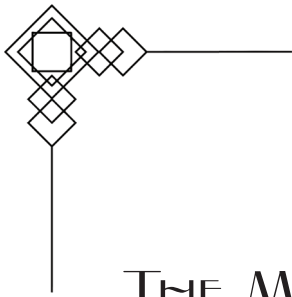


THE MASTERFUL MONK

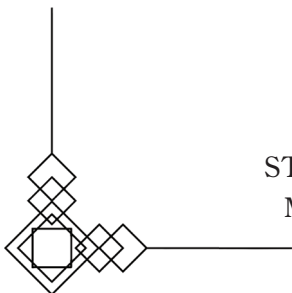


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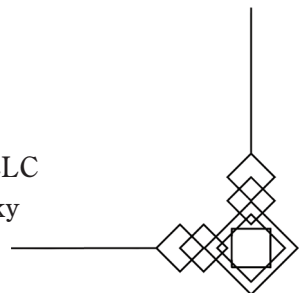
Problems of Human Happiness. III.

By

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The Masterful Monk.

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We have made no intentional change from the original text except to correct mistakes in spelling and punctuation.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS present volume is the third of a series dealing with problems of human happiness.

The first, *Will Men Be Like Gods?*, is an answer to the slanderers of Religion; the second, *The Shadow on the Earth*, to the slanderers of God. In *The Masterful Monk* I have endeavoured to meet the modern attack upon Man and his moral nature launched by those who would degrade him to the level of an animal.

I would like to mention that "Julian Verrers" in this tale is neither a literary affectation nor an exaggeration. He is a spokesman delivering faithfully the ideas of certain materialistic scientists, philosophers, and leaders of thought, whose names are before the public today, and whose writings are everywhere on sale. He speaks as they speak and says what they say.

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PART I

THE MASTERFUL MONK

CHAPTER I

SHE WAS in her “library” this morning, sandwiched between the recesses of an enormous leather chair and *The Times*. Her presence behind the paper was revealed by the finger-tips gripping its extremities, also by little clouds of smoke which floated up and curled about. She had been quite still for fifteen minutes.

When at length the paper was lowered, she became visible with a cigarette in a long holder between her lips, and an absorbed look on her face.

She stood up, crushed out the cigarette in an ash-tray on the mantelpiece, looked towards the window and said, “Um.”

Next she said, “Julian Verrers.” A minute later she said “Julian Verrers” again; this time as if she rather liked the sound of it. “Biologist? . . . What’s a biologist?” She went across to a bookshelf and took down a dictionary. “One skilled in biology,” said the dictionary. The next word was “Biology.” It was defined as “the science of life in its various forms.”

The dictionary closed with a snap, and went back to its place. She picked up *The Times* again.

At the head of one of the columns stood in bold letters—“A Plea for Freedom,” and beneath it—“Speech by Mr. Julian Verrers.” Then came half a dozen lines in italics, in which Mr.

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Julian Verrers was referred to as “the biologist.” Underneath began a verbatim report of the speech.

She turned to the illustrated page muttering, “*The biologist.*” Amongst the photographs was one subscribed, “Mr. Julian Verrers, whose speech of yesterday is reported elsewhere.”

She studied it.

It was a very clear portrait; the face of a man of about forty. The eyes were deep-set and straight-lidded, and appeared to be jet-black. The hair was swept sideways over a broad forehead, the photograph indicating slight greyness above the ears. She guessed the nose would be very straight in profile. Beneath a short upper lip, the mouth, though shapely, showed a peculiar, cynical twist.

“Julian Verrers.”

She put down the sheets and stood there, thinking. Suddenly she went across to her writing-desk in the corner, pulled up a chair, fiddled about for paper and envelope, found them and began to write:—

“MAGGIE,—I want to meet Julian Verrers—this biologist person. See *Times* today, if you don’t know him. But, of course you *do*. ‘*The biologist.*’ I’m hugely intrigued with this speech of his. And his face (illustrated page). You *will* work it, won’t you, Maggie?—Yours, BEAUTY.

“P.S.—For preference, at one of your ‘very, very’ dinners.”

The envelope she addressed to a Mrs. Sands-Woodford, of Eccleston Square.

She was called “Beauty” by her intimates.

It pleased her. It proclaimed that, physically, she was a complete success. It was true. She knew it. The blue depths in

Chapter One

her eyes, the pure gold of her shingled head, the white of her skin, the very poise of her challenged you to deny her right to the name.

It pleased her, too, to be considered intellectual. And she was, fairly so. What she lacked in experience, at twenty-three, she culled from books and clever people. Books interested her. Clever people interested her. Life interested her. The bookshelves in her “library,” as she chose to call it, shouted half the philosophies of the twentieth century. When friends came to tea at the flat, books would be lying about. She liked them to pick them up with, “I wish *I* could read these things.” She would murmur: “Oh, well, they interest me, you see.”

Books helped.

For it pleased her also to talk well, with the right men and right women. It was gratifying. She had once noticed a well-known author, a psychologist, talking-down to some brainless butterfly from mere politeness; and had mentally resolved never to be talked-down-to herself. The incident had stimulated her to study the great man’s writings. She happened to be introduced to him a few weeks later, and straightway tackled him on one of his own arguments. He did not talk-down to her. He deliberately drowned her with technical terms. He even asked her technical questions with a patronizing smile. Having courteously exhibited her ignorance of his science, he bowed and left.

The humiliation had rankled, but taught her to temper daring with discretion. After that she had kept within her range, or, if in danger, manœuvred into safer waters.

Yet, despite limitations, she maintained a reputation for being clever. And it pleased her.

Her flat was in Curzon Street.

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She lived there alone, save for her maid and the necessary servants. To live alone, away from her people, was one of Beauty's whims. It symbolized her independence. It was not a pose. She enjoyed living alone. Whenever she went down to Dorsetshire to her people they protested. She merely kissed her mother and smacked her father, and went back to her flat in London.

She loved her flat.

It was all her own; from the enormous leathern chair in the library to the exquisite crockery in the kitchen. The curtains and the carpets were unquestionably distinctive. All the curtains in all the rooms were deep, clear orange, and all the carpets in all the rooms were deep, clear green. These two colours throughout gave the deliberate, daring note that she intended. And she liked the mysterious, warm light that filtered through the orange curtains half-drawn on a sunny day. It emphasized her own bold splendour. Very few women could stand up against those orange curtains. Beauty could—and did.

She had written to Mrs. Sands-Woodford on Monday. On Tuesday the reply came.

Yes, said Mrs. Sands-Woodford, she knew Julian Verrers. On receiving Beauty's letter she had telephoned, asking him to her next "very, very" dinner, on Friday. He had accepted. Would Beauty come? She would put her with him.

Beauty wrote straight back—"Maggie, you're a brick. Of course I shall come. Exactly what I wanted. Ta, tremendously.—Yours, BEAUTY."

She lunched that day at a house in Kensington Palace Gardens.

Chapter One

It was a dull affair, and the customary half-hour in the drawing-room afterwards was duller. She sustained a bromide conversation with a semi-deaf barrister, who rumbled on in a soporific monotone until somebody's watch-case clicked, giving the signal, and people began to rise with relief to express their regrets at leaving.

She started to walk back along Kensington Gore, wondering why it was demanded of rational beings that they should spend an hour and a half of the best part of the day talking about nothing at one another.

"Dowds and frumps!"

She disliked these people. They were inexpressibly flat. The sort of people who went out to lunch and ate and talked solely because it was done. They would probably do it all over again this evening at dinner somewhere else, and tomorrow and the day after. They said the same thing in the same way to the same kind of people day after day. They were perfectly correct. They did exactly what they were expected to do. They never enthused. They just existed and went on.

It was not merely their conventions that irritated her; Beauty was quite honest with herself. These people gave her no opportunity of shining. She liked shining. Her instinct scented their disapproval of anything like shining. You had to keep to a rut. If you became excited or earnest or controversial you were promptly refrigerated.

At lunch today she had so far forgotten herself as to talk with considerable heat about Julian Verrers' speech. A remark from her hostess about the King's visit somewhere had cut her off. She had been refrigerated. A row of expressionless faces opposite had completed the process.

"Mugwumps! I wish I'd smacked them."

Her mind turned to Mrs. Sands-Woodford's "very, very" people. They, at any rate, were never dull. They were alive.

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Many of them were brilliant men and women who had made their mark in life.

She stopped to look at Kensington Gardens, glittering in the sunshine of early spring. At the gates further down she turned in and sauntered along until she came to the bridge. The Serpentine was one long sparkle. Over the bridge she quickened her pace and started to walk the whole way round. By the time she reached the gates again the “Mugwumps” had vanished, ousted by somebody else.

She was wondering what Julian Verrers would be like.