

**LEONARD
MERRICK**



CYNTHIA

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Leonard Merrick

Cynthia

With an Introduction by Maurice Hewlett

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MAURICE HEWLETT

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INTRODUCTION

My first acquaintance with Mr. Merrick's engaging and stimulating muse was made in the pages of *Violet Moses*, an early work, which appeared, I remember, in three volumes. Reading it again in the light of my appreciation of what its author has done since, I think of it now as I felt of it then. It has great promise, and though its texture is slight its fibres are of steel. It shows the light hand, which has grown no heavier, though it has grown surer, the little effervescence of cynicism, with never a hiccough in it, the underlying, deeply-funded sympathy with real things, great things and fine things, and the seriousness of aim which, tantalisingly, stops short just where you want it to go on, and provokes the reader to get every book of Mr. Merrick's as it appears, just to see him let himself go—which he never does. He is one of the most discreet dissectors of the human heart we have.

In *Violet Moses* Mr. Merrick avoided the great issue after coming up against it more than once. So did he in The

Quaint Companions, a maturer but less ambitious study. I don't know why he avoided it in *Violet's* case, unless it was because he found it too big a matter for his light battery. In the *Companions'* case I do know. It was because he came upon another problem which interested him more, a problem with a sentimental attraction far more potent than any he could have got out of miscegenation. The result was the growth, out of a rather ugly root, of a charming and tender idyll of two poets, an idyll, nevertheless, with a psychological *crux* involved in its delicate tracery. All this seems a long way from *Cynthia*, which is my immediate business, but is not so in truth. In *Cynthia* (which, I believe, followed *Violet*) you have a problem of psychology laid out before you, and again Mr. Merrick does not, I think, fairly tackle it. But he fails to tackle it, not because it is too big for his guns, as *Violet's* was, and not because he finds another which he likes better, as he did when he was upon *The Companions*, but because, I am going to suggest, he found it too small. He took up his positions, opened his attack, and the enemy in his trenches dissolved in mist.

The problem with which *Cynthia* opens is the familiar one of the novelist, considered as such, and as lover, husband, father and citizen. Now it's an odd thing, but not so odd as it seems at first blush, that while you may conceive a poet in these relations and succeed in interesting your readers, you will fail with a novelist. I cannot now remember a single interesting novel about a novelist. There is *Pendennis* of course; but who believes that Pen was a great novelist, or cares what kind of a novelist he was? Who cares about *Walter Lorraine*? Would anybody give twopence to read it?

The reason is that in the poet the manifestations of literary genius are direct and explicit—some are susceptible of quotation, some may be cut out with the scissors—while in the novelist they are oblique and implied. Humphrey Kent in *Cynthia* is in no sense an explicit genius; we are not, in fact, told that he was a genius at all. His technique seems to have been that of Mr. George Moore, then rather fashionable. The book puts it no higher than this, that the hero, with an obvious bent for writing, marries in a hurry and then finds out that he cannot be an honest man and support his wife and child by the same stroke. It is not whether he can be a good novelist and a good lover too, but whether he can be a good novelist and pay his bills. That's not very exciting, though George Gissing in *New Grub Street* drew out of it a squalid and miserable tale which, once begun, had to be finished. Luckily, in *Cynthia*, Mr. Merrick finds a secondary theme, and handles it so delicately and so tenderly that the book has an abiding charm because of it. That theme is the growth of Cynthia's soul.

I myself am one of Cynthia's victims, and I am sure that Mr. Merrick is another. He sketches her with admirable reticence in the beginning, where she is shown to us as very little more than a pretty girl. His strokes are few and sure. But she grows from chapter to chapter, and at the end, after the tragic crisis, she sweeps onward to the sentimental crisis which crowns the tale of her married life with a dignity and grave beauty which justify a belief in Hestia, even now, when modern testimony and practice alike are against such a belief. She justifies Mr. Merrick's conclusion too. It is seldom enough that we are able to believe in the happy

solution of such troubles as he has traced out in *Cynthia*. Cynics against inclination, we feel that the dog will return to his vomit after the easy reconciliation and facile tears upon Hestia's generous bosom. Not so here. Cynthia has got her Humphrey for what he is worth, and will hold him. She is one of Mr. Merrick's loveliest women; and he has made many lovely women.

MAURICE HEWLETT.

CHAPTER I

Two friends were sitting together outside the Café des Tribunaux at Dieppe. One of them was falling in love; the other, an untidy and morose little man, was wasting advice. It was the hour of coffee and liqueurs, on an August evening.

"You are," said the adviser irritably, "at the very beginning of a career. You have been surprisingly fortunate; there's scarcely a novelist in England who wouldn't be satisfied with such reviews as yours, and it's your first book. Think: twelve months ago you were a clerk in the city, and managed to place about three short stories a year at a guinea each. Then your aunt what-was-her-name left you the thousand pounds, and you chucked your berth and sat down to a novel. 'Nothing happens but the unforeseen'—the result justified you. You sold your novel; you got a hundred quid for it; and *The Saturday*, and *The Spectator*, and every paper whose opinion is worth a rush, hails you as a coming light. For you to consider marrying now would be flying in the face of a special providence."

"Why?" said Humphrey Kent.

"'Why'! Are you serious? Because your income is an unknown quantity. Because you've had a literary success, not a popular one. Because, if you keep single, you've a comfortable life in front of you. Because you'd be a damned fool."

"The climax is comprehensive, if it isn't convincing. But the discussion is a trifle 'previous,' eh? I can't marry you, my pretty maid, et cetera."

"You are with her all day," said Turquand—"I conclude she likes you. And the mother countenances it."

"There's really nothing to countenance; and, remember, they haven't any idea of my position: they meet me at a fashionable hotel, they had read the book, and they saw *The Times* review. What do they know of literary earnings? the father is on the Stock Exchange, I believe. I am an impostor!"

"You should have gone to the little show I recommended on the quay, then. / find it good enough."

Kent laughed and stretched himself.

"I am rewarding industry," he said. "For once I wallow. I came into the money, and I put it in a bank, and by my pen, which is mightier than the sword, I've replaced all I drew to live during the year. Ain't I entitled to a brief month's splash? Besides, I've never said I want to marry—I don't know what you're hacking at."

"You haven't 'said' it, but the danger is about as plain as pica to the average intelligence, all the same. My son, how old are you—twenty-seven, isn't it? Pack your bag, ask for your bill, and go back with me by the morning boat; and, if

you're resolved to make an ass of yourself over a woman, go and live in gilded infamy and buy sealskin jackets and jewellery while your legacy lasts. I'll forgive you that."

"The prescription wouldn't be called orthodox?"

"You'd find it cheaper than matrimony in the long-run, I promise you. Now and again, when some man plays ducks and drakes with a fortune for a cocotte there are shrieks enough to wake his ancestors; but marriage ruins a precious sight more men every year than the demi-monde and the turf and the tables put together, and nobody shrieks at all—except the irrepressible children. Did it never occur to you that the price paid for the virtuous woman is the most exorbitant price known in an expensive world?"

"No," said Kent shortly, "it never did."

"And they call you 'an acute observer'! Marriage is Man's greatest extravagance."

"The apothegm excepted. It sounds like a dissipated copybook."

"It's a fact, upon my soul. I tell you, a sensible girl would shudder at the thought of entrusting her future to a man improvident enough to propose to her; a fellow capable of marrying a woman is the sport of a reckless and undisciplined nature that she should beware of."

"The end is curaçoa-and-brandy," said Kent, "and in your best vein. What else? You'll contradict yourself with brilliance in a moment if you go on."

The journalist dissembled a grin, and Kent, gazing down the sunny little street, inhaled his cigarette pleasurably. To suppose that Miss Walford would ever be his wife looked to him so chimerical that his companion's warnings did not

disturb him, yet he was sufficiently attracted by her to find it exciting that a third person could think it likely. He was the son of a man who had once been very wealthy, and who, having attempted to repair injudicious investments by rasher speculation, had died owning little more than enough to defray the cost of his funeral. At the age of nineteen Humphrey had realised that, with no stock-in-trade beyond an education and a bundle of rejected manuscripts, it was incumbent on him to fight the world unassisted, and, suppressing his literary ambitions as likely to tell against him, he had betaken himself to some connections who thrived in commerce and had been socially agreeable. To be annihilated by a sense of your own deficiencies, seek an appointment at the hands of relations. The boy registered the aphorism, and withdrew. When "life" means merely a struggle to sustain existence, it is not calculated to foster optimism, and the optimistic point of view is desirable for the production of popular English fiction. His prospect of achieving many editions would have been greater if his father had been satisfied with five per cent. He shifted as best he could, and garnered various experiences which he would have been sorry to think would be cited by his biographer, if he ever had one. "Poverty is no disgrace," but there are few disgraces that cause such keen humiliations. Eventually he found regular employment in the office of a stranger, and, making Turquand's acquaintance in the lodging-house at which he obtained a bedroom, contemplated him with respect and envy. Turquand was sub-editing *The Outpost*, a hybrid weekly for which he wrote a little of what he thought and much that he disapproved, in

consideration of a modest salary. The difference in their years was not too great to preclude confidences. An intimacy grew between the pair over their evening pipes in the arid enclosure to which the landlady's key gave them access; and it was transplanted to joint quarters embellished with their several possessions, chiefly portmanteaus and photographs, equally battered. The elder man, perceiving that there was distinction in the unsuccessful stories displayed to him, imparted a good deal of desultory advice, of which the most effectual part was not the assurance that the literary temperament was an affliction, and authorship a synonym for despair. The younger listened, sighed, and burned. Aching to be famous, and fettered to a clerk's stool, he tugged at his chains. He had begun to doubt his force to burst them, when he was apprised, to his unspeakable amazement, that a maternal aunt, whom he had not seen since he was a school-boy, had bequeathed him a thousand pounds.

Dieppe had dined, and the Grande Rue was astir. He watched the passers-by with interest. In the elation of his success he was equal to tackling another novel on the morrow, and he saw material in everything: in the chattering party of American girls running across the road to eat more ices at the pastrycook's; in the coquettish dealer in rosaries and Lives of the Saints, who had put up her shutters for the night and was bound for the Opera; in the little boy-soldiers from the barracks, swaggering everywhere in uniforms several sizes too big for them. Sentences from the reviews that he was still receiving bubbled through his consciousness deliciously, and he wished, swelling with

gratitude, that the men who wrote them were beside him, that he might be introduced, and grip their hands, and try to express the inexpressible in words.

"I should like to live here, Turk," he remarked: "the atmosphere is right. It's suggestive, stimulating. When I see a peasant leaning out of a window in France, I want to write verses about her; when I see the same thing at home, I only notice she's dirty."

"Ah!" said Turquand, "that's another reason why you had better go back with me to-morrow. The tendency to write verses leads to the casual ward. Let us go and watch the Insolent Opulence losing its francs."

The Casino was beginning to refill, and the path and lawn were gay with the flutter of toilettes when they reached the gates. Two of the figures approaching the rooms were familiar to the novelist, and he discovered their presence with a distinct shock, though his gaze had been scanning the crowd in search of them.

"There are the Walfords," he said.

The other grunted—he also had recognised a girl in mauve; and Kent watched her silently as long as she remained in view. He knew that he had nerves when he saw Miss Walford. The sight of her aroused a feeling of restlessness in him latterly which demanded her society for its relief; and he had not denied to himself that when a stranger, sitting behind him yesterday in the salon de lecture, had withdrawn a handkerchief redolent of the corylopsis which Miss Walford affected, it had provided him with a sensation profoundly absurd.

If he had nerves, however, there was no occasion to parade the fact, and he repressed impatience laudably. It was half an hour before the ladies were met. Objecting to be foolish, he felt, nevertheless, that Cynthia Walford was an excuse for folly as she turned to him on the terrace with her faint smile of greeting; felt, with unreasoning gratification, that Turquand must acknowledge it.

She was a fair, slight girl, with dreamy blue eyes bewitchingly lashed, and lips so delicately modelled that the faint smile always appeared a great tribute upon them. She was no less beautiful for her manifest knowledge that she was a beauty, and though she could not have been more than twenty-two, she had the air of carrying her loveliness as indifferently as her frocks—which tempted a literary man to destruction. She accepted admiration like an entremets at a table d'hôte—something included in the menu and arriving as a matter of course; but her acceptance was so graceful that it was delightful to bend to her and offer it.

Kent asked if they were going in to the concert, and Mrs. Walford said they were not. It was far too warm to sit indoors to listen to that kind of music! She found Dieppe insufferably hot, and ridiculously over-rated. Now, Trouville was really lively; didn't he think so?

He said he did not know Trouville.

"Don't you? Oh, it is ever so much better; very jolly—really most jolly. We were there last year, and enjoyed it immensely. We—we had such a time!" She giggled loudly. "How long are you gentlemen remaining?"

"Mr. Turquand is 'deserting' to-morrow," he said. "I? Oh, I shall have to leave in about a week, I'm afraid."

"You said that a week ago," murmured Miss Walford.

"I like the place," he confessed; "I find it very pleasant, myself."

Mrs. Walford threw up her hands with a scream of expostulation. Her face was elderly, despite her attentions to it, but in her manner she was often a great deal more youthful than her daughter; indeed, while the girl had already acquired something of the serenity of a woman, the woman was superficially reverting to the artlessness of a girl.

"What is there to like? Dieppe is the Casino, and the Casino is Dieppe!"

"But the Casino is very agreeable," he said, his glance wandering from her.

"And the charges are perfectly monstrous. Though, of course, you extravagant young men don't mind that!"

"A friend might call me young," said Turquand gloomily; "my worst enemy couldn't call me extravagant."

"Oh, I mind some of the charges," returned Kent. "I hate being 'done.'"

She was pleased to hear him say so. Her chief requirement of a young man was that he should be well provided for, but if he had the good feeling to exercise a nice economy till he became engaged, it was an additional recommendation. Her giggle was as violent as before, though.

"Oh, I daresay!" she exclaimed facetiously; "I'm always being taken in; I don't believe those stories any longer. Do you remember Willy Holmes, Cynthia, and the tales he used to tell me? I used to think that young man was so steady, I

was always quoting him! And it turned out he was a regular scapegrace and everybody knew it all the time, and had been laughing at me. I've given up believing in any one, Mr. Kent—in anyone, do you hear?" She shook the splendours of her hat at him, and gasped and gurgled archly. "I've no doubt you're every bit as bad as the rest!"

He answered with some inanity. Miss Walford asked him a question, and he took a seat beside her in replying. Turquand sat down too. Twilight was falling, and a refreshing breeze began to make itself felt. A fashionable sea purred on the sand below with elegant decorum. In the building the concert commenced, and snatches of orchestration reached them through the chatter of American and English and French from the occupants of the chairs behind. Presently Mrs. Walford wanted to go and play petits chevaux. The sub-editor, involuntarily attached to the party, accompanied her, and Kent and the girl followed. The crowd round the tables was fairly large, but Turquand prevailed on the dame to see that there was space for four persons in a group. She complimented him on his dexterity, but immediately afterwards became "fatigued," and begged him to take her to the "settee in the corner." The party was now divided into couples.

CHAPTER II

He had appreciated the manoeuvres sufficiently to feel no surprise when she found the room "stifling" ten minutes later and said that she must return to the terrace. She had shown such small desire for his companionship hitherto,

however, that he was momentarily uncertain which tête-à-tête was the one that she was anxious to prolong.

"Pouf!" she exclaimed, as they emerged into the air. "It was unbearable. Where are the others? Didn't they come out too?"

"They have no idea we've gone," said Turquand dryly.

She was greatly astonished; she had to turn before she could credit it.

"I thought they were behind us," she repeated several times. "I'm sure they saw us move. Oh, well, they'll find it out in a minute, I expect! Never mind!"

They strolled up and down.

"Sorry you're going, Mr. Turquand? Your friend will miss you very much."

"I don't think so," he answered. "He knew I was only running over for a few days."

"He tells me it is the first holiday he has taken for years," she said. "His profession seems to engross him. I suppose it is an engrossing one. But he oughtn't to exhaust his strength. I needn't ask you if you've read his novel. What do you think of it?"

"I think it extremely clever work," said Turquand.

"And it's been a great success, too, eh? 'One of the books of the year,' *The Times* called it."

"It has certainly given him a literary position."

"How splendid!" she said. "Yes, that's what I thought it: 'extremely clever,' brilliant—most brilliant! His parents must be very proud of him?"

"They're dead," said Turquand.

Mrs. Walford was surprised again. She had "somehow taken it for granted that they were living," and as she understood that he had no brothers or sisters, it must be very lonely for him?

"He sees a good deal of *me*" said her escort, "and I'm quite a festive sort of person when you know me."

Her giggle announced that she found this entertaining, but the approval did not loosen his tongue. She fanned herself strenuously, and decided that, besides being untidy, he was dense.

"Of course, in one way," she pursued, "his condition is an advantage to him. Literary people have to work so hard if they depend on their writing, don't they?"

"I do," he assented, "I'm sorry to say."

His constant obtrusion of himself into the matter annoyed her very much. She had neither inquired nor cared if he worked hard, and she felt disposed to say so. Turquand, who realised now why honours had been thrust upon him this evening, regretted that loyalty to Kent prevented his doing him what he felt would be the greatest service that could be rendered and removing the temptation of the mauve girl permanently from his path.

"With talent and private means our author is fortunate?"

"I often tell him so," he said.

"If it doesn't tempt him to rest on his oars," she added delightedly. "Wealth *has* its dangers. Young men *will* be young men!"

"'Wealth' is a big word," said he. "Kent certainly can't be called 'wealthy.'"

"But he doesn't depend on his pen?" she cried with painful carelessness.

"He has some private means, I believe; in fact, I know it."

"I am so glad—so glad for him. Now I have no misgivings about his future at all.... Have *you*?"

"I'm not sure that I follow you."

She played with her fan airily.

"He is certain to succeed, I mean; he needn't fear anything, as he has a competence. Oh, I know what these professions are," she went on, laughing. "My son is in the artistic world, we are quite behind the scenes. I know how hard-up some of the biggest professionals are when they have nothing but their profession to depend on. A profession is so precarious—shocking—even when one has aptitude for it."

"Kent has more than 'aptitude,'" he said. "He has power. Perhaps he'll always work too much for himself and the reviewers to attract the widest public. Perhaps he's a trifle inclined to over-do the analytical element in his stuff; but that's the worst that can be said. And, then, it's a question of taste. For myself, I'm a believer, in the introspective school, and I think his method's it."

"Schools" and "methods" were meaningless to the lady in such a connection. Novels were novels, and they were either "good" or they were "rubbish," if she understood anything about them—and she had read them all her life. She looked perplexed, and reiterated the phrase that she had already used.

"Oh, extremely clever, brilliant—most brilliant, really! I quite agree with you."

"Your son writes, did you say, Mrs. Walford?"

"Oh no, not writes—no! No, my son sings. He sings. He is studying for the operatic stage." Her tone couldn't have been more impressive if she had said he was de Reszke. "His voice is quite magnificent."

"Really!" he replied with interest. "That's a great gift—a voice."

"He is 'coming out' soon," she said. "He—er—could get an engagement at any moment, but—he is so conscientious. He feels he must do himself justice when he makes his debut. Justice. In professional circles he is thought an immense amount of—immense!"

"Has he sung at any concerts?"

"In private," she explained—"socially. He visits among musicians a great deal. And of course it makes it very lively for us. He is quite —er—in the swim!"

"You're to be congratulated on your family," said Turquand. "With such a son, and a daughter like Miss Walford——"

"Yes, she is very much admired," she admitted—"very much! But a strange girl, Mr. Turquand. You wouldn't believe how strange!"

He did not press her to put him to the test, but she supplied the particulars as if glad of the opportunity. He remarked that, in narrating matters of which she was proud, she adopted a breathless, staccato delivery, which provoked the suspicion that she was inventing the facts as she went on.

"She is *most* peculiar," she insisted. "The matches she has refused! Appalling!"

"No?" he said.

"A Viscount!" she gasped. "She refused a Viscount in Monte Carlo last year. A splendid fellow! Enormously wealthy. Perfectly wild about her. She wouldn't look at him."

"You astonish me," he murmured.

Mrs. Walford shook her head speechlessly, with closed eyes.

"And there were others," she said in a reviving spasm—"dazzling positions! Treated them like dirt. She said, if she didn't care for a man, nothing would induce her. What can one do with such a romantic goose? Be grateful that you aren't a mother, Mr. Turquand."

"Some day," he opined, without returning thanks, "the young lady will be induced."

"Oh, and before long, if it comes to that!" She nodded confidentially. "To tell you the truth, I expect somebody here next week. A young man rolling in riches, and with expectations that—oh, tremendous! He raves about her. She has refused him—er—seven times—seven times. He wanted to commit suicide after her last rejection. But she *respects* him immensely. A noble fellow he is—oh, a most noble fellow! And when he asks her again, I rather fancy that pity'll make her accept him, after all."

"She must have felt it a grave responsibility," observed the journalist politely, "that a young man said he wanted to commit suicide on her account."

"That's just it, she feels it a terrible responsibility. Oh, she's not fond of him! Sorry for him, you understand—sorry. And, between ourselves, I'm sure I really don't know what to think would be for the best—I don't indeed! But I wouldn't

mind wagering a pair of gloves, that, if she doesn't meet Mr. Right soon, she'll end by giving in and Mr. Somebody-else will have stolen the prize before he comes—hee, hee, hee!"

Turquand groaned in his soul. In his mental vision his friend already flopped helplessly in the web, and he derived small encouragement from the reflection that she was mistaken in the succulence of her fly.

"You're not smoking," she said. "Do! I don't mind it a bit."

He scowled at her darkly, and was prepared to see betrothal in the eyes of the absent pair when they rejoined them.

As yet, however, they were still wedged in the crowd around the tables. On their right, a fat Frenchwoman cried "Assez! assez!" imploringly as her horse, leading by a foot, threatened at last to glide past the winning-post and leave victory in the rear; to their left, an English girl, evidently on her honeymoon, was making radiant demands on the bridegroom's gold. Kent had lost sixteen francs, and Miss Walford had lost five before they perceived that the others had retired.

"We had better go and look for them," she declared.

The well-bred sea shimmered in the moonlight now, and the terrace was so thronged that investigation could be made only in a saunter.

"I wonder where they have got to," she murmured.

Her companion was too contented to be curious.

"We're sure to come upon them in a minute," he said.

"Do you abuse Dieppe, too, Miss Walford?"

"Not at all—no. It is mamma who is bored."

"I should like to show you Arques," he said. "I'm sure your mother would be interested by that. Do you think we might drive over one afternoon?"

"I don't know," she replied. "Is it nice?"

"Well, 'nice' isn't what you will call it when you are there. It's a ruined castle, you know; and you can almost 'hear' the hush of the place—it's so solemn, and still, and old. If you're very imaginative, you can hear men clanking about in armour. You *would* hear the men in armour, I think."

"Am I imaginative?" she smiled.

"Aren't you?" he asked.

"Perhaps I am; I don't know. What makes you think so?"

He was puzzled to adduce any reason excepting that she was so pretty. He did not pursue the subject.

"There are several things worth seeing here," he said. "Of course Dieppe 'is only the Casino,' if one never goes anywhere else. I suppose you haven't even heard of the cave-dwellers?"

"The 'cave-dwellers'?" she repeated.

"Their homes are the caves in the cliffs. Have you never noticed there are holes? They are caves when you get inside—vast ones—one room leading out of another. The people are beggars, very dirty, and occasionally picturesque. They exist by what they can cadge, and, of course, they pay no rent; it's only when they come out that they see daylight."

"How horrid!" she shivered. "And you went to look at them?"

"Rather! They are very pleased to 'receive.' One of the inhabitants has lived there for twenty years. I don't think he has been outside it for ten—he sends his family. Many of the

colony were born there. Don't you think they were worth a visit?"

"I don't know," she said; "one might be robbed and murdered in such a place."

"Oh, rather!" he agreed. "Some of the inner rooms are so black that you literally can't see your hand before you. It would be a beautiful place for a murder! The next-of-kin lures the juvenile heiress there, and bribes the beggars to make away with her. Unknown to him, they spare her life because—because—Why do they spare her life? But they keep her prisoner and bring her up as one of themselves. Twenty years later—I believe I could write a sensational novel, after all!"

"What nonsense!" laughed Miss Walford daintily.

"Do you like that kind of story?"

"I like plots about real life best," she said. "Don't you?"

He found this an exposition of the keenest literary sympathies, and regarded her adoringly. She preferred analysis to adventure, and realism to romance! What work he might accomplish inspired by the companionship of such a girl!

"Wherever have you been, Cynthia? We thought you were lost," he heard Mrs. Walford say discordantly, and the next moment they were all together.

"It's where have *you* been, mamma, isn't it?"

"Well, I like that! We didn't stop a minute; I made certain you saw us get up. We've been hunting for you everywhere. Mr. Turquand and I have been out here ever so long, haven't we, Mr. Turquand? Looking at the moon, too, if you want to know, and—hee, hee, hee!—talking sentiment."

Turquand, who was staring at Kent, allowed an eyelid to droop for an instant at the conclusion, and the latter stroked his moustache and smiled.

"Such a time we've been having, all by ourselves" she persisted uproariously. "Mr. Kent, are you shocked? Oh, I've shocked Mr. Kent! He'll always remember it—I can see it in his face."

"I shall always remember *you*, Mrs. Walford," he said, trying to make the fatuity sound graceful.

"We were left by ourselves, and we had to get on as we could!" she cried. "Hadn't we, Mr. Turquand? I say we had to amuse ourselves as we could. Now Cynthia's glowering at me! Oh—hee, hee, hee!—you two young people are too respectable for *us*. We don't ask any questions, but—but I daresay Mr. Turquand and I aren't the only *ones*—hee, hee, hee!—who have been 'looking at the moon.'"

"Shall we find chairs again?" said Kent quickly, noting the frown that darkened the girl's brow. "It's rather an awkward spot to stand still, isn't it?"

She agreed that it was, and a waiter brought them ices, and Mrs. Walford was giddy over a liqueur. They remained at the table until she said that it was time to return to their hotel. Parting from them at its gates, the two men turned away together. Both felt in their pockets, filled their pipes, and, smoking silently, drifted through the rugged little streets to the café where they had had their conversation after dinner.

"Thank you for a very pleasant evening," said Turquand, breaking a long pause.

It was the only criticism that he permitted himself, and Kent did not care to inquire if it was to be regarded as ironical.

CHAPTER III

After his friend's departure, the mother and daughter became the pivot round which the author's movements revolved. Primarily his own companionship and the novelty of Dieppe had been enough; but now he found it dreary to roam about the harbour, or to sit sipping mazagrans, alone. Reviewing the weeks before Turquand joined him, he wondered what he had done with himself in various hours of the day. Solitude hung so unfamiliarly on his hands that Miss Walford's society was indispensable.

Soon after the chocolate and rolls, he went with the ladies to the Casino, and spent the morning beside them under the awning. Mrs. Walford did not bathe: while people could have comfortable baths in the vicinity of their toilet-tables, she considered that recourse to tents and the sea was making an unnecessary confidence—and she disliked to see Cynthia swim, "with a lot of Frenchmen in the water." Whether it was their sex, or only their nationality, that was the objection was not clear. She usually destroyed a copy of a novel while Mr. Kent and her daughter talked. Considering the speed with which she read it, indeed, it was constantly astonishing to him that she could contrive to do a book so much damage. In the evening they strolled out again, and but for the afternoon he would have had small cause for complaint. Even this gained a spice of excitement, however,