

Hilda Wade.

BY GRANT ALLEN.

III.—THE EPISODE OF THE WIFE WHO DID HER DUTY.

TO make you understand my next yarn, I must go back to the date of my introduction to Hilda.

"It is witchcraft!" I said the first time I saw her, at Le Geyt's luncheon-party.

She smiled a smile which was bewitching, indeed, but by no means witchlike. A frank open smile, with just a touch of natural feminine triumph in it. "No, not witchcraft," she answered, helping herself with her dainty fingers to a burnt almond from the Venetian glass dish. "Not witchcraft. Memory: aided perhaps by some native quickness of perception. Though I say it myself, I never met anyone, I think, whose memory goes quite as far as mine does."

"You don't mean quite as far *back*," I cried, jesting: for she looked about twenty-four, and had cheeks like a ripe nectarine, just as pink and just as softly downy.

She smiled again, showing a row of semi-transparent teeth, with a gleam in the depths of them. She was certainly most attractive. She had that indefinable, incommunicable, unanalyzable personal quality which we know as *charm*.

"No, not as far *back*," she repeated. "Though, indeed, I often seem to remember things that happened before I was born (like Queen Elizabeth's visit to Kenilworth): I recollect so vividly all that I have heard or read about them. But as far *in extent*, I mean. I never let anything drop out of my memory. As this case shows you, I can recall even quite unimportant and casual bits of knowledge, when any chance clue happens to bring them back to me."

She had certainly astonished me. The occasion for my astonishment was the fact that when I handed her my card, "Dr. Hubert Ford Cumberledge, St. Nathaniel's Hospital," she had glanced at it for a second and exclaimed, without sensible pause or break, "Oh, then, of course, you're half Welsh, as I am."

The instantaneousness and apparent inconsecutiveness of her inference took me aback. "Well, m'yes: I *am* half Welsh," I replied. "My mother came from Carnarvonshire. But why *then* and *of course*? I fail to perceive your train of reasoning."

She laughed a sunny little laugh, like one well accustomed to receive such inquiries. "Fancy asking a *woman* to give you 'the train of reasoning' for her intuitions!" she cried, merrily. "That shows, Dr. Cumberledge, that you are a mere man—a man of science, perhaps, but *not* a psychologist. It also suggests that you are a confirmed bachelor. A married man accepts intuitions, without expecting them to be based on reasoning. . . . Well, just this once, I will stretch a point to enlighten you. If I recollect right, your mother died about three years ago?"



"OH, THEN, OF COURSE, YOU'RE HALF WELSH, AS I AM."

"You are quite correct. Then you knew my mother?"

"Oh, dear me, no. I never even met her. Why *then?*" Her look was mischievous. "But, unless I mistake, I think she came from Hendre Coed, near Bangor."

"Wales is a village!" I exclaimed, catching my breath. "Every Welsh person seems to know all about every other."

My new acquaintance smiled again. When she smiled she was irresistible: a laughing face protruding from a cloud of diaphanous drapery. "Now, shall I tell you how I came to know that?" she asked, poisoning a *glacé* cherry on her dessert fork in front of her. "Shall I explain my trick, like the conjurers?"

"Conjurers never explain anything," I answered. "They say, 'So, you see, *that's* how it's done!'—with a swift whisk of the hand—and leave you as much in the dark as ever. Don't explain like the conjurers, but tell me how you guessed it."

She shut her eyes and seemed to turn her glance inward. "About three years ago," she began slowly, like one who reconstructs with an effort a half-forgotten scene, "I saw a notice in the *Times*—Births, Deaths, and Marriages—'On the 27th of October'—was it the 27th?" The keen brown eyes opened again for a second and flashed inquiry into mine.

"Quite right," I answered, nodding.

"I thought so. 'On the 27th of October, at Brynmor, Bournemouth, Emily Olwen Josephine, widow of the late Thomas Cumberledge, sometime colonel of the 7th Bengal Regiment of Foot, and daughter of Iolo Gwyn Ford, Esq., J.P., of Hendre Coed, near Bangor.' Am I correct?" She lifted her dark eyelashes once more and flooded me.

"You are quite correct," I answered, surprised. "And that is really all that you knew of my mother?"

"Absolutely all. The moment I saw your card, I thought to myself, in a breath, 'Ford, Cumberledge: what do I know of those two names? I have some link between them. Ah, yes: found! Mrs. Cumberledge, wife of Colonel Thomas Cumberledge, of the 7th Bengals, was a Miss Ford, daughter of a Mr. Ford, of Bangor.' That came to me like a lightning-gleam. Then I said to myself again, 'Dr. Hubert Ford Cumberledge must be their son.' So there you see you have 'the train of reasoning.' Women *can* reason—sometimes. I had to think twice, though, before I could recall the exact words of the *Times* notice."

"And can you do the same with everyone?"

"Everyone! Oh, come, now: that is expecting too much! I have not read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested everyone's family announcements. I don't pretend to be the Peerage, the Clergy List, and the London Directory rolled into one. I remembered *your* family all the more vividly, no doubt, because of the pretty and unusual old Welsh names, 'Olwen' and 'Iolo Gwyn Ford,' which fixed themselves on my memory by their mere beauty. Everything about Wales always attracts me: my Welsh side is uppermost. But I have hundreds—oh, thousands of such facts stored and pigeon-holed in my memory: if anybody else cares to try me," she glanced round the table, "perhaps we may be able to test my power that way."

Two or three of the company accepted her challenge, giving the full names of their sisters or brothers; and, in three cases out of five, my witch was able to supply either the notice of their marriage or some other like published circumstance. In the instance of Charlie Vere, it is true, she went wrong, just at first, though only in a single small particular: it was not Charlie himself who was gazetted to a sub-lieutenancy in the Warwickshire Regiment, but his brother Walter. However, the moment she was told of this slip, she corrected herself at once, and added, like lightning, "Ah, yes: how stupid of me! I have mixed up the names. Charles Cassilis Vere got an appointment on the same day in the Rhodesian Mounted Police, didn't he?" Which was in point of fact quite accurate.

But I am forgetting that all this time I have not even now introduced my witch to you.

Hilda Wade, when I first saw her, was one of the prettiest, cheeriest, and most graceful girls I have ever met—a dusky blonde, brown-eyed, brown-haired, with a creamy, waxen whiteness of skin that was yet warm and peach-downy. And I wish to insist from the outset upon the plain fact that there was nothing uncanny about her. In spite of her singular faculty of insight, which sometimes seemed to illogical people almost weird or eerie, she was in the main a bright, well-educated, sensible, winsome, lawn-tennis-playing English girl. Her vivacious spirits rose superior to her surroundings, which were often sad enough. But she was above all things wholesome, unaffected, and sparkling—a gleam of sunshine. She laid no claim to supernatural powers: she

held no dealings with familiar spirits: she was simply a girl of strong personal charm, endowed with an astounding memory and a rare measure of feminine intuition. Her memory, she told me, she shared with her father and all her father's family: they were famous for their prodigious faculty in that respect. Her impulsive temperament and quick instincts on the other hand descended to her, she thought, from her mother and her Welsh ancestry.

Externally, she seemed thus at first sight little more than the ordinary pretty, light-hearted English girl, with a taste for field sports (especially riding), and a native love of the country. But at times, one caught in the brightened colour of her lustrous brown eyes certain curious undercurrents of depth, of reserve, and of a questioning wistfulness which made you suspect the presence of profounder elements in her nature. From the earliest moment of our acquaintance, indeed, I can say with truth that Hilda Wade interested me immensely. I felt drawn. Her face had that strange quality of compelling attention for which we have as yet no English name, but which everybody recognises. You could not ignore her. She stood out. She was the sort of girl one was constrained to notice.

It was Le Geyt's first luncheon-party since his second marriage. Big-bearded, genial, he beamed round on us jubilant. He was proud of his wife, and proud of his recent Q.C.-ship. The new Mrs. Le Geyt sat at the head of the table, handsome, capable, self-possessed, a vivid, vigorous woman and a model hostess. Though still quite young, she was large and commanding. Everybody was impressed by her. "Such a good mother to those poor motherless children!" all the ladies declared, in a chorus of applause. And, indeed, she had the face of a splendid manager.

I said as much in an undertone over the ices to Miss Wade, who sat beside me—though I ought not to have discussed them at their own table. "Hugo Le Geyt seems to have made an excellent choice," I murmured. "Maisie and Ettie will be lucky indeed to be taken care of by such a competent step-mother. Don't you think so?"

My witch glanced up at her hostess with a piercing dart of the keen brown eyes, held her wine-glass half raised, and then electrified me by uttering, in the same low voice, audible to me alone, but quite clearly and unhesitatingly, these astounding words:—

"I think, before twelve months are out, *Mr. Le Geyt will have murdered her.*"

For a minute I could not answer, so startling was the effect of this confident prediction. One does not expect to be told such things at lunch, over the port and peaches, about one's dearest friends, beside their own mahogany. And the assured air of unflinching conviction with which Hilda Wade said it to a complete stranger took my breath away. *Why* did she think so at all? And *if* she thought so, why choose *me* as the recipient of her singular confidences?

I gasped and wondered.

"What makes you fancy anything so unlikely?" I asked aside at last, behind the Babel of voices. "You quite alarm me."

She rolled a mouthful of apricot ice reflectively on her tongue, and then murmured, in a similar aside, "Don't ask me now. Some other time will do. But, I mean what I say. Believe me, I do not speak at random."

She was quite right, of course. To continue would have been equally rude and foolish. I had perforce to bottle up my curiosity for the moment, and wait till my Sibyl was in the mood for interpreting.

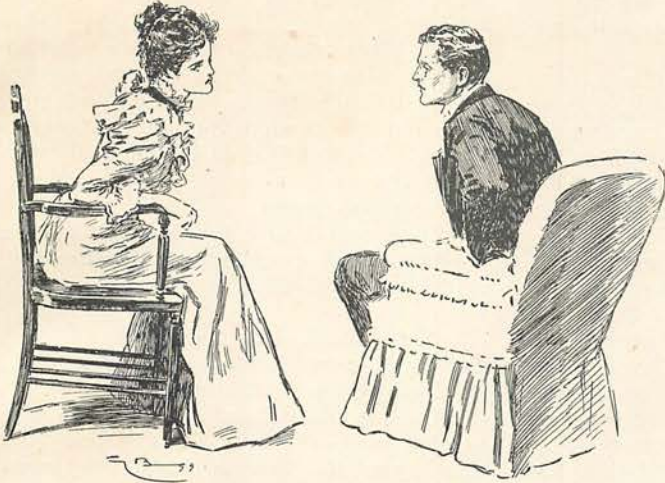
After lunch we adjourned to the drawing-room. Almost at once, Hilda Wade flitted up with her brisk step to the corner where I was sitting. "Oh, Dr. Cumberledge," she began, as if nothing odd had occurred before, "I *was* so glad to meet you and have a chance of talking to you, because I *do* so want to get a nurse's place at St. Nathaniel's."

"A nurse's place!" I exclaimed, a little surprised, surveying her dress of palest and softest Indian muslin, for she looked to me far too much of a butterfly for such serious work. "Do you really mean it, or are you one of the ten thousand modern young ladies who are in quest of a Mission, without understanding that Missions are unpleasant? Nursing, I can tell you, is not all crimped cap and becoming uniform."

"I know that," she answered, growing grave. "I ought to know it. I am a nurse already at St. George's Hospital."

"You a nurse! And at St. George's! Yet you want to change to Nathaniel's? Why? St. George's is in a much nicer part of London, and the patients there come on an average from a much better class than ours in Smithfield."

"I know that too: but . . . Sebastian is at St. Nathaniel's—and I want to be near Sebastian."



"I AM A NURSE ALREADY."

"Professor Sebastian!" I cried, my face lighting up with a gleam of enthusiasm at our great teacher's name. "Ah, if it is to be under Sebastian that you desire, I can see you mean business. I know now you are in earnest."

"In earnest?" she echoed, that strange deeper shade coming over her face as she spoke, while her tone altered. "Yes, I think I am in earnest! It is my object in life to be near Sebastian—to watch him and observe him. I mean to succeed. . . . But, I have given you my confidence, perhaps too hastily, and I must implore you not to mention my wish to him."

"You may trust me implicitly," I answered.

"Oh, yes, I saw that," she put in, with a quick gesture. "Of course, I saw by your face you were a man of honour—a man one could trust—or I would not have spoken to you. But—you promise me?"

"I promise you," I replied, naturally flattered. She was delicately pretty, and her quaint, oracular air, so incongruous with the dainty face and the fluffy brown hair, piqued me not a little. That special mysterious commodity of *charm* seemed to pervade all she did and said. So I added, "And I will mention to Sebastian that you wish for a nurse's place at Nathaniel's. As you have had experience, and can be recommended, I suppose, by Le Geyt's sister," with whom she had come, "no doubt you can secure an early vacancy."

"Thanks so much," she answered, with that delicious smile: it had an infantile simplicity about it which contrasted most piquantly with her prophetic manner.

"Only," I went on, assuming a confidential tone, "you really *must* tell me why you said that just now about Hugo Le Geyt. Recollect, your Delphian utterances have gravely astonished and disquieted me. Hugo is one of my oldest and dearest friends; and I want to know why you have formed this sudden bad opinion of him."

"Not of *him*, but of *her*," she answered, to my surprise, taking a small Norwegian dagger from the what-not and playing with it to distract attention.

"Come, come, now," I cried, drawing back. "You are trying to mystify me.

This is deliberate seer-mongery. You are presuming on your powers. But I am not the sort of man to be caught by horoscopes. I decline to believe it."

She turned on me with a meaning glance. Those truthful eyes fixed me. "I am going from here straight to my hospital," she murmured, with a quiet air of knowledge—talking, I mean to say, like one who really knows. "This room is not the place to discuss this matter, is it? If you will walk back to St. George's with me, I think I can make you see and feel that I am speaking, not at haphazard, but from observation and experience."

Her confidence roused my most vivid curiosity. When she left, I left with her. The Le Geys lived in one of those new streets of large houses on Campden Hill, so that our way eastward lay naturally through Kensington Gardens. It was a sunny June day, when light pierced even through the smoke of London, and the shrubberies breathed the breath of white lilacs. "Now, what did you mean by that enigmatical saying?" I asked my new Cassandra, as we strolled down the scent-laden path. "Woman's intuition is all very well in its way: but a mere man may be excused if he asks for evidence."

She stopped short as I spoke and gazed full into my eyes. Her hand fingered her parasol handle. "I meant what I said," she answered, with emphasis. "Within one year, Mr. Le Geyt will have murdered his wife. You may take my word for it."

"Le Geyt!" I cried. "Never! I know the man so well! A big, good-natured,

kindly schoolboy! He is the gentlest and best of mortals. Le Geyt a murderer! Im—possible!”

Her eyes were far away. “Has it never occurred to you,” she asked, slowly, with her pythoness air, “that there are murders and murders?—murders which depend in the main upon the murderer . . . and also murders which depend in the main upon the victim?”

“The victim? How do you mean?”

“Well, there are brutal men who commit murder out of sheer brutality—the ruffians of the slums; and there are sordid men who commit murder for sordid money—the insurers who want to forestall their policies, the poisoners who want to inherit property: but have you ever realized that there are also murderers who become so by accident, through their victims’ idiosyncrasy? I thought all the time while I was watching Mrs. Le Geyt, ‘That woman is of the sort predestined to be murdered.’ . . . And when you asked me, I told you so. I may have been imprudent: still, I saw it, and I said it.”

“But this is second sight!” I cried, drawing away. “Do you pretend to prevision?”

“No, not second sight: nothing uncanny, nothing supernatural. But prevision, yes: prevision based, not on omens or auguries, but on solid fact—on what I have seen and noticed.”

“Explain yourself, oh prophetess!”

She let the point of her parasol make a curved trail on the gravel, and followed its serpentine wavings with her eyes. “You know our house-surgeon?” she asked at last, looking up of a sudden.

“What, Travers? Oh, intimately.”

“Then come to my ward and see. After you have seen you will perhaps believe me.”

Nothing that I could say would get any further explanation out of her just then. “You would laugh at me if I told you,” she persisted: “you won’t laugh when you have seen it.”

We walked on in silence as far as Hyde Park Corner. There my Sphinx tripped lightly up the steps of St. George’s Hospital. “Get Mr. Travers’s leave,” she said, with a nod and a bright smile, “to visit Nurse Wade’s ward. Then come up to me there in five minutes.”

I explained to my friend the house-surgeon that I wished to see certain cases in the accident ward of which I had heard; he smiled a restrained smile—“Nurse Wade, no doubt!” but, of course, gave me per-

mission to go up and look at them. “Stop a minute,” he added, “and I’ll come with you.” When we got there, my witch had already changed her dress, and was waiting for us demurely in the neat dove-coloured gown and smooth white apron of the hospital nurses. She looked even prettier and more meaningful so than in her ethereal outside summer-cloud muslin.

“Come over to this bed,” she said at once to Travers and myself, without the least air of mystery. “I will show you what I mean by it.”

“Nurse Wade has remarkable insight,” Travers whispered to me as we went.

“I can believe it,” I answered.

“Look at this woman,” she went on, aside, in a low voice—“no, *not* the first bed: the one beyond it: number 60. I don’t want the patient to know you are watching her. Do you observe anything odd about her appearance?”

“She is somewhat the same type,” I began, “as Mrs.——”

Before I could get out the words “Le Geyt,” her warning eye and puckering forehead had stopped me. “As the lady we were discussing,” she interposed, with a quiet wave of one hand. “Yes, in some points very much so. You notice in particular her scanty hair—so thin and poor—though she is young and good-looking?”

“It is certainly rather a feeble crop for a woman of her age,” I admitted. “And pale at that, and washy.”

“Precisely. It’s done up behind about as big as a nutmeg . . . Now, observe the contour of her back as she sits up there: it is curiously curved, isn’t it?”

“Very,” I replied. “Not exactly a stoop, nor yet quite a hunch, but certainly an odd spinal configuration.”

“Like our friend’s, once more?”

“Like our friend’s, exactly!”

Hilda Wade looked away, lest she should attract the patient’s attention. “Well, that woman was brought in here, half-dead, assaulted by her husband,” she went on, with a note of unobtrusive demonstration.

“We get a great many such cases,” Travers put in, with true medical unconcern, “very interesting cases: and Nurse Wade has pointed out to me the singular fact that in almost all instances the patients resemble one another physically.”

“Incredible!” I cried. “I can understand that there might well be a type of men who assault their wives, but not, surely, a type of women who get assaulted.”

"That is because you know less about it than Nurse Wade," Travers answered, with an annoying smile of superior knowledge.

Our instructress moved on to another bed, laying one gentle hand as she passed on a patient's forehead. The patient glanced gratitude. "That one again," she said once more, half-indicating a cot at a little distance: "Number 74. She has much the same thin hair—sparse, weak, and colourless. She has much the same curved back, and much the same aggressive, self-assertive features. Looks capable, doesn't she? A born housewife! . . . Well, she too was knocked down and kicked half-dead the other night by her husband."

"It is certainly odd," I answered, "how very much they both recall——"

"Our friend at lunch! Yes, extraordinary. See here": she pulled out a pencil and drew the quick outline of a face in her note-book.



"SHE DREW THE QUICK OUTLINE OF A FACE IN HER NOTE-BOOK."

"That is what is central and essential to the type. They have *this* sort of profile. Women with faces like that *always* get assaulted."

Travers glanced over her shoulder. "Quite true," he assented, with his *bourgeois* nod. "Nurse Wade in her time has shown me dozens of them. Round dozens: bakers' dozens! They all belong to that species. In fact, when a woman of this type is brought in to us wounded now, I ask at once, 'Husband?' and the invariable answer comes pat: 'Well, yes, sir; we had some

words together.' The effect of words, my dear fellow, is something truly surprising."

"They can pierce like a dagger," I mused.

"And leave an open wound behind that requires dressing," Travers added, unsuspecting. Practical man, Travers!

"But *why* do they get assaulted—the women of this type?" I asked, still bewildered.

"Number 87 has her mother just come to see her," my sorceress interposed. "*She's* an assault case; brought in last night: badly kicked and bruised about the head and shoulders. Speak to the mother. *She'll* explain it all to you."

Travers and I moved over to the cot her hand scarcely indicated. "Well, your daughter looks pretty comfortable this afternoon, in spite of the little fuss," Travers began, tentatively.

"Yus, she's a bit tidy, thanky," the mother answered, smoothing her soiled black gown, grown green with long service. "She'll git on naow, please Gord. But Joe most did for 'er."

"How did it all happen?" Travers asked, in a jaunty tone, to draw her out.

"Well, it was like this, sir, yer see. My daughter, she's a lidy as keeps 'erself to 'erself, as the sayin' is, an' 'olds 'er 'ead up. She keeps up a proper pride, an' minds 'er 'ouse an' 'er little 'uns. She ain't no gadabaht. But she 'ave a tongue, she 'ave": the mother lowered her voice cautiously lest the "lidy" should hear. "I don't deny it that she 'ave a tongue, at times, through myself 'avin' suffered from it. And when she *do* go on, Lord bless you, why, there ain't no stoppin' of 'er."

"Oh, she has a tongue, has she?" Travers replied, surveying the "case" critically. "Well, you know, she looks like it."

"So she do, sir; so she do. An' Joe, 'e's a man as wouldn't 'urt a biby—not when 'e's sober, Joe wouldn't. But 'e'd bin aht, that's where it is; an' 'e cum 'ome lite, a bit fresh, through 'avin' bin at the friendly lead: an' my daughter, yer see, she up an' give it to 'im. My word, she *did* give it to 'im! An' Joe, 'e's a peaceable man when 'e ain't a bit fresh: 'e's more like a friend to 'er than an 'usband, Joe is; but 'e lost 'is temper that time, as yer may say, by reason o' 'ein' fresh, an' 'e knocked 'er abaht a



"SHE DID GIVE IT TO 'IM."

little, an' knocked 'er teeth aht. So we brought 'er to the ospital."

The injured woman raised herself up in bed with a vindictive scowl, displaying as she did so the same whale-like curved back as in the other "cases." "But we've sent 'im to the lock-up," she continued: the scowl giving way fast to a radiant joy of victory as she contemplated her triumph: "an' wof's more, I 'ad the last word of 'im. An' 'e'll git six month for this, the neighbours says; an' when he comes aht again, my Gord, won't 'e ketch it!"

"You look capable of punishing him for it," I answered, and as I spoke, I shuddered: for I saw her expression was precisely the expression Mrs. Le Geyt's face had worn for a passing second when her husband accidentally trod on her dress as we left the dining-room.

My witch moved away. We followed. "Well, what do you say to it now?" she asked, gliding among the beds with noiseless feet and ministering fingers.

"Say to it?" I answered. "That it is wonderful, wonderful. You have quite convinced me."

"You would think so," Travers put in, "if you had been in this ward as often as I have, and observed their faces. It's a dead certainty. Sooner or later, that type of woman is cock-sure to be assaulted."

"In a certain rank of life, perhaps," I answered, still loth to believe it; "but not

surely in ours. Gentlemen do not knock down their wives and kick their teeth out."

My Sibyl smiled. "No: there, class tells," she admitted. "They take longer about it, and suffer more provocation. They curb their tempers. But in the end, one day, they are goaded beyond endurance; and then—a convenient knife—a rusty old sword—a pair of scissors—anything that comes handy, like that dagger this morning. One wild blow—half unpre-

meditated—and . . . the thing is done! Twelve good men and true will find it wilful murder."

I felt really perturbed. "But can we do nothing," I cried, "to warn poor Hugo?"

"Nothing, I fear," she answered. "After all, character must work itself out in its interactions with character. He has married that woman, and he must take the consequences. Does not each of us in life suffer perforce the Nemesis of his own temperament?"

"Then is there not also a type of men who assault their wives?"

"That is the odd part of it—no. All kinds, good and bad, quick and slow, can be driven to it at last. The quick-tempered stab or kick: the slow devise some deliberate means of ridding themselves of their burden."

"But surely we might caution Le Geyt of his danger!"

"It is useless. He would not believe us. We cannot be at his elbow to hold back his hand when the bad moment comes. Nobody will be there, as a matter of fact: for women of this temperament—born niggers, in short, since that's what it comes to—when they are also ladies, graceful and gracious as she is, never nag at all before outsiders. To the world, they are bland: everybody says, 'What charming talkers!' They are 'angels abroad, devils at home,' as the proverb puts it. Some night she will provoke him when they are alone, till she has reached his utmost limit of endurance—and then," she drew one

hand across her dovelike throat, "it will be all finished."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. We human beings go straight like sheep to our natural destiny."

"But—that is fatalism."

"No, not fatalism: insight into temperament. Fatalists believe that your life is arranged for you beforehand from without: willy nilly, you *must* act so. I only believe that in this jostling world your life is mostly determined by your own character, in its interaction with the characters of those who surround you. Temperament works itself out. It is your own acts and deeds that make up Fate for you."

For some months after this first meeting, neither Hilda Wade nor I saw anything more of the Le Geys. They left town for Scotland at the end of the season: and when all the grouse had been duly slaughtered, and all the salmon duly hooked, they went on to Leicestershire for the opening of fox-hunting: so it was not till after Christmas that they returned to Campden Hill. Meanwhile, I had spoken to Dr. Sebastian about Miss Wade, and on my recommendation he had found her a vacancy at our hospital. "A most intelligent girl, Cumberledge," he remarked to me with a rare burst of approval—for the Professor was always critical—after she had been at work for some weeks at St. Nathaniel's. "I am glad you introduced her here. A nurse with brains is such a valuable accessory—unless of course she takes to *thinking*. But Nurse Wade never *thinks*: she is a useful instrument—does what she's told, and carries out one's orders implicitly."

"She knows enough to know when she doesn't know," I answered. "Which is really the rarest kind of knowledge."

"Unrecorded among young doctors!" the Professor retorted, with his sardonic smile. "They think they understand the human body from top to toe, when in reality—well, they might do the measles!"

Early in January, I was invited again to lunch with the Le Geys. Hilda Wade was invited too. The moment we entered the house, we were both of us aware that some grim change had come over it. Le Geyt met us in the hall, in his old genial style, it is true, but still with a certain reserve, a curious veiled timidity which we had not known in him. Big and good-humoured as he was, with kindly eyes beneath the shaggy eyebrows, he seemed strangely subdued now:

the boyish buoyancy had gone out of him. He spoke rather lower than was his natural key, and welcomed us warmly though less effusively than of old. An irreproachable housemaid in a spotless cap ushered us into the transfigured drawing-room. Mrs. Le Geyt, in a pretty cloth dress, neatly tailor-made, rose to meet us, beaming the vapid smile of the perfect hostess—that impartial smile which falls, like the rain from Heaven, on good and bad indifferently. "So charmed to see you again, Dr. Cumberledge!" she bubbled out, with a cheerful air—she was, always cheerful, mechanically cheerful, from a sense of duty. "It *is* such a pleasure to meet dear Hugo's old friends. And Miss Wade, too; how delightful! You look so well, Miss Wade! Oh, you're both at St. Nathaniel's now, aren't you? So you can come together. What a privilege for you, Dr. Cumberledge, to have such a clever assistant—or, rather, fellow-worker. It must be a great life, yours, Miss Wade: such a sphere of usefulness! If we can only feel we are *doing good*—that is the main matter. For my own part, I like to be mixed up with every good work that's going on in my neighbourhood: I'm the soup-kitchen, you know, and I'm visitor at the workhouse; and I'm the Dorcas Society, and the Mutual Improvement Class, and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and to Children, and I'm sure I don't know how much else: so that, what with all that, and what with dear Hugo and the darling children"—she glanced affectionately at Maisie and Ettie, who sat bolt upright, very mute and still, in their best and stiffest frocks, on two stools in the corner—"I can hardly find time for my social duties."

"Oh, dear Mrs. Le Geyt," one of her visitors said with effusion, from beneath a nodding bonnet—she was the wife of a rural dean from Staffordshire; "*everybody* is agreed that *your* social duties are performed to a marvel. They are the envy of Kensington. We all of us wonder, indeed, how one woman can find time for all of it!"

Our hostess looked pleased. "Well, yes," she answered, gazing down at her fawn-coloured dress with a half-suppressed smile of self-satisfaction, "I flatter myself I *can* get through about as much work in a day as anybody!" Her eye wandered round her rooms with a modest air of placid self-approval which was almost comic. Everything in them was as well kept and as well polished as good servants thoroughly drilled could make it. Not a stain or a speck any-

where. A miracle of neatness. Indeed, when I carelessly drew the Norwegian dagger from its scabbard, as we waited for lunch, and found that it stuck in the sheath, I almost started to discover that rust could intrude into that orderly household.



"THE NORWEGIAN DAGGER."

I recollected then how Hilda Wade had pointed out to me during those six months at St. Nathaniel's that the women whose husbands assaulted them were almost always "notable housewives," as they say in America—good souls who prided themselves not a little on their skill in management. They were capable, practical mothers of families, with a boundless belief in themselves, a sincere desire to do their duty, as far as they understood it, and a habit of impressing their virtues upon others which was quite beyond all human endurance. Placidity was their note: provoking placidity. I felt sure it must have been of a woman of this type that the famous phrase was first coined—"Elle a toutes les vertus—et elle est insupportable."

"Clara, dear," her husband said, "shall we go in to lunch?"

"You dear, stupid boy! Are we not all waiting for *you* to give your arm to Lady Maitland?"

The lunch was perfect, and it was perfectly served. The silver glowed: the linen was marked with H. C. Le G. in a most artistic monogram. I noticed that the table decorations were extremely pretty. Somebody com-

plimented our hostess upon them. Mrs. Le Geyt nodded and smiled—"I arranged them. Dear Hugo, in his blundering way—the big darling—forgot to get me the orchids I had ordered. So I had to make shift with what few things our own wee conservatory afforded. Still, with a little taste and a little ingenuity—" She surveyed her handiwork with just pride, and left the rest to our imaginations.

"Only you ought to explain, Clara—" Mrs. Le Geyt began, in a deprecatory tone.

"Now, you darling old bear, we won't harp on that twice-told tale again," Clara interrupted, with a knowing smile. "*Point de réchauffés!* Let us leave one another's misdeeds and one another's explanations for their proper sphere—the family circle. The orchids did *not* turn up, that is the point; and I managed to make shift with the plumbago and the geraniums. Maisie, my sweet, *not* that pudding, *if* you please: too rich for you, darling. I know your digestive capacities better than you do. I have told you fifty times it doesn't agree with you. A small slice of the other one!"

"Yes, mamma," Maisie answered, with a cowed and covering air. I felt sure she would have murmured, "Yes, mamma," in the self-same tone if the second Mrs. Le Geyt had ordered her to hang herself.

"I saw you out in the park, yesterday, on your bicycle, Ettie," Le Geyt's sister, Mrs. Mallet, put in. "But do you know, dear, I didn't think your jacket was half warm enough."

"Mamma doesn't like me to wear a warmer one," the child answered, with a visible shudder of recollection, "though I should love to, Aunt Lina."

"My precious Ettie, what nonsense—for a violent exercise like bicycling! Where one gets so hot! So unbecomingly hot! You'd be simply stifled, darling." I caught a darted glance which accompanied the words and which made Ettie recoil into the recesses of her pudding.

"But yesterday was so cold, Clara," Mrs. Mallet went on, actually venturing to oppose the infallible authority. "A nipping morning. And such a flimsy coat! Might not the dear child be allowed to judge for herself in a matter purely of her own feelings?"

Mrs. Le Geyt, with just the shadow of a shrug, was all sweet reasonableness. She smiled more suavely than ever. "Surely, Lina," she remonstrated, in her frankest and most convincing tone, "*I* must know best what is good for dear Ettie, when I have been

watching her daily for more than six months past, and taking the greatest pains to understand both her constitution and her disposition. She needs hardening, Ettie does. Hardening. Don't you agree with me, Hugo?"

Le Geyt shuffled uneasily in his chair. Big man as he was, with his great black beard and manly bearing, I could see he was afraid to differ from her overtly. "Well, —m— perhaps, Clara," he began, peering from under the shaggy eyebrows, "it would be best for a delicate child like Ettie—"

Mrs. Le Geyt smiled a compassionate smile. "Ah, I forgot," she cooed sweetly. "Dear Hugo never *can* understand the upbringing of children. It is a sense denied him. We women know"—with a sage nod. "They were wild little savages when I took them in hand first—weren't you, Maisie? Do you remember, dear, how you broke the looking-glass in the boudoir like an untamed young monkey? Talking of monkeys, Mr. Cotswould, *have* you seen those delightful, clever, amusing French pictures at that place in Suffolk Street? There's a man there—a Parisian—I forget his honoured name—Leblanc, or Lenoir, or Lebrun, or something—but he's a most humorous artist, and he paints monkeys and storks and all sorts of queer beasties *almost* as quaintly and expressively as you do. Mind, I say *almost*, for I will never allow that any Frenchman could do anything *quite* so good, quite so funnily mock-human, as your marabouts and professors."

"What a charming hostess Mrs. Le Geyt makes," the painter observed to me after lunch. "Such tact! Such discrimination! . . . *And*, what a devoted step-mother!"

"She is one of the local secretaries of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children," I said, drily.

"And charity begins at home," Hilda Wade added, in a significant aside.

We walked home together as far as Stanhope Gate. Our sense of doom oppressed us. "And yet," I said, turning to her, as we left the doorstep, "I don't doubt Mrs. Le Geyt really believes she *is* a model step-mother!"

"Of course she believes it," my witch answered. "She has no more

doubt about that than about anything else. Doubts are not in her line. She does everything exactly as it ought to be done—who should know if not she?—and therefore she is never afraid of criticism. Hardening, indeed! that poor slender, tender, shrinking little Ettie! A frail exotic. She would harden her into a skeleton if she had her way. Nothing's much harder than a skeleton I suppose, except Mrs. Le Geyt's manner of training one."

"I should be sorry to think," I broke in, "that that sweet little, floating thistle-down of a child I once knew was to be done to death by her."

"Oh, as for that, she will *not* be done to death," Hilda answered, in her confident way. "Mrs. Le Geyt won't live long enough."

I started. "You think not?"

"I don't think. I am sure of it. We are at the fifth act now. I watched Mr. Le Geyt closely all through lunch, and I'm more confident than ever that the end is coming. He is temporarily crushed: but he is like steam in a boiler, seething, seething, seething. One



"DOUBTS ARE NOT IN HER LINE."

day, she will sit on the safety-valve, and the explosion will come. When it comes"—she raised aloft one quick hand in the air as if striking a dagger home—"good-bye to her!"

For the next few months I saw much of Le Geyt; and the more I saw of him, the more I saw that my witch's prognosis was essentially correct. They never quarrelled: but Mrs. Le Geyt in her unobtrusive way held a quiet hand over her husband which became increasingly apparent. In the midst of her fancy-work (those busy fingers were never idle) she kept her eyes well fixed on him. Now and again I saw him glance at his motherless girls with what looked like a tender protecting regret, especially when "Clara" had been most openly drilling them: but he dared not interfere. She was crushing their spirit as she was crushing their father's—and all, bear in mind, for the best of motives! She had their interest at heart: she wanted to do what was right for them. Her manner to him and to them was always honey-sweet—in all externals; yet one could somehow feel it was the velvet glove that masked the iron hand: not cruel, not harsh even, but severely, irresistibly, unflinchingly crushing. "Ettie, my dear, get your brown hat at once. What's that? Going to rain? I did not ask you, my child, for *your* opinion on the weather. My own suffices. A headache? Oh, nonsense! Headaches are caused by want of exercise. Nothing so good for a touch of headache as a nice brisk walk in Kensington Gardens. Maisie, don't hold your sister's hand like that: it is imitation sympathy! You are aiding and abetting her in setting my wishes at nought. Now, no long faces! What *I* require is *cheerful* obedience."

A bland, autocratic martinet, smiling, inexorable! Poor, pale Ettie grew thinner and wanner under her law daily, while Maisie's temper, naturally docile, was being spoiled before one's eyes by persistent, needless thwarting.

As spring came on, however, I began to hope that things were really mending. Le Geyt looked brighter; some of his own careless, happy-go-lucky self came back again at intervals. He told me once, with a wistful sigh, that he thought of sending the children to school in the country—it would be better for them, he said, and would take a little work off dear Clara's shoulders: for never even to me was he disloyal to Clara. I encouraged him in the idea. He went on to say that the great difficulty in the way was . . . Clara. She was *so* conscientious: she thought it her duty to look after the children herself, and couldn't bear to delegate any part of that duty to others. Besides, she had such an excellent opinion of the Kensington High School!

When I told Hilda Wade of this, she set her teeth together and answered at once: "That settles it! The end is very near. *He* will insist upon their going, to save them from that woman's ruthless kindness: and *she* will refuse to give up any part of what she calls her duty. *He* will reason with her: he will



"THAT SETTLES IT! THE END IS VERY NEAR."

plead for his children: *she* will be adamant. Not angry—it is never the way of that temperament to get angry: just calmly, sedately, and insupportably provoking. When she goes too far, he will flare up at last: some taunt will rouse him: the explosion will come: and . . . the children will go to their Aunt Lina, whom they dote upon. When all is said and done, it is the poor man I pity!"

"You said within twelve months."

"That was a bow drawn at a venture. It may be a little sooner: it may be a little later. But—next week or next month—it is coming: it is coming!"

June smiled upon us once more; and on the afternoon of the 13th, the anniversary of our first lunch together at the Le Geys, I was up at my work in the accident ward at St. Nathaniel's. "Well, the ides of June have come, Sister Wade!" I said, when I met her, parodying Cæsar.

"But not yet gone," she answered; and a profound sense of foreboding spread over her speaking face as she uttered the words.

Her oracle disquieted me. "Why, I dined there last night," I cried, "and all seemed exceptionally well."

"The calm before a storm, perhaps," she murmured.

Just at that moment I heard a boy crying in the street, "*Pall Mall Gazette*: 'ere y'are: speshul edishun! Shocking tragedy at the West-end! Orful murder! 'Ere y'are! Speshul *Globe*! *Pall Mall*, extr'y speshul!"

A weird tremor broke over me. I walked down into the street and bought a paper. There it stared me in the face on the middle page: "Tragedy at Campden Hill: Well-known Barrister murders his Wife: Sensational Details."

I looked closer and read. It was just as I feared. The Le Geys! After I left their house the night before, husband and wife must have quarrelled, no doubt over the question of the children's schooling: and at some provoking word, as it seemed, Hugo must have snatched up a knife—"a little ornamental Norwegian dagger,"

the report said, "which happened to lie close by on the cabinet in the drawing-room," and plunged it into his wife's heart. "The unhappy lady died instantaneously, by all appearances, and the dastardly crime was not discovered by the servants till eight o'clock this morning. Mr. Le Geyt is missing."

I rushed up with the news to Nurse Wade, who was at work in the accident ward. She turned pale, but bent over her patient and said nothing.

"It is fearful to think," I groaned out at last, "for us who know all—that poor Le Geyt will be hanged for it! Hanged for attempting to protect his children!"

"He will *not* be hanged," my witch answered, with the same unquestioning confidence as ever.

"Why not?" I asked, astonished once more at this bold prediction.

She went on bandaging the arm of the patient whom she was attending. "Because . . . he will commit suicide," she replied, without moving a muscle.

"How do you know that?"

She stuck a steel safety-pin with deft fingers into the roll of lint. "When I have finished my day's work," she answered slowly, still continuing the bandage, "I may perhaps find time to tell you."

