in late June, when the sun ceaselessly veiled and unveiled its face in a sky of tumbled blue and white, and the south-easterly breeze rhythmically bent and relaxed the tall poplars that bordered the carriage-drive. High walls of impenetrably dense box shut in the little square, pierced on two sides by deep arches, from which paths wound into other and unseen mazes. At one end a pergola, climbed upon by roses, offered shade beneath which the small house-party was assembled at tea; at the other a long narrow bed was set with trim patterns of flowers. The flagstones, square and uniform in size, were of all shades of yellow, grey and white, and between them grew a thin piping of velvety moss, dark green for the most part, but occasionally widening into a patch of bright viridian. Behind the flower bed, in a niche contrived in the thickness of the hedge, a marble copy of Houdon's *frileuse* drew her drapery round those portions of herself which, according to conventional prejudice, least demanded it, with a mock modest air of the prettiest indecency. In the middle of the court a shallow stone basin had been sunk below

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the level of the ground. Two broad steps led down to the water, which trembled ceaselessly, although almost imperceptibly, with the passage of the trickling stream that kept it fresh, and with the movements of little fishes. Water lilies, both white and pink, lay becalmed on their dark rafts; and in the glassy and dimpling surface were reflected the tops of the high trees which grew beyond the confines of the garden. Though these images were alive with the wind, hardly a breath of air stirred between these quickset walls.

Mrs. Cassilis, her abundant grey hair concealed beneath a shady hat, had fitted her generous figure into a somewhat inadequate seat of basket work, and her hands were busy with teapot and milk-jug. Beside her, the slight form of Sir Edward Talbot was almost invisible in an immensely deep arm-chair. His flannel clad shins, neat brown shoes, and an occasional plume of grey smoke arising from the depths of his hiding-place were all that told of his bodily presence. On a carved stone bench, the rigours of which had been mitigated by a number of gaudy cushions, a bald, pot-bellied, swarthy man was smoking a cigar, his little feet crossed and tidily tucked away beneath the seat; and next to him a thin girl, pale of skin and eyes, with startlingly red hair and lips, lounged in smiling contentment. In a little group apart, Joyce, her crocus head gay in the strong sunlight, was chattering and laughing

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

to two young men, of whom one was the sunburnt soldier who had been her squire at the evening party. The other, a handsome fellow of seven or eight and twenty, was plainly in bad health. His eyes were too bright, fixed and anxious, the spot of colour in his cheeks too vivid, his manner, when he spoke, too hectic, his silences too frequent and abstracted. There were signs too of slovenliness in his appearance, although his clothes were new and admirably cut. Joyce called him Gathorne, and the soldier Billy; and the latter listened and responded to her frivolities with a tell-tale indefatigability.

"Isidore," said Mrs. Cassilis to the bald man, "ring the bell. They haven't brought a cup for Shirley, and she may be here any moment. Oh, it's by you, Magdalen, dear. Do you mind?"

The red-haired girl discovered the hanging bell-push among the roses, and obeyed.

"Is that Shirley Cresswell? I didn't know she was coming," she drawled lazily. "I'm so glad. I adore her. Do you know her, Edward? Isn't she a darling?"

"Oh, Sir Edward knows her," Mrs. Cassilis interrupted, with a significant smile. "We all do, don't we?"

"I've only seen her," said Billy.

"That's all there is to do," suggested Gathorne.

"It isn't!" Joyce cried indignantly. "She's awfully clever in lots of ways, and jolly nice."

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Really?" Gathorne answered. "All the better. I haven't got beyond seeing her, myself; but she's quite worth seeing. Who is she, by the way? Any relation of the Whissendines?"

"I don't really know; very likely," said Mrs. Cassilis. "Her father was in command of his regiment, I believe, when he was killed, poor fellow. But he didn't leave her too well off, so the brave little thing, without any sort of help, got employment as a dress designer at Delbruck's—indeed that's how I met her; and now she must be earning quite a thousand a year. At twenty-five! Isn't it splendid of her? Particularly as there's no necessity for her to work at all?"

"What's the matter with her, then? Isn't she all there?" Billy wonderingly asked.

"Very much so," Joyce informed him in a crushing manner. "She doesn't like scratching along on twopence a year. Nobody but an idiot would."

"But she could marry well, any time she liked. That was what I meant," her mother explained. "She's quite a beauty. Everybody who meets her says so. I suppose she prefers to be independent; and then she's devoted to her work. Sometimes, too, I suspect that the poor child was in love with some boy who got killed. . . ."

"Oh, I know she was," Magdalen yawned. "Geoffrey Foulkes. . . . Of course, that was nothing. Everybody was in love with Geoff. I'm sure I

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

worshipped the ground beneath his feet—the only man I ever met that I could stand. But he and Shirley were engaged—"

"Actually? It was never given out, my dear, was it?"

"I don't think so. He told a few people; me, among them. No doubt he saw that I had designs on him myself, and thought it only gentlemanly to warn me not to waste my youth in vain endeavour. . . . Dear little Joyce, come and sit by me," she broke off, catching the girl's hand as she passed her, on the way from the tea-table with a fresh supply of cake.

"Oh, do let me go!" cried the other, disengaging herself testily.

"Was that the Foulkes who was brought down somewhere near Douai?" enquired Billy. "I knew him. He was a good sort."

"That's the man. He painted, you know, and was supposed to be going to do something at it."

"I have a couple of hith thingth," Mr. Cassilis joined in swiftly, taking his cigar from his full lips. "He wath very promithing; not many ideath, but he could draw; and drawing'th rarer than ideath, jutht now."

"Dear me, yes!" his wife agreed. "A charming boy! He stayed with us once; and his painting was most distinguished."

"No, no!" maintained Mr. Cassilis irritably. "He

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

couldn't paint. Loth of men can paint. He could draw."

"How sad!" ruminated Mrs. Cassilis, dropping the art question. "She'd have been very well off, if he'd lived to marry her; he was a relation of the banking Foulkes; and here she is being exploited by those odious Brook women, who've no notion of dressing themselves, let alone anyone else. I wonder she endures it."

"She told me she preferred a salary and commission job to taking any risks herself," said the voice of the unseen Talbot.

"But I'm sure that's only because she's too dispirited at present to bother about business. You must console her with your wonderful philosophy, Sir Edward. Or perhaps you'd rather console her otherwise?"

"I will buy her some chocolates, if you think they'd be any use."

"Oh, you've no romance in you at all. It must be by philosophy, then. Everybody tells me how extraordinary you are. I wish you could think me worthy of being one of your disciples."

Magdalen cast a stealthy look into the depths of the chair, and her elaborately curved mouth smiled faintly; while Gathorne tilted his dishevelled head backwards, with closed eyes, against the wooden frame of his deck-chair, as if wearied by the turn of the conversation. Mr. Cassilis drummed the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

dome of his waistcoat with his short fingers impatiently.

"A disciple?" repeated Sir Edward in a tone of amusement. "I talk a great deal of nonsense, I'm afraid, to you and everyone else. No more than that."

"No, no," insisted the lady. "You have some new religion or system, whichever you call it. Rita Salomon told me so distinctly. She's a great admirer of yours."

"We all have some sort of system, no doubt, if we think of metaphysics at all. I must have explained a good deal of mine to you already in the course of conversation. But I'm always ready for fresh discussion."

She shook her head.

"You're deceiving me because you see I'm unworthy. Isn't he, Magdalen? I'm sure you know all about it."

"I should think he probably was," the girl replied in careless amusement. "I'd never trust a word he says. But he doesn't admit me into all his secrets, either."

"Rita spoke of you as if you were a new prophet —in quite a hushed voice. Truly she did. Ask Joyce."

"Oh, Rita talks in a hushed voice about all her men friends, Mummy," Joyce declared.

"And generally it's just as well," remarked Billy.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Not in your case, sir, of course," he hastened to add to Sir Edward.

"You're quite right," Mr. Cassilis agreed, with his hurried lisp. "I don't like that Thalomon girl; never did. Never trutht Jewth—never. I wonder you have her in the houthe, Adela. She'th hand and glove with half the thcallywagth in London. If it hadn't been for her, you'd never have got mixed up in all thith thpiritualithtic nonthenthe . . ."

Mrs. Cassilis turned the gaze of a benignant elephant on her husband, and was drawing herself up to a reply, when a footman entered the flagged garden, ushering Shirley.

She looked a trifle alarmed at the general uprisal to greet her; bowed at Gathorne when introduced to Captain Billy Lovat; denied all knowledge of having met Gathorne Burrell before, subsequently recanting and blaming herself for her stupidity; accepted the formal kiss of Mrs. Cassilis dutifully, and the impassioned one of Magdalen with an air of startled surprise; smiled upon Sir Edward; and then, losing her head, forgot to take any notice at all of her host, and sought refuge beside Joyce, with an expression of relief.

"We've all been discussing you, dear," Mrs. Cassilis told her in her fatly affectionate, if slightly condescending, manner. "Your ears must have been burning for the last quarter of an hour."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Oh dear!" murmured Shirley. Her voice spoke of a grave dismay.

"Miss Herbert—oh, of course, you know Magdalen, don't you?—has been saying such nice things about you; and Captain Lovat was most anxious to make your acquaintance."

The soldier's brown face took on a deeper colour.

"By Jove! Rather!" he cried, and proved his delight at the fulfilment of his ambition by turning his shoulder to the new-comer, and devoting himself almost feverishly to Joyce.

Mr. Cassilis, who was on the other side of Shirley, scarcely looked at her, and greeted her conversational efforts with the briefest words of agreement. A furtive embarrassment showed itself in his averted eyes and uneasy fingers, which he sought to alleviate by talking loudly to his wife, from time to time, across the intervening bodies of his guests. Shirley, relapsing into silence, glanced at Magdalen, who replied with a smile of sleepy amorousness; at Gathorne, who appeared unaware of her notice; and finally at Sir Edward Talbot, who had once more sunk into the recesses of his deep chair. His lips curved in polite recognition as their eyes met, but he made no attempt to entertain her; and it could hardly have been guessed that it was due to the request of this apathetic spectator that the girl had been included in the party. His heavy white eye-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

lids drooped, and his body lay relaxed in luxurious carelessness of his surroundings. The air of the little, sunny enclosure grew drowsier. Only Joyce and Billy continued to talk and laugh unbrokenly; and the efforts of the girl to draw Shirley into a three-handed conversation were consistently defeated by the determination of the young soldier to address all his remarks exclusively to herself. Before long she rose to her feet.

"Would you like to have a look-round, Shirley?"

"Yes, do, dear," Mrs. Cassilis said, "and tell us if you approve of it. It's so delightful to have got you here at last."

The suggestion of the words was that Shirley had, till now, hard-heartedly declined to visit the house and issue such directions for alterations and improvements as seemed desirable to her superior taste. Joyce lighted a cigarette from Billy's case, and passed her hand through her friend's arm.

"Come along!" she said. "No, you stay where you are, Billy. I want Miss Cresswell to myself."

And passing through one of the deep archways, the two girls shortly emerged from the winding paths of the box labyrinth on to the broad and velvety lawn which lay beneath the southern windows of the house.

Overbourne was a big, flat-faced, red-brick building, of no architectural beauty, but warm and

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

friendly in tone, and cosily wrapped in creepers. It was raised above its surroundings upon a double terrace, balustraded with grey stone and set with large craters in which red and yellow flowers flamed like beacon fires. In the middle of the lawn a fountain threw a waving scarf of sequinned gauze into the wind and sunshine. There was a golden liveliness in the air which came as a pleasant change after the hushed warmth of the paved garden.

"What a lovely place!" said Shirley, standing still to admire the scene, her skirts fluttering, and one hand to her wide hat. Joyce paused at her side. Although eight years younger than her companion, she topped her by half a head, and the two made a vivid contrast, the girl strongly built, upright, and brilliantly coloured, the young woman small, slender and delicate in tone. Their voices too were widely dissimilar, Joyce's ringing out firmly in a boyish alto, Shirley's dancing and sparkling in the upper register.

"It's not bad, is it?" said Joyce.

"Bad! I wish it was mine."

"You may have it, as far as I'm concerned. I hate the country. There's nothing to do."

"But it's so pretty to look at."

"You can't go on looking at the same thing for ever; and it's never any different, except in the winter, or when it rains; and then it's beastly."

"Well, I think I'd rather live in London, as a

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

general thing; but I should love to have a country place like this to run down to when I felt rustic. One can have nice people to stay. . . ."

"But they're just as nice in a town; nicer, because they don't get bored and sleepy and stodgy."

"Does Captain Lovat get stodgy?" asked Shirley, looking at the other with a smile.

"Billy's only been down two days," replied Joyce, blushing brightly, but with an increased resolution in her voice and eyes. "I love him at present, but I dare say that in a few days he'd be as big a bore as Gathorne or Edward."

"Are they bores?"

"Gathorne's awful here. I can't think why he comes. Perhaps to get a good sleep. They say he never goes to bed in London. Edward's a dud anywhere."

"Oh, I thought him rather attractive."

"Did you really? Sorry!"

"Please don't apologise," said Shirley, laughing. "I've only spoken to him that one evening at your house; and you saw he wasn't very excited at meeting me again. He's an interesting looking man; that was all I meant."

"I know. Most people say that. I can't see the attraction. He's got a face like a blank wall."

"I think that's partly the interest. One wonders what's behind it."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Probably nothing."

"Oh, there must be something, surely."

"Well, nothing to write to the papers about. Of course silly asses like Magdalen and Rita say he's so wonderful; they've always got to be swooning over somebody or something. But when you ask what he's done, they can't tell you. No, I believe he just lives on a sniffy manner."

Shirley shook her head.

"I'm sure he's clever, even if he doesn't do anything out of the way. By the bye, what is he? A writer or something?"

"Nothing nowadays, as far as I know. He must be pretty rich; he's got two or three cars, and a house in the country that he's just had built or altered for himself, and a flat in Sackville Street. He told me once that he was a speculator in his young days."

"The Stock Exchange! That's the last thing I should have taken him for."

"I don't know. I think he looks the part. He lived in America, you know; and Daddy knows lots of those Wall Street men, and they're mostly like that—clean-shaven and frightfully pleased with themselves and dressed like boys and not saying much except 'Sure' and 'Nope' and 'Gee' and that sort of rot."

"But that's just it; he does. Last time we met,

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY