

The Phantasies of Philarete

By James Ashcroft Noble

I

FOR quite a month or two it was noticed at the Shandy Club that a certain change had passed over Hartmann West. West was rather a notability at the club, though he was, comparatively speaking, a young member. To be precise, he had belonged to it just two years and a half, and six months before his election he had published his first book, *Drafts upon Inexperience*. It was a volume of somewhat exotic sentiment and paradoxical reflection, with a dash of what was just then beginning to be called "the new humour"; and the novelty, as represented by West, found no great favour with the critics. In most quarters the book was either energetically slated or altogether ignored—which, as we all know, is a much worse fate—but somehow, perhaps as a consequence of the very vigour of the slating, perhaps in virtue of that touch of unconventional genius which critics are not always quick to detect, the *Drafts* were honoured by the great reading public, and in half a year Hartmann West was a hero of six editions, and a member of the somewhat exclusive Shandy Club.

On the whole, he was a fairly popular member, in spite of the
fact

fact that he had what is called an uncertain temper ; but, during the period to which reference has been made, his popularity had much declined, for the uncertainty had become a very unpleasant certainty ; and an after-dinner chat or game of whist with Hartmann West was becoming, even to the most gentle and tactful members of the club, a thing that was to be avoided, if avoidance were at all possible. Most of those who had in a tepid way liked him, began to regard him with a dislike which was not in the least tepid ; but one or two Shandians—illuminated it may be by personal experience—had been heard to say that it was no use being hard upon poor West ; for as Major Forth, the well-known African explorer, pithily put it : “ It’s plain enough that the man has had a nasty knock-down blow of some kind or other ; but he’ll get over it all right if fellows will only give him a chance.” The Major’s intuition was wonderfully accurate. Hartmann West *had* received a knock-down blow ; and though chances were not dealt out to him in overflowing measure, he did get over it. At least, he seemed to get over it ; but I can’t forget the way in which Sumner told that he could have pulled him through the influenza, complicated as it was, if he hadn’t had something on his mind. “ He was sick of life, sir, and when a man gets to that, it doesn’t take much to make life sick of him.” It was after his death that I acquired the knowledge which corroborated the Major’s theory. And this is the story.

II

A few months after the date of the publication of *Drafts upon Inexperience*, a great stroke of luck had come to a certain John Errington. The influence of the only acquaintance he had in the world

world who possessed any influence at all, had been exerted in his favour, and he had become a member of the reviewing staff of *Noon*, a mid-day paper, the conductors of which made an emphasised appeal to the public that fancies literature and art, without snubbing that other public which better loves the House of Commons, the Turf, and the Divorce Court. Errington's career up to this time had not been conspicuously successful. All his life he had been more or less of an invalid. In his youth he had tried one or two callings, but ill-health had compelled him to abandon them ; and, having a genuine love of letters and gift of expression, he had—paradoxical as the sequence may seem—drifted into journalism. The leading paper in the northern provincial town where he lived had, in the first instance, published his articles, and had then gone on to pay for them, the pay becoming finally so assured as to justify him—that, at any rate, was the poor fellow's view of the case—in marrying the pretty Alice Blundell, and assuming the responsibilities of a British husband and ratepayer.

They did not exactly live on the fat of the land, but they lived somehow and kept out of debt, and were most foolishly happy until the fatal day when it became known that Mr. Warlow the proprietor of the *Norton Post* had loved American railroad investments not wisely, but too well, and that his journal had passed into new hands. The new hands, as is sometimes the case, did not appreciate the old hands ; and John Errington received an intimation that at the end of the month his services on the great organ of Norton opinion would no longer be required. Seeing that he was a nervous, timid, and singularly unresourceful man, he bore the blow with more of courage than might have been expected from him ; perhaps because it came and did the worst for him at once, the really demoralising troubles being those

which arrive in instalments, each one suggesting the harassing question "What next?" Thus it was that he came to take a step which to an ordinary man would have been simple and obvious enough, but which in John Errington indicated the special courage of despair, that is to ordinary courage, what the struggle of delirium is to healthy muscular force. He broke up his little Norton home; bade good-bye to his friends, and to the grave where his two little children lay buried; and carrying in his purse the few bank-notes which were the price of his household goods, took his wife and their one remaining child to London, and pitched the family tent in a dreary but reasonably clean and cheap Camberwell lodging-house.

It was a step to which even despair would not have impelled him had there not been one chance of possible success. About twelve months before the trouble came, he had contributed to the *Post* a short set of articles which had attracted the favourable attention of Sir George Blunt, and a correspondence between the Baronet and himself which had arisen out of them, had been maintained with something of regularity. Out of this correspondence sprung Errington's one hope, for Sir George, who had always written in the friendliest manner, was known to be a large proprietor of *Noon*, and if his good word could only be secured, the terrible *premier pas* in the new life would be successfully taken. Errington accordingly presented himself at the great house in Prince's Gardens, and was received by the master of his fate without any effusion, but with courtesy and kindness. Sir George was sorry to hear of Mr. Errington's misfortune, and would be pleased to be of service to him. Mr. Errington, as a journalist, would understand that a proprietor felt some delicacy in taking any step, which looked like interference in the literary management of a paper, that was in competent editorial hands; that

that the hands of Mr. Mackenzie who edited *Noon* were singularly competent ; and that they belonged to a man who was very likely to regard suggestion as an attempt at dictation.

John Errington listened and felt chilly ; had he been standing his legs would have trembled.

“ But,” continued Sir George with a voice in a new key. “ I’ll tell you what I will do, Mr. Errington. There can be no impropriety in my giving you a letter of introduction to Mr. Mackenzie, in which I will tell him what I know of you, and what I think of your work. Perhaps you had better not present it in person, but send it by post, with a letter of your own, and a few specimen articles—not too many. Then if there is any opening, he will probably make an appointment. I can’t promise you that anything will come of it, but there is a chance, and at any rate it is the best thing—indeed the only thing—that I can do.”

The two letters and the carefully selected literary specimens reached Mr. Mackenzie at an auspicious moment. The most useful of his general utility men in the literary department of *Noon* had suddenly levanted, and was supposed to be half-way across the Atlantic, having for a companion, the beautiful Mrs. Greatrex, wife of the well-known dramatist. Dick Mawson’s morals—or his want of them—had long been notorious ; but Mr. Mackenzie did not deal in morals save in his social articles, and very sparingly even there. What concerned him was that Mawson was, as a writer, clever, versatile, and best of all prompt ; and his wrath burned as he thought of Dick’s perfidious treatment—not of poor Mr. Greatrex, but of *Noon* and of himself, Andrew Mackenzie. And now here was this new man. His articles were hardly so smart as Mawson’s, but he seemed to know more, and there was a certain finish about his work which the erring

Dick

Dick had never attained. He should be tried. If he proved a success, well and good; if a failure, he could soon be got rid of, and there would be a reasonable pretext—not that Mr. Mackenzie needed any—for saying to Sir George: “Hands off.”

And so it happened that after a brief interview with the great man of *Noon*, John Errington left the editorial office in Bouverie Street, for the Camberwell lodgings, bearing under his arm a couple of volumes for review, and in his mind a proposal made by the editor that he should write one of a forthcoming series of articles on “Fin-de-Siècle Fiction.” Some ideas for this series, and one quite impossibly libellous contribution to it, were the only keepsakes that the amorous fugitive Dick Mawson had left behind him for the consolation of Mr. Andrew Mackenzie; but the editor made no mention of Dick to John Errington, leaving him indeed with a vague impression that the series was an impromptu scheme, conceived and brought forth in ten minutes for his special benefit.

Mr. Mackenzie did not find Errington a failure, so Sir George Blunt did not receive the “hands off” ultimatum. Indeed the editor rather liked the work of his new contributor, mainly because he found that other people liked it; and the cheques which came monthly to the little house at Shepherd’s Bush (for Camberwell had been abandoned) sometimes represented an amount which made Errington feel that fortune had really come to him at last. There was, however, a harassing irregularity in the descent of the golden or paper shower. Sometimes publishers abstained from publishing the right sort of books; sometimes, even in *Noon*, politics raided the territory of letters; and there were months when Errington would have made a fair profit by exchanging his cheque for a ten pound-note. He had tried to get work on other newspapers, or to find an appreciative magazine editor

editor to accept his more thoughtful and elaborate literary essays ; but the newspapers had no vacancy, and the magazine editors all wanted short stories—the one literary commodity which he found himself unable to supply. In spite, therefore, of what he admitted to be his wonderful good luck, there were seasons when Errington felt somewhat anxious and depressed.

He was feeling so one day, when he entered Mr. Mackenzie's room, seeking what he might devour. For two months the cheques had been of the smallest ; and before very long there would be a new and expensive arrival in the house at Shepherd's Bush—a conjunction which roused the timid man to unwonted persistence of appeal.

“ I'm afraid there's nothing,” said Mackenzie ; “ the publishers are keeping everything back until this dynamite excitement is over, and upon my word I am glad they are, for it fills the paper. This is really the only thing I have in hand that is in your line, and it has been here for nearly a month.” As he spoke the editor took down a daintily attired book from a shelf behind him, and continued : “ I didn't intend to notice it. I think West is a conceited ass who needs snubbing ; but as you want something you can take it, and of course treat it on its merits. But you must keep within a column, and if you only send half, so much the better.”

John Errington left Mr. Mackenzie's room with a lighter heart than that which he had taken there, for though the *honorarium* represented by a column of copy was not much in itself, it was just then a good deal to him. He was specially grateful to his chief for stretching a point in his favour, for he was inclined to agree with his opinion that *The Phantasies of Philarete* was likely to prove poor stuff. During the weeks in which it had been lying on Mr. Mackenzie's shelf, Errington had read

read reviews of it in the *Hour*, the *Morning Gazette*, the *Parthenon*, and the *Book World*, and these influential journals with almost unique unanimity had pronounced it a strained, affected, pretentious, and entirely vapid performance. "If a beginner," said the *Hour*, "were to ask us to indicate the qualities of substance and workmanship which he, in his own attempts ought most studiously to avoid, we should give him this volume and say, 'My dear boy, you will find them all here.'"

III

When John Errington, after going upstairs to kiss his rather worn-looking little wife, who was taking the afternoon rest which had become a necessity, lighted his pipe and began to read the *Phantasies*, he found the opening pages better than he expected. He saw nothing of strain or affectation; and if the substance was slight, the style had a graceful lightsomeness which seemed to Errington very charming. He read on and on; his wife came into the room with her sewing and he never noticed her entrance; but when he had finished the chapter which contains the episode of old Antoine's daughter, he looked up and said, "I must read this book to you, dear love, it is just wonderful."

Errington did not go to bed until he had reached that last chapter, which, you will remember, Mr. Walter Hendon cited a few weeks ago as the most beautiful thing in contemporary prose. The next morning he wrote and posted his review, the 1200 words of which would, he knew, just fill a column of *Noon*, and in two days more it appeared. In the meantime, Errington's enforced leisure had allowed the domestic readings to begin, and, as the fragile wife reclined on her little couch and sewed and listened,

listened, her enthusiasm was not less intense than her husband's.

Then, when the paper came, he read his review, and she exclaimed :

"Oh, John, that is lovely : it is one of the best things you have ever done. I do wish you would send it to Mr. West and thank him for the pleasure he has given us. I would like to write myself, only I express myself so stupidly, but you will do it perfectly ; and I am sure he would like to know all that we feel about the book."

"I don't know," said Errington, with the self-distrust always aroused in him by any suggestion of the mildest self-assertion, "I don't suppose he would care for the opinion of a man about whom he knows nothing."

"Oh, yes, he would ; people like sympathy, even if they don't care for praise ; and then, too, if it is really true that he is the sub-editor of *Caviare*, he might be able to get you some work for it."

Now *Caviare*, as proved by its name and motto, "*Caviare to the general*," was a monthly magazine, dealing exclusively with literature and art in a way that appealed to the superior few ; and some of Errington's best essays—or those which he thought the best—had been declined by several editors on the ground that their goodness was not of the kind to attract their miscellaneous *clientèle*. He had once or twice thought of submitting to *Caviare* one of these rejected addresses ; but he had doubted whether they were up to the mark, and so they had never gone. His wife's last suggestion startled him.

"Oh, I couldn't do that," he said ; "it would spoil the whole thing. It would take the bloom off one's gratitude for a beautiful thing. I couldn't do it. I would rather ask help from a perfect stranger."

"Well,

“Well, that seems to me to be morbid ; and I don’t like to hear you talk as if people did you a favour by accepting your work. They accept it not for love of you, but because they know it is good. You remember what Professor Miles said about your essay on ‘The Secret of Swift,’ and I am sure they would be glad to have it for *Caviare*. I don’t often press you to do anything ; but I don’t think you have ever repented taking my advice, and I *do* want you to write to Mr. West.”

Errington was not a strong man. He was too timid to initiate, and too timid to oppose ; and his wife was right, for he had never adopted a suggestion of hers without finding that she was wiser than he. And so he sat down and wrote :

Titan Villas, Shepherd’s Bush.

DEAR SIR,

I am a stranger to you, and my only introduction is the enclosed review of *The Phantasies of Philarete* which I have had the great privilege of contributing to *Noon*, and which appears in to-day’s issue of that journal. I have tried my best to do justice to the truth and beauty and tenderness of the book ; but I feel that my best does not say what I wanted to say. Nor is a second attempt likely to be one whit more successful than the first, so I do not write now to supplement my review ; but to express what I could not express in public—my own personal gratitude and that of my wife, to whom I have been reading it, for a book which has touched us as we have not often been touched before. We live a very quiet life into which enters little of what is ordinarily called pleasure, but such a volume as your *Phantasies* brings with it delights upon which we can live for many days. Please accept our hearty gratitude for so great a gift.

I cannot suppose that my name will be at all known to you, for I am, comparatively speaking, a new-comer in the world of London journalism ; and I have so far been unsuccessful in obtaining any
literary

literary work besides that which has been given me by the editor of *Noon*. To follow an acknowledgment of one favour by a request for another is not usual with me, but I find something in your book which encourages me to unwonted freedom. Just now I have special reasons for wishing to enlarge my slender but ordinarily sufficient resources, and I have thought it possible that you might be willing to look over an article of mine entitled "The Secret of Swift," with a view to giving me your opinion as to its suitability for publication in *Caviare*. The theory propounded in it is, I think, a new one, and Professor Miles has been kind enough to say that it is at any rate sufficiently well-supported to deserve provisional acceptance as a working hypothesis.

But please let this matter await a perfectly free moment. I write not to trouble you about my poor affairs, but to express my gratitude—to which my wife wishes me to add hers—for the pure and rare delight your book has brought to us.—I am, dear sir,

Yours very truly and gratefully,

JOHN ERRINGTON.

Errington was not a man who expected much, yet he felt a certain disappointment when, on the second day after the despatch of his letter, the postman passed and left no reply from Hartmann West. But no postman ever passed the office of *Noon*, and while Errington was wondering whether the author of *Phantasies* could be at home, Mr. Mackenzie was perusing with ireful countenance a letter bearing his signature. It had contained an enclosure in a handwriting with which the editor was familiar, and it ran thus :

Shandy Club, W.

DEAR SIR,

I have received the enclosed communication from a person who is, or professes to be, a member of your staff. You will see that he, truly or falsely, announces himself as the writer of a very fulsome, and

and yet in some respects gratuitously offensive, review of my latest book which appeared in your issue of Thursday last, and that he then goes on to tout for employment by the editor of a magazine with which I am supposed to be connected. I do not know whether you have any views upon the dignity of journalism ; but you have probably strong views upon the ethics of advertising, and are not very eager to give payment, instead of receiving it, for allowing a small scribe to introduce his wares through your literary columns to possible purchasers. I think it well for you to know to what base use even *Noon* can be put.

Yours faithfully,

HARTMANN WEST.

Seldom had Andrew Mackenzie felt such an access of speechless rage ; and for the moment he could not tell which object of his emotion was the more hateful. He was not a physically violent man, but had either West or Errington presented himself at that moment, violence would certainly have been done. He had not willingly inserted the review of *The Phantasies of Philarete* ; in fact, he had remarked to his nephew and sub-editor that he wished Errington had chosen any other book on which to “tap his d——d private cask of gush ;” but having explicitly given the owner of the cask a free hand, he had not felt it consistent with dignity implicitly to cancel the authorisation. And now this consummate cad, who ought to be off his head with exultation at having been honoured with even the coolest notice of *Noon*, had actually dared to write of its praise as “fulsome” and “gratuitously offensive.” What was meant by the latter term Mackenzie did not trouble to guess ; but had he done so, his trouble would have been fruitless, for one vain man can seldom sound the depths of vanity in another. The fact was that Errington had made a veiled reference to previous criticisms of the book as “attempts made

made by malignity or incompetence to crush a rising author ;” and the word “rising” was gall and wormwood to the man who believed himself to have been for at least a year on the apex of fame’s pyramid. Had he read Errington’s letter first, the unmistakable accent of timorous praise, and still more the appeal to him as a possible patron, would have titillated his vanity and sent him to the review with a clean palate ; but of course a printed cutting, headed “A Western Masterpiece,” could not wait, and the “rising” vitiated his taste for what would have been to him the dainty dish of adulation.

But Andrew Mackenzie neither knew this nor cared to know it, and his thoughts turned from West to Errington. It has been said that at the moment he knew not which he hated the more ; but he did know upon which he could inflict immediate vengeance, and that was a great point. As he brooded upon Errington’s offence, West’s seemed comparatively trivial, for was it not Errington who had provided West with his offensive weapon ? The member of the Shandy Club had said that he did not know whether Mr. Mackenzie had any views upon the dignity of journalism. His ignorance on this matter was very general ; but there were many who knew that he held exceedingly strong views concerning the dignity of one journal, *Noon*, and one journalist, Andrew Mackenzie. It was his pride to know that the members of his political staff were to be seen at Government Office receptions, hobnobbing with Cabinet Ministers, that his critics dined with literary peers whose logs they judiciously rolled, and that both were frequently represented in the half-crown reviews. That was as it should be : and here was a fellow who put it in the power of a man like West to say that one of his contributors wrote from Titan Villas, Shepherd’s Bush, about his slender resources, and his ardent desire to pick

up

up any crumbs that might fall from the table of *Caviare*. He, at any rate, should be made to suffer.

IV

While Mackenzie was devising his scheme of punishment, John Errington was engaged in pleasant thoughts of Hartmann West. The expected letter might now come by any post, and it would be well to see whether "The Secret of Swift" were in fit condition to be despatched to him, or whether he must get Alice to make a clean copy of it in that pretty handwriting of hers which was always seen at its neatest in her transcript of the MSS. of which she was so proud. The present copy was, however, in capital order, but on examining it he found that one slip was missing. Nervous search through the well-filled drawer soon convinced him that it was not there; but, fortunately, on examining the two edges of the gap, he made the discovery that the lost leaf had been devoted to little more than a long quotation, which could be easily restored by a visit to the library of the British Museum.

He had nothing else to do, and the day was fine. He could start at once, copy his quotation, and have a few hours in the metropolis of the world of books. It was six o'clock when he reached home again, and the dusk of an evening in late autumn was beginning to gather, but the lamp in the little general utility chamber, which served for dining and drawing room, was unlit. As he entered he thought no one was there, but a second glance revealed his wife crouching upon the floor, her head lying upon the couch which stood by the window.

"Dear Alice," he said faintly as he strode forward, "are you ill?"

ill? what is the matter?" but there was no reply. His first vague terror crystallised into a definite dread, which, however, lasted only for an instant, for the hand he took in his, cold as it was, had not the unmistakable coldness of death; and when he kissed the lips whose whiteness even the dusk revealed, he felt that they were the lips of a living woman.

"Jane, Jane," he called loudly, "bring some water quickly; your mistress has fainted;" and rising from his knees he lit with trembling hands the lamp upon the table. The maid, carrying a basin of water, bustled in with a scared face.

"Oh, dear, dear," she exclaimed, "she do look awful bad; shall I go for the doctor?"

"No, no—we must bring her to, first. How has it happened? Do you know anything about it?"

"No, indeed; she was in the kitchen ten minutes ago, or it might be a quarter of an hour, and the postman knocked at the door, and she says 'That will be the letter the master was expectin',' and then she didn't come back, but I heard nothink, and thought nothink of it. If I'd a heard anythink I'd have come in."

They lifted her on to the couch. Errington loosened her dress and sprinkled the water over her face, while the girl rubbed one of her hands, but there was no movement. The small basin was soon emptied.

"More water, quick," said the man; "and oughtn't we to burn something?"

"Feathers is the thing, but we haven't got no feathers; perhaps brown paper'd do; I'll fetch some."

It was brought, and the woman now sprinkled the water while the man held under his wife's nostrils the ignited paper which threw off a pungent aromatic smoke. A slight shiver ran through

through the recumbent figure ; the eyelids trembled, then opened, though their glance was hardly recognition, and slowly closed again.

"Alice, dear heart," exclaimed the man brokenly as he gently put his arm round her neck, and drew her lips to his ; "speak to me, darling. You will be all right now. I am with you. What has frightened you ?"

For a few seconds she lay apparently unconscious ; then the eyes opened again with less of that dreadful, unseeing look, and she murmured sleepily, "Where am I ? What is the matter, John ?"

"Yes, darling, I am here. You are better now. Rest a little bit, and then tell me all about it."

"She's coming to," said the girl, "I'll go and make her a cup of tea. It's the best thing now." And she left the husband and wife together.

While the wife lay, again silent, with now and then a slight movement as of a shiver, a timid voice was heard at the door. "Is mother ill ? Can I come in ?"

"She's getting better, my pet. Run away now, and be very quiet. You shall come in soon."

The figure stirred again, this time with more of voluntary motion ; she made as if to raise herself ; her eyes met her husband's with a look of full recognition ; she threw her arm round his neck and pressed herself against him in a terrifying outburst of hysterical weeping. It lasted for minutes—how many John never knew—with heavy sobs that convulsed her, and intermittent sounds of eerie laughter. At last the words began to struggle forth with difficulty and intermittence.

"John—John—dear John—my own dear husband—Oh my darling—my darling—I love you, and I have ruined you—it will
kill

kill me ; but, oh, if I could have died before." And then, with less of violence, for the paroxysm had exhausted her, she began silently to weep again. An hour had passed before John Errington had heard the story, or rather read it in the type-written letters which had dropped from his wife's hands as she fell, and had been pushed under the sofa. He read them first rapidly ; then again more slowly, with stunned senses :

Office of *Noon*,

October 5, 1893.

SIR,

Enclosed you will find a copy of a letter which I have just received from Mr. Hartmann West, from which you will see that he has done me the favour to place in my hands a letter addressed to him by you, and written so recently that its purport must be fresh in your memory. That I should see it did not enter into your calculations, and I do not suppose that the man capable of writing it, would in the least understand the emotions excited by it, in the mind of a self-respecting journalist. I may, however, say that never in the whole course of my professional experience—which has been tolerably varied—can I remember an instance in which a trusted contributor to a high-class journal had deliberately puffed a book which he knows to be worthless (for I am assured on all hands that the worthlessness of this particular book would be obvious to the meanest capacity), and has made that puff a fulcrum for the epistolary leverage of two or three contemptible guineas. I congratulate you on the invention of an ingenious system of blackmailing, one great merit of which is that it evades the clutch of the criminal law, though I cannot add to my congratulations either a lament for its present failure or a hope for its future success. Though I am unfortunately powerless to control the operations of the inventor, I am happily able to restrict their scope by refusing the use of *Noon* as a theatre of operation. Please understand

stand that your connection with this journal is at an end. A cheque for the amount due to you will be at once forwarded.

Yours truly,

ANDREW MACKENZIE.

Hartmann West's letter had also been read, and John Errington was vainly endeavouring to check his wife's outpourings of remorse.

"I can't bear it, John. To think that I who love you should have brought this upon you. Oh! I hate myself. You would never have written it if it hadn't been for me. You didn't want to write, and I made you write. But oh, I didn't know. I ought to have known that I was foolish and that you were wiser than I; but I thought of other times when I had done you good and not harm. Dear, dear John; you won't hate me, will you?"

"Don't talk like that, darling; you will break my heart. I should love you more than ever, if that were possible; but it isn't. How could we know that the man who seemed to us an angel was just a devil. When I read the book I felt that he was a man to love, and I tried to put something of what I felt into what I wrote, being sure that he would understand. I wrote from my heart, and he calls it gratuitously offensive. Darling, you mustn't reproach yourself any more; I can't bear it; how could you know, how could I know, how could any one know, that there could be such a man?"

John Errington passed a wakeful night, but his wife slept the heavy sleep of exhaustion. When at eight o'clock he quietly rose, dressed, and went down to breakfast with his little girl, she was sleeping still. "It will do her good," thought Errington, and when Doris had gone to school, he set to work upon his essay, "The Common Factor in Shakespeare's Fools," to pass the time until

until he heard her bell. It did not ring until half-past eleven, and he ran rapidly up the short flight of stairs.

"Well darling," he said, "you have had a good sleep."

"Oh, I have been awake for a long time—two hours I should think—and I have been in great pain. I didn't ring before, because I thought it would pass away, and I wouldn't trouble you, but it is much worse than it was."

John Errington looked down tenderly upon the thin face, which seemed to have grown thinner during the night. The woman closed her eyes and seemed to be suffering. After a moment's silence she spoke again.

"I'm better now," she said faintly, "but I think dear, Jane had better go for the doctor, and she might knock next door and ask Mrs. Williams if she can come in."

The kindly neighbour was soon by the bedside, and the doctor, who had been found at home, was shortly in attendance. It was not an obscure case, nor a tedious one. Three hours afterwards Alice Errington was the mother of a dead baby-boy, and in the early dawn of the next day Mrs. Williams with many tears placed the little corpse on the breast of the dead mother, and drew the lifeless arm around it. John Errington stood and watched her silently; then he came and kissed the two dead faces; then he threw himself upon the bed, which shook with his tearless sobs.

John Errington, Doris, and Alice's father, Richard Blundell, who came from Norton for the funeral, returned from Kensal Green, and sat down to the untimely meal prepared for Mr. Blundell, who in a few minutes must start to catch his homeward train at Willesden. He was a man of few words, and of the very few he now uttered, most were addressed to his little granddaughter. It was only as the two men stood at the door that he spoke to his son-in-law in that Lancashire accent that the younger

man still loved to hear. "Tha's been hard hit lad, and so have I, God knows ; but try to keep up heart for th' little lass's sake. We're proud folk i' Lancashire ; mayhap too proud ; but ye won't mind a bit of a lift in a tight place fro' Alice's father. Ah wish it were ten times as much. God bless thee—and thee, my lass."

The old man kissed the child, wiped his eyes, and was driven away. John watched the cab till it turned a corner ; then looked hard at the ten pound note left in his hand as if it presented some remarkable problem for solution ; closed the door ; led Doris into the little sitting-room ; and began the task imposed upon him—of keeping up his heart.

V

The cheque from *Noon* had come ; John Errington had it in his pocket, where also were five sovereigns and a few shillings. The ten-pound note was still in his hand, and a rapid calculation told him that when the undertaker was paid, nearly a month of safety from absolute penury was still his. In a month surely something could be done, and John Errington set himself to do it. The man to whom self-assertion and self-advertisement had been impossible horrors, now found himself wondering at himself as he bearded editors and sub-editors, and referred—in perhaps too apologetic a tone for persuasion—to the *Noon* articles on "Fin-de-Siècle Fiction," which had really excited more comment than he was aware of in journalistic circles. His success was small. No editor had any immediate opening, but one or two were friendly, and said they would bear his name in mind. A proprietor who was his own editor told him that literary paragraphs containing quite fresh information would be always acceptable ; but of the various paragraphs he sent in, only two—representing a sum of fourteen shillings or thereabouts

thereabouts—found acceptance. The going up and down other men's stairs became as hateful to him as it was to Dante ; but he lashed himself into hope for the "little lass's" sake, and hope made it endurable. At six o'clock every evening he arrived at Titan Villas, and for two hours, until Doris's bedtime, in helping the child with her lessons, or reading aloud while she nestled up to him, he felt something that was to happiness as moonshine is to sunlight. One evening, however, he had to forego this delight, for he had received a message from a certain editor, who had asked him to call after eight at his house at Wimbledon. He had seen the great man, who had given him a long chapter of autobiography, but had said little of practical importance, and when, just before midnight, he reached home, he was weary and dissipated. He drew his arm-chair to the fire, warmed his feet, smoked his pipe in the company of an evening paper for half an hour, and then went to bed, turning for a moment—as was his wont—into the room where the ten-years-old little Doris must have been asleep for hours. He held the carrying-lamp over the child's face, which was somewhat flushed : and the bed-clothes were tumbled as if the sleeper had been restless. As he made them straight and tucked them in, the child stirred but did not waken, and Errington was on the point of leaving the room, when his eye caught the little frock hanging at the foot of the bed. The new black cashmere looked shabby and draggled, and as he instinctively grasped one of its falling folds, he felt it cold and wet. Then he turned to the little heap of under-linen upon a chair and was conscious of their chill damp. "She has been wet through," he thought, "and her clothes have never been changed. Poor motherless darling." He gathered the little garments together on his arm, and, taking them downstairs, found a clothes-horse, and spread them upon it before the fire, which he had replenished when he came in.

He

He knew how it had happened. A kindly girl who had once been a near neighbour had offered to give the little Doris lessons in music, but she had recently removed to lodgings nearly two miles away, and the child must have been caught in the heavy rain which he remembered had set in just about the time that she would be leaving Miss Rumbold. The thoughtless Jane had allowed her to sit in the saturated garments until she went to bed.

In the morning the child's eyes looked somewhat dull and heavy, but otherwise she was apparently quite well, and she resisted her father's suggestion that she should stay in bed instead of going to school. In the evening when Errington returned from his wanderings she seemed much better. Her eyes were bright again—brighter even than usual—and for the first time since her mother's death she chatted to her father with something of her old animation. During the night Errington heard a short, hard cough often repeated, but when he left his bed and went to look at her she was fast asleep. When he rose for the day and visited her again she seemed feverish; the cough was more frequent; and her breathing was somewhat short.

"What is the matter with her?" said the father to the doctor whom he had hastily summoned. "I suppose it is nothing really serious."

"Well," said the slowly-speaking young Scotsman, "I'm just thinking it's a case of pneumonia, and pneumonia is never exactly a trifle, but I see no grounds for special anxiety. You must just keep her warm, and I'll send her some medicine over, and look in again to-night."

He sent the medicine and looked in, but said little.

"Of course the temperature is higher, but that was to be expected. I will be down again in the morning, and she just needs care—care."

The

The care was not lacking, for Errington was himself Doris's nurse, but, as Mr. Grant observed, "pneumonia is never a trifle," and even her father did not know how heavily her mother's death had taxed the child's power of resistance. The unequal fight lasted for five days and nights, and for the last two of them there could be little doubt of the issue. The end came on Sunday evening as the bells were ringing for church. The child had been delirious during the latter part of the day, and had evidently supposed herself to be talking to her mother, subsiding from the delirium into heavy sleep; but about six she awakened with the light of fever no longer in her eyes, and stretched out a thin little hand to Errington, and said faintly, "Dear, dear father."

"Are you feeling better, darling?" he said.

"I don't know," she whispered; "I like you holding my hand. I feel as if I were sinking through the bed. I think I am sleepy."

She closed her eyes, and for ten minutes she lay quite still. Then she opened them very wide and looked straight before her, lifted her free hand, and partly raised herself from the pillow. The glance which had been a question became a recognition. "Oh mother, mother," she exclaimed in the clear voice of health, "it is you; oh, I am so glad." And then the grey veil fell over the child's face; she sank back upon the pillow; and the eyes closed again for the last time. In the room where there had been two—or was it three?—there was only one.

VI

On the morning of the funeral there came a letter for John Errington. It was from the editor who lived at Wimbledon, and was very brief.

"Mr. Joliffe

“Mr. Joliffe regrets that on consideration he cannot entertain Mr. Errington’s proposal with regard to the series of articles for *The Book World*. When Mr. Joliffe informs Mr. Errington that he has had an interview with Mr. Mackenzie, he will doubtless understand the reasons for this decision.”

Mr. Williams, John Errington’s neighbour, was standing near him in the darkened room. He had offered to accompany him to Kensal Green, for Richard Blundell was confined to bed and could not come, and the stricken man was alone in his grief. When Errington had read the letter he quietly returned it to its envelope, and placed it in his pocket, as the undertaker summoned them to the waiting coach. On their return from the cemetery Williams pressed Errington to come into his house and sit down with his wife and himself at their midday dinner.

“It is very kind of you,” said Errington, “but I must not be tempted; I have work to do. But I will come in for a moment and thank Mrs. Williams for all her goodness to me and mine.”

He went in, and the thanks were tendered.

“Well, I must go, now,” he said abruptly, after a short silence. “God bless you both. Good-bye!”

“Oh, Mr. Errington, not ‘good-bye.’ You must come in this evening and smoke a pipe with Robert. ‘Good morning’ is what you ought to say, if you really can’t stay now.”

“I don’t know. This is a world in which ‘good-bye’ never seems wrong. But God bless you, anyhow. That must be right—if,” he added suddenly, “there is any God to bless.”

Then he walked hastily down the road in the direction of half a dozen shops which supplied suburban requirements, of suburban quality, at suburban prices; went into one of them, and in a few moments reappeared and turned homeward. Entering the house, he drew up the blind of the sitting-room and sat down at the table

table to write a letter. When it was finished he read it over, put it in an envelope, addressed it, took it to the pillar-box about twenty yards from his gate, and when he had dropped it in, sauntered with a weary air back to the house. This time he went, not to the sitting-room, but to the kitchen.

"Jane," he said, "I'm tired out. I don't think I have slept properly for a week, but I feel very sleepy now. I shall go and lie down on the bed, and don't let me be disturbed, whatever happens. If I get a chance I think I can sleep for hours."

He turned as if to go, and then turned back again, thrust his hand into his pocket, and drew from it a few coins. Two of them were sovereigns. These he laid upon the table.

"Your wages are due to-morrow, Jane, aren't they? I may as well pay you now lest I forget. Twenty-three and fourpence, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir; but don't trouble about it a day like this; it'll do any time."

"I would rather pay it now. I haven't the even money, but you can get me the change when you go out."

"Thank you, sir; but won't you have a chop before you lie down? I can have it ready in ten minutes."

"No, I'm not hungry; I want rest." Then after a pause—"I'm afraid I spoke roughly that day—about those wet clothes, you know. We may all forget things. I forget many things, and I daresay I was too hard."

The girl burst into tears. "Oh, sir," she said, "it's kind of you, but I can't forgive myself. The sweet pet that was so fond of her Jane, and that I wouldn't have harmed for"—but as she took the apron from her eyes she saw that she had no listener. Her master had gone upstairs.

It was half-past twelve, for the funeral had been very early.

At

At eight in the evening Jane was standing at the door of the next house, speaking eagerly in a terrified tone to Mrs. Williams's small servant. "Oh, will you ask Mr. Williams if he would mind stepping in. I'm frightened about the master. He's been in his room since noon, and I can't make him hear. I'm afraid something's happened."

"What's that?" said Williams, stepping out into the narrow passage.

The girl repeated her story, and without putting on his hat he followed her into the house and up the stairs.

"It's the front room," she said, and Williams knocked and called loudly, but all was silent.

"How many times did you knock?"

"Ever so many, and very hard at last."

"Good God! I'm afraid you're right," and as he spoke he tried the handle of the door.

"He has locked himself in. We must break the door open. Have you a mallet? Anything would do."

"There's a screwdriver; nothing else but a little tack hammer, that would be of no use."

The large screwdriver was brought, and the wood-work of the suburban builder soon gave way before its leverage. When Mr. Williams entered, carrying the lamp he had taken from Jane's trembling hand, he saw that Errington had undressed himself and got into bed. He was lying with his face towards the door, and one arm was extended on the coverlet. He might have been sleeping, but before Williams touched the cold hand he knew what had happened. There was a bedroom tumbler on the dressing table, and beside it an empty bottle bearing the label, "Chloral Hydrate. Dose one tablespoon, 15 grains." John Errington was dead.

When

VII

When during the forenoon of the next day Hartmann West entered the Shandy Club the correspondence awaiting him—which was usually heavy—consisted only of a single letter. He glanced at the address, which was in a handwriting that he could not at the moment identify, though he thought he had seen it before. He mounted to the smoking-room on the first floor, holding it in his hand, and when he had established himself in his favourite arm-chair near one of the three windows, drew a small paper knife from his waistcoat pocket and cut open the envelope. The letter began abruptly without any one of the usual forms of address :

I do not want you to throw this letter aside until you have read it to the end, and therefore I mention a fact concerning it which will give it a certain interest—even to you. It is written by a man who, when you receive it, will be dead—dead by your hand—who has just come from the grave of his dead wife and dead children, murdered by you as surely as if you had drawn the knife across their throats. I wonder if you remember me, or if you have added to all the other gifts with which Heaven, or Hell, has dowered you, the gift of forgetfulness. I am the man who read your book and loved it—loved it for itself, but loved still more the heart that I thought I felt was beating behind it, and wrote of my love which I was glad to tell—first for all who might read what I had written, and then for you alone. I must have written clumsily, for I seem to have angered you—how I know not, and because I had angered you, you took your revenge. I was a poor man—I told you I was poor—but I was rich in a wife and child who loved me, and whom I loved ; and I only thought of my poverty when I looked at
them

them, and felt the hardness of the lot to which my physical weakness, and perhaps other weakness as well, had led them. Then, because my wife was looking forward to the pains and perils of motherhood, and I had tried in vain to secure for her something of comfort in her time of trial, I humbled myself for her—you know how; and yet, fool that I was, I felt no humiliation, for I thought that I was writing to, as well as from, a human heart. Then came the blow which your letter rendered inevitable, the blow which bereft me of the scanty work which had perhaps been done clumsily, but which I know had been done honestly, the blow which killed a mother and an unborn child. I found her fainting with your letter lying beside her, and in two days she was dead. She left me with our little girl for a sole remaining possession; but a child motherless is a child defenceless, and to-day I have laid her in her grave, and she is motherless no more. Only I am alone, and now I go to join them, if indeed the grave be not the end of all. I know not, for you have robbed me of faith as well as of joy. Within the last hour, I have with my lips and in my heart, denied the God whom I have loved and trusted, even as I loved and trusted the man who has murdered my dear ones. If there be no God I will not curse you, for what would curses avail? If there be a God I will not curse you, for my cause is His cause, and shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? But remember that when you are where I am now—the unknown now in which you read these words—I shall summon you with a summons you dare not disobey, to stand as a murderer before His judgment bar.

JOHN ERRINGTON.

Hartmann West had lighted a cigar before he cut the envelope. It had gone out. No connoisseur relights a cigar, and Hartmann West was a connoisseur not only in tobacco but in many other things. He considered himself—quite justly—a proficient in the art of making life enjoyable, and his achievements in that art had so far been successful. He had enjoyed the writing of his letter

to

to Andrew Mackenzie ; it was, as he put it to himself, "rather neat." But it came back to him with an unexpected rebound ; and Major Forth was not wrong when he talked about a knock-down blow.

For such it undoubtedly was. West was not, like Mackenzie, a thick-skinned and insensitive man. He was, on the contrary, a bundle of nerves, and the nerves were well on the surface—an idiosyncrasy of physique which accounted for the delicacy and exquisiteness of sympathetic realisation that had charmed Errington in *The Phantasies of Philarete*. But he was a colossal egoist, and when his egoistic instincts were aroused, the man who became almost sick when he heard or read a story of cruelty, showed himself capable of a sustained and startling ruthlessness of malignity. When the mood passed he became again his ordinary self—the fastidious, sensitive creature, susceptible to tortures which a chance word of any coarser-fibred acquaintance might inflict. Errington's letter appealed to the quick imagination which was his hell as well as his heaven. It made pictures for him, and he turned from one only to find himself face to face with another. He saw the fainting woman, the dead child, the corpse of the man—bloody it might be, for the tormenting fiend of fancy provided all possible accessories of horror—and as he looked the tide of life ebbed within him.

Next morning this one ghastliness of terror was removed, but its place was taken by a new dread. He received a copy of a suburban news-sheet, the *West London Comet*, with a thick line of blue pencilling surrounding a report headed "Sad Suicide of a Journalist." The details he knew and those that he did not know were all there ; and there, too, was the evidence of a man Williams—by whom he rightly conjectured this latest torture was inflicted—who had told the jury that Errington's misfortunes had been due

to some unpleasantness connected with a review of a book by Mr. Hartmann West, and would evidently have told more had not the coroner decided that the matter was irrelevant. The *West London Comet* was not taken at the Shandy Club; but would not the report, with this horrible mention of his name, find its way into more highly favoured journals? With trembling hands, which even brandy had not served to steady, he turned over the papers of that morning, and the evening journals of the day before, and, as he failed to find the dreaded item, relief slowly came. But the older terror remained; the pictures were still with him; and though one had lost its streak of sanguine colour, they were still lurid enough. Gradually the very fact upon which, for an hour, he had congratulated himself—the fact that the world knew nothing, but that he and one unknown man shared the hateful knowledge between them—became in itself all but unbearable. Once, twice, half a dozen times, he felt that he must tell the story; but when he thought he had nerved himself for the attempt, the words refused to come.

Three months later, in the morning and evening papers, which had taken no notice of the affair at Shepherd's Bush, there were leaderettes lamenting, with grave eloquence, the loss sustained by English literature in the death of Mr. Hartmann West. A comment upon these utterances found a place in "At the Meridian," the column in *Noon* known to be written by its accomplished editor, Mr. Andrew Mackenzie:

"Were there no such emotion as disgust I should feel nothing but amusement in the perusal of the eulogies upon the late Mr. Hartmann West which have appeared in the *Hour* and the *Morning Gazette*. Less than six months ago the former journal, in reviewing Mr. West's *Phantasies of Philarete*, declared the book to be 'characterised by pretentiousness, strain, and affectation,' and the latter authority, with
its

its well-known subtlety of satire, remarked that, 'Mr. Hartmann West's extraordinary vogue among the shop-girls of Bermondsey, and the junior clerks of Peckham, will probably be maintained by a volume which is even richer than its predecessors in shoddy sentiment and machine-made epigram.' The *Hour* has now discovered that Mr. West's work presented 'a remarkable combination of imaginative veracity and distinction of utterance,' and the *Gazette* mourns him as 'a writer whose death breaks a splendid promise, but whose life has left a splendid performance.' The style of these belated eulogists is their own; but their substance seems to have been borrowed from this journal, which in reviewing the 'pretentious shoddy' and 'machine-made' work, spoke of it as 'one of those books which make life better worth living by revealing its possibilities of beauty, which touch us by their truth not less than by their tenderness, in which the lovely art is all but lost in the lovely nature which the art reveals, which make us free of the companionship of a spirit finely touched to fine issues.' I am not apt at sudden post-mortem eloquence, and I have nothing to add to these words, written while Hartmann West was still alive, and able to appreciate the sympathy he was so ready to give."

"Well, I never could have believed," said a young member of the Shandy Club, "that Mackenzie wrote that review of poor West's *Phantasies*."

The current issue of *Noon* had just come in, and, though it was before luncheon, Major Forth, who had contracted bad habits in Africa and elsewhere, was refreshing himself with whisky and potash. He looked at the speaker, slowly emptied his tumbler, and replied, "I don't believe it now."