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paying work

Nor had all Park Lane, with bulging nose and pocket book, been clanking at his door, would he have  
sold a picture. He objected on principle to parting with <sup>his</sup> pictures at all, and so he let his 170

~~The~~ The Chute: 2 carbons  
I. Idleness.

Mark Lessing was one of Nature's monsters. A shy almost effeminate boy, he had failed to please the Procrustes of Public School life, and had to be forced to Oxford without that consciousness, cynicism, callousness, hidden brutality and displayed perversion which is the foundation of the Oxford manner. Six years later he was still a never-do-well, wasting his time and money in the Latin Quarter, and acquiring an unenviable reputation as a painter of what his fellow-artists recognized as masterpieces. At that time, his father, a distinguished civil servant, whose last years had been saddened by his <sup>only</sup> son's failure to live a decent life, took his grey hairs down in sorrow to the grave. Mark's income suddenly stopped, and he had perforce to abandon Paris for London. In Paris, he said, they knew all about pictures and bought none; in London nothing, and bought none. Unfortunately, Lessing was not at all the man to paint the picture of the year at the Academy. He could only paint one thing - the nude; and of this he had so extraordinary a perception, and expressed the same with such absolute simplicity, that his work was entirely beneath the notice of those who wished to

To the King - 'good times' it was said in England. He could do better - perhaps he must - and I got - see it? to America. I will do better - perhaps he must - and I got - see it? to America. I will do better - perhaps he must - and I got - see it? to America.

Now had see Paul Lane, wife's looking worse and perhaps blind, been cleaning at his own, small bellows  
some pictures. He objected in vain to be taken with a picture of Paul, and when Paul was 1795

he excited by the question of whether that small child would  
live or die, whether it was the swimming wife or the faithless  
husband, <sup>that went with the title of the picture</sup> who was accusing who of cheating, and why,  
whether the girl would say yes or no, which horse would  
win after all, and if the lion would eat the martyr or not.  
He did not understand, either, how to tell his work in private.  
His education had not fitted him to lookey the Johannesburg  
Jew, or smart in the 'drawing-rooms of the aristocracy'. He  
hated society, preferred to smoke his pipe in a public-house.  
His equals bored him <sup>when they did not</sup> ~~by~~ <sup>to</sup> talk art, and sickened him  
when they did. He could not tolerate shams of any kind.  
Age made him more morose than ever. He shunned all  
folk above the age of ten or thereabouts, with the exception  
of the honest old fellow with whom he worked in the  
evenings when it was too dark to paint, two hours of  
daily toil sufficing to earn enough to supply his simplicity.  
For the delicacy of touch which served him as a painter  
was also found useful by polishers of lenses. Mark  
Lensing could detect and correct errors of a thousandth of an  
inch with his eyes shut.  
When he was forty, a great calamity befell him. The  
old man died. It had not been his own seeking, this  
paying work. Now it had ended, he would of course

live on his savings, and by the sale of his pictures. Of these he had a great collection, having painted about 60 a year for twenty years, and being sold or given away not more than half. However, this was fated not to worry him, for about three months later he was knocked down by a cab, and taken to the hospital where he lay unconscious for over a week, and between life and death for six weeks more. Before anyone could discover his identity, his landlord sold his few stiches and many canvases to pay himself the rent; and as the aforesaid canvases were ~~sent~~ distributed among poverty-stricken students to be painted over, they were not recoverable, even had Mack been able to redeem them. Being a man of spirit, he would not ~~allow~~ his name known to his friends, but bought chalks, and proceeded to decorate a pavement. The police put a sudden death to that, and only his University accent saved him from a prosecution, the constable persuading himself that some mob was drawing the (how! how! how! behind a glove) for a look or a bet. So that he escaped with a few remarks on half leaning and half jeering or morality which jeopardized that constable's life - had he known it - more than many burglars. Thus baffled, the painter took to selling matches, rose by degrees to the power of

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purchasing paints and brushes, painted a picture and managed to sell it for a ten-pound note to the one dealer in London who would even look at his work. Restored to affluence by this stroke of luck, he was still further favoured by fate, and found a job again at the Lenses. He soon had a studio, and began his old game of turning out three score unsaleable pictures per annum. He became casual in the matter of lenses, was paid less, lived on mere scraps of food and kept every available shilling to pay models, and purchase materials.

"Idleness is a bitter curse." (my father used to say) "It's the mother of all ills and there's nothing worse." at this critical point in his downward career he came face to face with Vice.

## II. Vice.

It was the same year in which he entered a public school that Alice Roberts joined her eleven brothers and sisters at the little hot vicarage in Gloucestershire. Her father, successful enough in that absence, had failed in every other, only stumbling into a benefice as a sort of last lunch before the grave. However, her early years were peaceful enough, save that her frivolity, expressed mainly by what can only be called *vices vitales*

of the limbs, cursed fumes. When she was twelve years old  
her father died; the family was scattered; a wealthy aunt  
sent her to a convent (no place for a Christian child!) and  
forgot about her the next day. In the convent - she still tried  
to dance until the nuns could think of nothing but the  
convulsion fits of St. Me'dard. Exorcism proving fruitless,  
and punishment - being only to confirm the criminal in her crime,  
she was bounded out, and a Russian girl from the  
Opera passing the garden in which she despatched, recognized  
her, and arranged for the girl to go to Moscow to learn  
the ballet. Here she met Baron Michaelovitch, who was  
not content to teach her only dancing. <sup>under the name of La Kyslovska</sup> At <sup>any time</sup> <sup>she</sup>  
was dancing in principal parts with him; at length she  
set out to conquer Paris and London, and at length - <sup>she</sup>  
succeeded. Of strong animal spirits, and weakened moral  
principles - a convent and a dancing-school can undermine  
even a clergyman's daughter - she allowed herself to amass  
that collection of ruffians - which will be remembered  
by connoisseurs as the marvel of the decade. She was however  
not without her troubles. For instance, she lost her complexion,  
and several teeth. There came a year during which she  
could not dance at all, and on her return to the stage  
the final touch which had made her had departed.

She got the usual applause, and looked apparently as well as ever: but the jaded ones quailed.

Two years later she had already begun to sell her sapphires; and a year after that she — saw a ghost!

There is a point in the downward career of Vice when it comes face to face with the Idleness whose hours initiated it!

### III

#### Crime.

~~It is certainly the~~ <sup>young girl</sup> La Koslovskaya was 32, and Mark Lessing 47 when they met in the night boat from Calais. He had been over to Paris for a few weeks of happiness among his old friends, she too fulfilled a not too-well paid engagement at the Alhambra.

My poor Boris! cried she as he walked across the gangway. Boris Mikhelevitch had been her first man, the man she really loved, deep down where love lies, God knows where! but most <sup>surely</sup> ~~certainly~~ immune from all the accidents of life. Now she saw him, as she thought, old and broken down. She became on the instant, eternal youth itself, in that respect of it which we call motherhood.

The mistake was easily explained, but the immersion continued. Ailsa was lost in memories of first love; Mark in contemplation of the body of a perfect dancer.

She gladly agreed to sit for him; his simplicity charmed her; his evident poverty moved her to a great resolution. For Boris' memory she resolved to be a mother-daughter to him. With great difficulty she got him to the flat to dine; with greater persuasion she got him to sell her a picture for ten pounds. He spent over an hour in persuading her to accept one as a gift.

This price of ten pounds deserves comment. Ciska was significantly ignorant in particulars, and had no idea that anything but dress, jewellery, champagne, and women could cost money. She imagined ten pounds to be a sort of fancy price for a picture. She had vaguely heard of Reinhardt's buying £20,000 in the auction room, but never connected it with any fact of life. She had once been offered a particularly fine London for £50, and stumbled out of that shop in a rage that anyone should dare to presume so on her inexperience.

The ice once broken, it was the dancer's practice to spend fifteen to twenty pounds a week on Lesau's pictures and for a year or two he prospered. Greater ease and comfort <sup>combined with complete leisure</sup> overcame advancing age, and he painted harder and better than ever before. Unfortunately his putrescence found the contrary. She made less and less both in the stage and off; her dress cost her more every month, and her shapeliness and beauty went all her

earnings. There were even no more supplies; the rent of her flat became a burden. She moved from Market Street to Victoria St., from Victoria Street to Russell Square, from Russell Square to Durbey Street. She bored lesser managers than those who had fought in law courts to secure her services; she who had frowned on duels now smiled at stockbrokers' clerks.

Of all this Rent Lessey was totally unaware. absorbed completely in his painting, he hardly ever stirred from his studio unless to take the air on the Embankment and watch the Titan that is the heart of London's energy tower above the ~~tidal~~ tide. To visit him she always made her finest toilet; she took to feeding in obscure cafes to buy some the money to buy his pictures. But her visits became less frequent in spite of all that she could do; and a day came when she could no longer hide her poverty, even from his unobservant eye. He flatly refused to sell her another picture, and ~~showed~~ only woman's wit won out. She burst into tears, and made a great confession. All this time, she said, I have been selling your pictures at a profit. It is all I have to live by.

In plain English, she lied to him. There is a period when the conjunction of Vice and Idleness gives birth to Crime.

#### IV Virtue.

Lady Adelaide Victoria <sup>Knowslege</sup> ~~Cocke~~ had never lacked anything but admirers, and her just indignation against those who had any grew, equal-striding, with what cynics vilely called her eye and her despair. She availed even the street-walkers, and devoted her life to dragging such from their already miserable existence to a world of wretchedness and strong <sup>unhappiness</sup> mingled with sermons. She had lessed all her wealth and influence to an agitation against a 'white slave traffic' which existed only in the columns of pornographic newspapers of the basest type, weeklies whose editors had come from every goal in England to guard the morals of its people. It was principally through her eloquence and intinging that an act was hurried through Parliament to take away the last happiness of these wretched women by untrusting and flogging their lovers. That she did this without self-interest of any kind goes without saying; with her the command of God and the approval of her own conscience were every thing. In the career of Virtue there are no crises; self-sustained by the consciousness of its own excellence it moves gloriously onward. Virtue is its own reward.

## V Punishment.

It was one of Lady Adelaide's 'censors' - the word 'spy' is highly improper in this connection - who, failing to obtain money and favour from Alice Roberts in return for abstinence from offensive measures, resorted to these, and got her fined £4 for assisting him. This she paid; and enraged at his partial failure to revenge alike his pride and his infidelity, he resolved upon a subtler plan of vengeance, and followed her about for several days. He tracked her to Lessing's studio, and made enquiries about the latter, resulting in a visit. When a sly stranger of villainous appearance offered him a five-pound note for a picture, Nash painter was not a little taken aback; but being shy and unwilling to wound, accompanied his refusal with the remark that he did not sell his pictures, as he had private means. "Nash the word, you worship, private means!" was the next act in the comedy, and Lessing found himself in the dock, charged with living on the immoral earnings of Nash.

At the trial Mr Justice Gillmore found the opportunity of his life. Counsel for the Crown had told the whole black story by the hour. Although prisoner's

father had been a servant of the English Crown, Lessing was a German name - the name, he understood, of a notorious criminal. Advice in court "a poet!" and laughter in certain quarters, though the jury <sup>became</sup> ~~had~~ <sup>withly</sup> graver. But the judge outprosecuted the prosecutor as the sun outshines the moon.

Prisoner at the bar, said he, when the jury, without leaving the box, returned a verdict of Guilty, this has been a very plain and a very shocking case. So far from finding any extenuating circumstance, I can see only aggravations of the most disgusting offence - except one - known to the Law. You had a worthy father, and the best of educations. You had perhaps at one time talent. All this you have abused. There is a period when idleness becomes Vice; you have long passed that stage. My experience finds no parallel for the brazen effrontery with which you have attempted to defend yourself. Refusing the legal assistance generously offered you by the King you have so grievously offended, you ~~at~~ <sup>have</sup> ~~wilted~~ wilted this court by bringing into it the obscene darts, fit only for the walls of Parisian brothels, which you call <sup>your</sup> work. If indeed you sell them, <sup>- which I thank God I cannot believe -</sup> I can only cry shame on the buyer, and it is <sup>never</sup> ~~again~~ no principle of English Law that a lesser crime

can be brought forward as the excuse for a greater.  
There is a period in the career of Idleness when its  
association with Vice engenders Crime; and there is  
a period in the career of Crime when it is cut short  
by Punishment.

I feel it my duty to impose a penalty which I hope  
will deter other lazy rogues from following ~~an~~ <sup>an</sup> example  
so loathsome and abominable to all decent men;  
and I therefore sentence you to eighteen months' hard  
labour and 45 strokes of the 'Cat'.

Which general applause, the prisoner, who remained  
silent, was removed to the cells.

#### VI. Hell's counterstroke.

Mark Lasing died under the infliction of the 'Cat'.  
Most unfortunately, the story does not end there. It is  
one of the permitted wiles of Satan ~~that~~ - in the  
inscrutable Wisdom of God - that when earthly  
punishment, poetic justice, is frustrated; the base is  
swept and garnished, and seven other devils enter in.  
I need only refer to the case of Oscar Wilde to prove my  
point. Neither a first-rate thief nor a first-rate  
atrot, the intricacy of his trial has secured him  
- through the generosity of fallen man - a personal

triumph amounting to immortality, and a long list and  
universal popularity for his works.

It so happened that a Jewish picture-dealer was a witness  
in the case following Rex v. Lessing, and was in court during  
the trial. His attention being thus attracted to the 'black  
doubts', he thought that a success of scandal might  
possibly attach to the public sale of one or two <sup>of them</sup>. He  
therefore approached la Koslowskye, who sold him  
three for fifty pounds. She was thunderstruck at the idea  
of any one wanting to ~~buy them~~ pay real money for them;  
but as the dealer had been so obviously clean and keen  
and Hebraic and prosperous, he could have had them  
for <sup>almost</sup> nothing.

The sale was widely advertised; decent people turned  
away disgusted. The day before the sale the dealer  
returned, with an offer to buy her whole collection - some  
three hundred pictures, mostly under the bed - but  
found her reading a telegram from Paris, from a  
man whose name she knew as one of Lessing's  
oldest friends, containing these words - 'For God's  
sake don't sell any <sup>more</sup> pictures till after <sup>an</sup> auction  
~~next week~~. Will call ten o'clock - Ailsa showed  
this to the disreputable Hebrew, who retired, by giving

electricity.

The sale was a surprise, even to him, who had work of what would happen. Painters from Paris who had known Lessing, some of them already successful men, came over in force. Every dealer had been warned, and was there to fight for the fame of his house; every one bid with no thought but to purchase, careless whether he ever sold again or not; and the Jew went away with what he called a consignment of  $\pounds 17,850$ .

Every year on the anniversary of her meeting with Mark Lessing, and every year on the anniversary of his death, Miss Roberts sells a picture, at prices constantly increasing:

For she had built a Memorial Gallery to the great painter whom she loved for his likeness to the man who had betrayed her, and after her death there will be no millionaire to filch even one more picture from the Nation.

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