

UNCHANGING QUEST



PHILIP
GIBBS

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By SIR PHILIP GIBBS

UNCHANGING QUEST

THE RECKLESS LADY

HEIRS APPARENT

THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

THE STREET OF ADVENTURE

WOUNDED SOULS

PEOPLE OF DESTINY

THE SOUL OF THE WAR

THE BATTLES OF THE SOMME

THE STRUGGLE IN FLANDERS

THE WAY TO VICTORY, 2 Vols.

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

MORE THAT MUST BE TOLD

TEN YEARS AFTER: *A Reminder*

UNCHANGING QUEST

BY
PHILIP GIBBS

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UNCHANGING QUEST
—Q—
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TO
MY WIFE

WHO HAS TWO NOVELISTS AT HOME AND IS
VERY GENEROUS WITH ALL HER GIFTS OF
FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY

Unchanging Quest

I

I AM writing this story about a woman I loved because it pleases me to do so in remembrance of her spirit, and because her early days when I first knew her recall many incidents of my own life belonging to a past which seems strangely remote after all that has happened in recent years. Besides, the story of Katherine and Michael is in some ways the history of my generation and has a warning for the next—useless, but interesting.

The beginning of it, as far as my friendship with Katherine is concerned, goes back to the time when I was a boy of eighteen, and to a night when Paul Lambert—three years older than myself, and a medical student with a cheery view of life—took me to Romilly Hall, Whitechapel.

It was raining, and Paul and I had to sit on the top of a horse-omnibus which went from Ludgate Circus. It was the first time I had been to the East End of London—my people living in the well-to-do smugness of Clapham Park when that suburb was still “genteel”—and it filled me with a sense of disgust because of the hideous squalor of its life. It was not the East End of today, where one no longer sees such foul aspects of life, though there is misery enough still. Down the Whitechapel Road there was a sort of fair, with naphtha flares blowing wildly in the wet wind above the wooden booths, where bedraggled women with filthy children picked at chunks of offal and rotten fruit among crowds of men in battered bowlers, ragged overcoats, and broken boots. From a gin-palace some coster girls came out, shrieking with laughter and holding their skirts high as they swayed to and fro, with their feathered hats getting rain-sodden. One of them shouted some obscene words at a young lout with a cap pulled over his eyes, leaning against the wall of the “pub.” He took a hand out of his pocket and swiped her across the face with a clenched fist. We heard the girl’s scream of rage, the shrill laughter of her friends, and

the blowing of a police-whistle.

"A cat and dog fight," said Paul, laughing as he looked on over the rail of the 'bus. "Lots of fun on a Saturday night!"

Outside another public-house a mob of young hooligans were jeering at an old woman like Dan Leno as the widow Twankey, shrieking like one possessed of a devil as two policemen tried to strap her down on a stretcher. At the opposite corner a Salvation Army lass shook her tambourine at the passing crowd who were hurrying under broken umbrellas or slouching by with upturned collars, and we heard her crying out something about the Blood of Jesus, joyfully. From side streets young women with painted faces, large picture hats, and long skirts which they held up over high-heeled boots, came to the edge of the wet pavements and hailed the 'buses going West, but already overcrowded.

"Off to Piccadilly," said Paul. "Boat-race night. . . . As the Scripture hath it, 'Beware of women who paint their faces and stand at the corner of the street.' "

It was London in 1894.

Romilly Hall was down a narrow passage off the Whitechapel Road. It was an institution founded by Paul's father, Canon Lambert, as a centre of social science in the London slums. Paul, with the irreverence of youth, called it the House of Humbug. It was a rendezvous of young Oxford men and others, of high ideals and liberal views, who believed that the masses would benefit by their intellectual and moral companionship. The Canon, who had a greater sense of humour, believed that the young Oxford men would get more advantage themselves, morally and intellectually, by contact with dock-labourers, mechanics, sempstresses, and charwomen who faced the insecurities of life in East London with a courage which never ceased to amaze him.

That night, when I went there for the first time, I became fired with enthusiasm for this experiment in social idealism, although Paul thought the whole thing "dashed silly." But I had sense of humour enough to see that, as a social evening, it was not altogether successful from the point of view of the working-folk who had been induced to attend. The charladies and coster girls had tidied themselves up in a poor way, and sat on stiff-backed chairs, looking uncomfortable and class-conscious. They laughed or squealed at the Canon's little jokes as he passed down their lines, enquiring after their husbands—so often "in drink" again, or "put away" for three months—with benevolence shining through his pince-nez, his bald head reflecting the luminance of the gas-jets, his fluffy white whiskers framing his lean old face with its thin, delicate, ironical lips.

“Ain’t ’e an ole dear?” whispered one of the women.

Mrs. Lambert, a bustling, organising lady who happened to be the daughter of an obscure peer, though she dressed almost as shabbily as some of the charwomen, did her best in a cheery way to make her guests “mix,” and served out tea and coffee, sandwiches and buns, indefatigably, while she snatched little conversations, on the political situation and the latest measures of social reform, with professors, journalists, and trade-union leaders.

It seemed to me, a shy but observant boy, that the guests didn’t “mix” as well as might have been hoped. A few “horny-handed sons of toil” stood awkwardly around in clean collars and respectable clothes, rather like the models of famous criminals in the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud’s—before the fire. They looked as though they wanted to spit somewhere, but found themselves inhibited, as we should say now, by the polished boards. Here and there a man in a dog’s-ear collar and red tie argued aggressively about social economics with the young Oxford or Cambridge men, who were hopelessly self-conscious and affected a smiling deference to half-baked ideas. Their high-toned voices clashed with the pure Cockney of the earnest young men from Limehouse, Bermondsey, and West Ham.

That night there was an address by a distinguished professor, whose name I forget, on the social history of Europe, followed by a discussion, when some of the young men in the red ties became hopelessly involved in the intricacies of English grammar, lost their notes, spluttered convulsively, or sat down abruptly and sullenly after agonised endeavours to express their belief in the utter wrongness of everything. Some of them are now ex-Cabinet Ministers, with great gifts of speech. Paul annoyed his father considerably by guffawing loudly when one of them quoted a Latin tag with a false quantity, but I was not so hypercritical.

It was after the debate that evening that I first saw Katherine. Like the young lady in *The Sorrows of Werther*, she was helping her mother with the tea and coffee and handing round bread and butter.

She was twenty then, and a tall, slim girl, with coiled, brown hair. She had shy, grey eyes and irregular features which, for some reason, were wonderfully attractive, and a lurking humour about her lips. It was no wonder that the young University men seemed to forget their mission to elevate the working classes, or to revolutionise the social conditions of England, and edged round with obsequious offers to help in regard to coffee cups and buns. Being barely eighteen, and painfully self-conscious, I was completely tongue-tied at first when Paul pushed me forward among this group and introduced me to his sister.

“Here’s a lad I want you to know, Kitty. A new idealist for you, and a lily-white soul.”

Katherine laughed as she gave me her hand, and her candid glance seemed to test what quality I had.

“We’ve lots of idealists here,” she said. “It’s a home for them. But they don’t do Paul any good. He’s a dreadful materialist.”

Paul grinned, and seemed to take this as a compliment.

“I try to restore the mental balance of the family.”

He explained to me that Katherine spent most of her time nursing dirty little babies, visiting their filthy homes, and trying to reform their disreputable parents. He didn’t approve of it.

“Why can’t you leave these poor devils alone?” he asked. “Honest working men don’t want to be poked up by social inquisitors when they’re comfortably drunk in their back parlours after beating their objectionable wives. And why shouldn’t they get drunk? It gives them their only escape from ‘demnition’ drudgery. It’s a biological necessity, as a reaction against their devitalising environment.”

“Yes, but we ought to alter their environment,” I said, finding my tongue for the first time in the presence of Paul’s sister. I had recently become a convert to the gospel of the Fabian Society, which at that time, under the leadership of youngish Mr. H. G. Wells, and early-middle-aged Mr. Bernard Shaw, was devising a new Utopia, in which poverty, disease, and unpleasant work should be abolished for ever.

“That’s father’s idea,” said Katherine generously. “You ought to have a talk with him. Paul’s a heretic on these subjects.”

She smiled at her brother as though his heresy didn’t distress her, and he proclaimed his faith as a free thinker, specialising in bacteriology, which he called “bugs”—more honest, he thought, than his father’s religious compromises and his power of believing what he knew to be untrue.

“The intellectual arrogance of youth!” said Katherine, as though she were a hundred years old herself. She went out of the way that evening to talk to me, though so many good-looking men were anxious for her conversation, and she seemed to take an interest in my literary ambitions and ideas, which I blurted out to her in an eager, boyish way, talkative like all shy people when they find themselves in sympathetic company and forget their self-consciousness.

That night I went home in love with her, and Whitechapel became my Paradise. My father and mother wondered a little anxiously what took me so often to the East End at night and brought me back home by the last omnibus, with a strange luminance in my eyes. My father, with his Tory views—he regarded Gladstone as a wicked old traitor—did not approve much of Romilly Hall, which he thought was “a hot-bed of Socialism,” and he called Canon Lambert a silly old humbug who was doing a lot of harm to the country by putting false ideas into the people’s heads. My mother—who had no politics,

and an anxious love for me, her sensitive plant—came into my room one night after one of my trips to Whitechapel, and put her hand on my shoulder.

“I believe you’re in love!” she said. “My foolish darling! Tell me all about her.”

II

PAUL and Katherine came to my house sometimes to tea and supper, and my family approved of them. My sister Clare approved especially of Paul, who made her laugh hysterically because of what she called his “funny ways,” and shocked her dreadfully and delightfully by his free-and-easy speech as a medical student at Bart’s. My father, who always had a quick eye for a pretty face, became devoted to Katherine, and treated her with a chivalrous and rather pompous deference which secretly amused her, as I could see by her humorous lips.

That winter we arranged some private theatricals, and Katherine, protesting her lack of talent, consented to play the chief part in a romantic drama I had written for the purpose. Paul wanted to play the funny man, for which he was perfectly suited, and, as it was bad form, I thought, to act my own hero, I accepted Paul’s suggestion that his friend, Hugh Evesham, was just the man for the part, being a good-looking fellow and a first-class amateur with an Oxford reputation. He arranged to bring him up to Romilly Hall one night, so that Katherine and I could look him over.

It was at the beginning on one of those social evenings that Paul arrived with his friend. They had been to dinner together, and I could see that Paul had drunk not wisely but too well. He was a little unsteady on his legs, and laughed noisily at the door before bringing in Hugh Evesham—Lord Evesham’s son and heir—who was to play my hero. Slightly older than Paul, this young man was astoundingly good-looking, with blue eyes and a little fair moustache, and a delicate, good-natured mouth. I could not deny that he was exactly suited to the part suggested for him, though I felt an instant pang of jealousy. He was everything that I should have liked to be, so fine and tall and elegant, so easy and confident as he came across the room to be introduced to Katherine.

It seemed that Paul had taken a box at the Empire for a “leg show,” as he called it, vulgarly, and he wanted Katherine and me to “chuck the menagerie”—his name for Romilly Hall—and join them in a merry evening. I was keen to go, especially if Katherine would come, but she shook her head, and protested that England expected every girl to do her duty. She was also alarmed, though amused, by her brother’s flushed face, suppressed laughter, and noisy whisperings during an address on “the Religious Beliefs of Primitive Races” by a Cambridge don.

“Better go to bed, Paul,” she said, raising a reproving finger. “You’re a disgrace to the family.”

“We shall be horribly disappointed if you don’t come,” said young

Evesham in a gallant way. "Besides, it's wasting a good box."

"Hush!" said a young man, listening to the address on the religions of primitive races.

Paul turned on him savagely, and spoke above a whisper.

"We decline to be hushed. I regard all this flapdoodle as a degradation of the human intellect, utterly unscientific, and pandering to superstition." He had some difficulty with that last word. "If you say 'hush' again, I'll bash your blooming head, sir."

"That's all right," said the earnest young man, undismayed by this threat, and slightly amused. He happened to be the future Prime Minister of England, though nobody guessed it, except himself.

But Paul's outburst had disconcerted the lecturer and attracted the attention of his father, who had already given up his son as a hopeless case, and looked confirmed in that belief. It was Katherine's tact which saved a painful situation. She agreed to go to the Empire with her inebriated brother, to save further argument.

We took the Underground—not yet electrified—from Aldgate to Charing Cross, and, later, Paul fell asleep on my shoulder in a hansom cab—there were no taxis in those days—after singing "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!" in a rich baritone. Already I felt completely cut out, as far as Katherine was concerned, by the noble presence and elegant manners of Hugh Evesham. They drove ahead in another hansom, and by the time we were sitting in the box at the Empire Evesham had secured her confidence and esteem. I envied him for the easy, gracious way in which he helped her off with her cloak, the nonchalant manner in which he ordered one of the girls to bring him a programme, the ease, and wit, and brilliance of his conversation between the scenes.

Once or twice I tried to interpolate a remark, but blushed under his supercilious smile, which seemed to rebuke my boyish ignorance of life and literature. He spoke of his admiration for the work of Oscar Wilde and the art of Aubrey Beardsley. He quoted one of Henley's poems, and a line or two of Swinburne. He touched a little on his own ambitions and ideals. He would rather write a good sonnet, he said, than be Commander-in-Chief of the British Army. He had an idea of going into Parliament and advocating increased wages for working-girls, and free theatres—at which only the noblest plays should be produced—in the slums of our great cities. His own people, he told us, were hopelessly reactionary—crusted old Tories—and that was why he had such a tremendous admiration for Canon Lambert and the idealistic spirit of Romilly Hall.

Katherine listened attentively, with now and then a little humorous remark which seemed to show that she was not altogether convinced by all this noble thought. But I saw her admiration as she turned her eyes shyly to Evesham's

good-looking face. Apart from his chivalrous sentiments and democratic faith, which accorded with her own, the physical beauty of this young gentleman attracted her, as I observed with increasing and poignant jealousy. He looked so much more noble than the earnest young men from Limehouse and Bermondsey, even than Paul's usual type of undergraduate friends, with their noisy slang and careless clothes.

Paul became rather restless with so much high-toned conversation between the acts, and suggested a little liquid refreshment. Leaving Katherine and Evesham in the box, we went round to the "promenade," which was familiar to Paul, though I went there for the first time.

"The heart of the Empire!" said Paul grandiloquently. "Where virtue and vice rub shoulders. See that bronzed fellow with the little black moustache, standing next to the fat old cow in the picture hat? That's young Butler, just back from Central Africa, having a look at civilisation again, like some of the others from our far-flung frontiers. They all come back to the dear old prom!"

"Do you call this civilisation?" I asked bitterly, as I strolled round after Paul, morbidly unhappy because of that handsome lad in the box with Katherine.

The promenade was crowded with flashy, painted women, whose roving eyes invited the attention of the men who stood in groups smoking and laughing, or leaning over the balustrade sucking silver-knobbed sticks or cheap canes which were called "wangees." The atmosphere reeked with coarse scent, stale tobacco, and the fumes of beer from the bar near by. The old "Empire" promenade!—thronged, as Paul said, with the men who had come back from adventures in Empire-building. . . . Egypt, India, Africa, Canada, Australia, . . . with the younger sons, the wasters, the sporting crowd, the bad hats, the "mashers," the good fellows, the future heroes of England. Well, most of them have gone across the great river now, and the old "Empire" which was their rendezvous exists no more as it was then. . . .

A lady in a picture hat leered at Paul and said: "Hullo, dearie!" But he winked at me, and said: "Perhaps we'd better get back to that box! This is no place for a lily-white soul."

Katherine and Evesham were still talking, and Paul suggested that he had had enough of watching the waving legs of the ballet girls.

"Can't we go somewhere else and see a little life?" he asked.

"Come round to my rooms," said Evesham. "There's not much life there, but I'd like to show your sister my little sanctuary."

It was not a very exciting proposition, as far as Paul was concerned, but he yielded to the idea when he heard that Evesham had some very special port wine. Katherine didn't yield so easily. As a young lady of the late Victorian era she was not quite sure whether she ought to visit a bachelor's rooms at that

hour of the evening, even with her brother as an escort. I saw the hesitation in her eyes, and then her surrender, as Evesham said: "For half an hour! I'd love to show you my prints. They're rather good."

I hated the man who was to play the part of my hero—he had agreed to that willingly—and yet I remember that he fascinated me too, and, in spite of my ridiculous jealousy, I was compelled to admire his elegance and style, and was grateful when he turned to me and said: "You'll come too, Chesney? One of these days I want your opinion about some of my foolish verse. One or two little things——"

Evesham's rooms were in the Albany, so we walked from the Empire, and Katherine was good enough to put her hand on my arm, little knowing the thrill she gave me, while her brother walked ahead with his friend.

"He's rather wonderful," she said, alluding to Evesham, with a queer catch of excitement in her voice. "I think it's splendid for a young man like that to have such high ideals. Not like Paul, who scoffs at everything."

"I prefer Paul," I said grumpily.

Katherine laughed, and said: "Dear old Paul!"

Evesham's rooms were furnished in an æsthetic style, and there was a little marble figure of Aphrodite on his piano, which seemed to me very daring for an unmarried man. On the walls were some beautiful mezzotints and old sporting-prints, and some original drawings by Aubrey Beardsley.

Evesham was a charming host, as I was bound to admit, and Paul found his port wine excellent, but became rather bored when Katherine was prevailed upon to play some Chopin, which she did charmingly, instead of the rowdy choruses which her brother preferred. Evesham stood near the piano with his arms folded, and a mystical look on his face, and not a crease in his immaculate clothes—which made me feel like a tramp in my blue serge suit. It was half-past eleven before Katherine sprang up with a cry of dismay because of the lateness of the hour. Girls of a slightly later era would not have been so conscience-smitten.

"Oh, Paul! Whatever will father and mother say?"

Time had gone swiftly for her in the company of a young man whose high ideals and exquisite manners had put a spell upon her.

III

THE rehearsals of my romantic play—dreadful stuff it must have been!—were the occasion of a lot of drama in my father's house, outside the parts written down. They afforded me an exquisite mingling of delight and pain; delight because they brought Katherine over two nights a week and established my friendship with her, pain because I really suffered agonies at seeing Hugh Evesham make love to her according to the book, and also quite outside his role as "Richard Fairfield."

As an actor he played his part admirably, as I was bound to admit, and was quite moving in a tragic scene where he had to make a heroic denunciation of the lady of his heart. I used to stand there prompting—Paul never knew three lines through, though Katherine was word perfect after the first week—saying, "Splendid! That's first-class!"—but raging inwardly because it was Evesham and not myself who had such a wonderful chance of kissing Katherine's hand, putting his arm about her, expressing adoration. Her blushes and her laughter added fuel to the fires of my self-appointed torture. My mother guessed what was happening behind my smiling eyes, and several times I saw her looking at me with a sympathy that revealed her knowledge of my secret.

The advent of Hugh Evesham in my family created something of a stir. My father, who had a romantic temperament, chiefly due to the early influence of Sir Walter Scott and some strain of blood which ought to have made him a soldier of fortune instead of a departmental chief in the Local Government Board, delighted to think that he was giving the hospitality of his roof-tree to a young man descended from a famous line of ancestors.

"That's a delightful young man!" he said at the breakfast-table one morning, after turning up the Eveshams in Burke's *Peerage*. "I'm not a snob, and we've no reason to be ashamed of our own family. On the contrary, the Chesneys were barons of Norman William, when the Eveshams were nothing but rustic thanes—small farmers, as you might say. But blood is blood. I believe it. *Noblesse oblige*, and thank God for it."

Remembering the hideous gap in the chain of evidence which linked us with the Norman barons, I winked slightly at my eldest sister, Evelyn, who had a sense of humour, and, this being intercepted by my father, he became rather angry, and got off some rather good stuff about the value of tradition. He behaved to Hugh Evesham with a mixture of geniality and respect, and we all noticed that on the nights of rehearsals he put on a dinner-jacket, though as a rule we didn't dress for dinner in Clapham Park. Evelyn and my second sister, Beatrice, spent most of the day in the kitchen when Evesham was expected for

dinner—or supper, as we called it modestly—preparing special dishes, and then rushed upstairs, much flurried, to put on their best frocks, which were home-made.

“Why make such a fuss about the fellow?” I asked.

Evelyn was quite candid in her answer.

“If there’s any chance of winning such a prize, dear child, Beatrice and I can’t afford to miss it! It’s better to be Lady Evesham than the wife of a City clerk, which is all we could hope for before the arrival of this noble youth. Besides, as father says, ‘Blood is blood!’”

Beatrice was equally audacious.

“Evelyn and I are both in love with him. It’s merely a question which is going to win—my beauty or Evelyn’s intellect. I’m backing beauty, two to one in sixpences.”

“A nice virtuous household!” I remarked, with a sarcasm which was lost upon them. “If only mother knew the stuff you talk behind her back——”

“Oh, mother is an Early Victorian!” said Evelyn, with intellectual superiority. “We’ve learnt a little since her young day.”

“More than you ought to know,” I growled, and at the time I was really shocked by their moral depravity, though now I know that their conversational audacities were as nothing to those of their daughters, and that neither need mean a lack of virtue.

Clare, the youngest, whom I liked least, because of her prim little ways and conventional mind, neat as Beatrice was untidy, which was to the ultimate degree, and nice-mannered as Evelyn was rebellious and passionate, was not so excited by Hugh Evesham as the others, because Paul, for some extraordinary freak of psychology which even now I can’t understand, had fallen head over heels in love with her doll-like prettiness, and was unabashed in his courtship. But she enraged me one day by remarking that she thought it very good of Hugh Evesham to come to Clapham Park when he might be enjoying high society.

“Good heavens!” I said. “Don’t you think that we’re good enough for him?”

“Well,” answered Clare calmly, “we’re not on his social level, you know, however much we pretend. Why, he thinks nothing of going to tea with a duchess!”

I remember I roared with laughter, and said “Damn his duchesses! If he prefers their company to ours, let him stay away. I wish he would, anyhow. I’m sorry I asked him to play that part.”

Clare gave me a quick glance, and smiled.

“You’re jealous of him!” she said in her sly way, “because of Katherine Lambert. Anybody can see that, Gilbert, and it’s silly. She’s two years older

than you, anyhow. You're just a kid."

She looked at me with sisterly contempt, and I felt like hitting her. Yes, it was silly—I knew that—my passionate love for Katherine Lambert. She was far removed from my boyish adoration. Men old enough to be my father—famous literary men—were in love with her. No doubt I hadn't a dog's chance.

Hugh Evesham never showed by the flicker of an eyelid that he was conscious of any social condescension in coming to Clapham Park, though I think he must have been amused sometimes by my father's friends, who were mostly unsuccessful literary men, impecunious artists, and Civil Servants with old-fashioned ways and extraordinary hobbies, whom my father had gathered round him to minister to his need of intellectual conversation—spiced with what he called "Bohemianism"—and who regarded him with reverence and admiration, as a fellow of infinite wit, wide range of knowledge, and enormous capacity for adventure, though he seldom went beyond Whitehall, and was regarded by his children as hopelessly conservative in opinions and ideas.

I had to acknowledge that Evesham was the soul of good nature and courtesy. He discussed politics with my father, politely disagreeing with his views on old Gladstone, congratulated me on the "genius" of my ridiculous play, which I then considered a masterpiece, and made himself so charming to Beatrice and Evelyn that they could not decide which was to be the lucky girl. He talked poetry with Evelyn, who wrote amazing novelettes which she hid from my father, and said pretty things to Beatrice, whose beauty acquired a new bloom from her blushes; and to my mother he behaved with a boyish deference which won her simple heart. But all the time I knew that he came to our house for one reason, and that was Katherine. She had captured him completely by that unconscious lure of hers—by the laughter at the corner of her lips, by her beautiful candour of soul, and perhaps by her faith in his idealism. And when I watched them together, I knew that he would have her for the asking. Her eyes became more luminous in his presence. A kind of spirituality was on her face, as though this love that had come to her was a religious thing. She had a habit of looking at him under her lashes, as though to hide this secret in her eyes. And I knew that he thrilled to her touch, and lingered over those love-scenes in my romantic drama more than was necessary to his part. I was the onlooker, as I have been all my life, standing in the wings, out of the play.

I remember he invited Katherine and my sisters to go to the Derby with him, and Paul and I stood in the road by the common that evening waiting to see them come back.

Paul spoke to me about Evesham, and said in a casual way, "He's very

sweet on Katherine. Anything in it, do you think?"

I didn't answer directly, but asked another question, in a voice that I tried to steady.

"Do you think she likes the fellow?"

"Who wouldn't?" asked Paul, with unusual enthusiasm. "The rising Hope of England's Youth—what, what?"

We watched the procession coming back from Epsom, and kept sharp eyes open for the four-in-hand which Evesham was driving. Paul roared with laughter at this pageant of East and West—the coster girls with their waving feathers, blowing paper trumpets; the donkey carts driven by spare-jowled fellows in pearlies; the fat old ladies in velveteens waving gin-bottles from dog carts; the sporting gentlemen in broad checks, chewing the stumps of cigars, in high gigs; the scarlet-coated guards sounding tantivies on silver horns behind yellow coaches crowded with beauty and fashion; concertina-playing Cockneys urging forward their tired little mokes, their fast trotting nags, their knock-kneed old hacks, their fat little ponies, dressed in ladies' underclothing; the vulgarity, drunkenness, jollity, laughter, with the shrieking whistles, the blaring cornets, the old music-hall songs, of a pandemonium that has driven clean out of English life into the Valhalla of Victorian ghosts.

"There they are!" shouted Paul. "Hooray!"

Evesham's four-in-hand came between one of the yellow coaches and a greengrocer's cart laden with ladies wearing their sweethearts' hats. Evesham, in a white topper and fawn-coloured suit, kissed his whip to us. Katherine was sitting next to him, her face flushed, with laughter in her eyes, with a beauty which I remember across the years. She wore a mauve-coloured dress with balloon sleeves, and a Gainsborough hat with a blue feather. I daresay the girls of to-day would scream with laughter at her costume. To me it looked divine in those days. Behind were my sisters, Evelyn and Beatrice, with two young gentlemen from Evesham's set, and almost as elegant as himself. One of them was so taken up with the beauty of Beatrice, whose hair had become disordered in the wind, so that it gave her a wildish gipsy look, that he did not see Evesham's salute to us. Evelyn had her hand through the arm of her male companion, whose hat was at a rakish angle and who waved his disengaged hand at the laughing ladies on the coach in front. He looked to me a little drunk and disreputable, but I knew him afterwards as Evelyn's husband, and a curate of St. Peter's, Hanover Square.

"Seem to have had a priceless day," said Paul enviously. "To think that I had to diagnose dirty diseases in the outpatients' department!"

It was the day Katherine became engaged to Hugh Evesham, as she told Paul that night, with shy laughter and a sudden mist of tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Paul!" she cried, "do you think I'll ever be able to live up to his

idealism? He's so noble and good that I feel frightened."

Paul thought she needn't worry.

IV

THAT wretched play of mine was a *succès d'estime*, and I was much congratulated by an audience which crowded the drawing-room of our house in Clapham Park, and excited the neighbourhood because of the large number of carriages and cabs lined up in the road outside. Everything went wrong, of course. My father, dressed as a Stuart Cavalier, and looking it to the manner born, pulled up the curtain while I was on the stage cursing Paul because he couldn't remember his opening lines. That caused great laughter. Afterwards the curtain wouldn't go up at all until it was violently jerked from the wings, with the help of a broomstick. Some of the footlights went out in the middle of my best scene, which had to be acted in semi-darkness, and Beatrice lost her gilt-handled dagger at the very moment when she needed it to stab her rival. After vainly groping for it, she strangled the lady—who was Evelyn—and did it so well that Evelyn's gasps and gurglings were not assumed.

Paul forgot more than his opening lines. He "gagged" all through, while I was vainly trying to prompt him, but convulsed the audience by his horseplay as a Royalist soldier of drunken habits. Hugh Evesham and Katherine were the triumph of the evening, and their passionate love-scene, which they played with grace and tenderness, received rounds of applause from the tightly-pressed audience. Afterwards there was a call for "Author," but I refused to appear, much to the annoyance of my father, who went on instead and referred to the "genius" of his son, with some allusion to a more than doubtful ancestor who had written sonnets in the time of Queen Elizabeth.

"Blood," he said, "will out. To-night, as some of you may know, the chief part in my son's little play has been performed by a scion of one of our oldest and noblest families. His dignity and grace, which all of you have observed, are the natural heritage of a young man among whose ancestors was just such a Cavalier as he has enacted to-night—Harry Evesham, who rode in Rupert's Horse."

I was in a poisonously bad temper. The applause meant nothing to me, for between the acts I had seen Hugh Evesham take Katherine in his arms behind the scenes, when they thought that nobody could see them. Since their engagement had been announced I had been barely civil to Evesham, and, looking back on those boyhood days, I see now that I must have been a sulky young pup. But Evesham was always courteous, as though he made allowance for my feelings, and Katherine went out of her way, not once, but many times, to be comradely and kind. I treasured her congratulations most when, through my father's friendship with a publisher, I received an appointment on the

editorial staff at a salary which seemed to me magnificent. It was sixty pounds a year.

It was in the little room that I used as an office in that publishing house off Fleet Street that I received an unexpected visit from Paul, who was now a junior bacteriologist in the Pasteur Institute.

"Can you spare five minutes?" he said in a casual way, though I saw there was trouble in his eyes.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Have some of your bacilli got loose to devastate London?"

"Not so good as that," he answered with a grin. "It's about Kitty. I'm worried in my conscience."

He ignored my light-hearted remark casting doubt on his possession of such a thing.

"Look here, you know Kitty's going to be married to Evesham next month? She thinks him the most wonderful fellow in the world—the soul of honour, and all that. Idealist to the finger-tips!"

"Is there anything wrong with him?" I asked in a stupefied voice. "What on earth are you driving at?"

I had a sense of fear at Paul's gloomy expression. For Katherine's sake I hoped there was nothing wrong with Evesham.

Paul helped himself to one of my cigarettes, and lit it before answering, and gave a queer, ironical laugh.

"I don't want to blow the gaff on a pal. It isn't done in our set, is it? That's what makes it so infernally awkward. All the same, Kitty is my sister. I shall have to take notice."

He pulled a crumpled letter out of his pocket and held it out to me.

"Have a look at that," he said. "I'd like your advice." It was a letter from a girl—passionate and pitiful, as it seemed to me then. I have forgotten its phrasing, but she made it clear enough that Evesham, whom she called "Brighteyes," had been taking her about town, and going to her rooms in the Pimlico Road, until a few weeks ago, when he had suddenly "given her the bird," as she called it in her queer mixture of slang and bad grammar. It appeared that she had been a ballet girl at the Palace until she had "chucked the game" because Brighteyes had promised to take care of her. Now she was very ill, and the landlady threatened to turn her out of her rooms because she couldn't raise the rent. Surely Brighteyes, whose father was "a blooming lord and all that," wouldn't let her down after all his love-making, and his promises, and his fine sentiments, unless he was a cad, like some of the other boys she had known, who would take all they could from a girl and then leave

her in the lurch and let her starve to death, while they pretended to be so virtuous with their mothers and sisters. She had found out Paul's address one day from Brighteyes, and she was sending the letter to him because she knew that he was Evesham's best friend, and might persuade him to help her, as he ought to do. . . . There was a postscript, which is the only part of the letter I remember word by word.

"Oh, my dear sir, for the love of God tell Brighteyes to be kind to me. I'm not a good girl, but I played fair by him, and now I want him to play fair by me."

It was signed "Evelyn Eversley."

This letter was in a big schoolgirl scrawl, ill spelt and full of blots. I confess it filled me with rage against Hugh Evesham.

"Scoundrel!" I said. "Hypocrite and skunk!"

Paul adopted a man-of-the-world attitude which was rather impressive.

"Don't sentimentalise too quickly, young feller. It may be a case of blackmail. In any case, we're not all saints living in stained glass windows. Supposing it's true—and we don't know—the worst charge against Hugh is not sending the girl some money and refusing to answer her letters. That's the meanest thing I've heard. Unbelievable!"

"Abominable!" I said. "Swine of swine!"

Paul tattooed on the window-pane and stared at the chimney-pots on the Fleet Street horizon.

"The point is," he remarked gloomily, "what am I going to do about it? Put it up to Hugh, of course. That's only fair, though deuced unpleasant. But what about Kitty? If I tell her, it'll smash her beautiful ideal and all that. You know what women are—especially Kitty! It'll knock her edgewise. The way she idolises that fellow is enough to frighten a hunk of human clay like me. One can't live up to that sort of thing. On the other hand, if I don't tell her, she may find out one day, and then there'll be the devil to pay. Broken hearts and that kind of thing. . . . Very awkward!"

My advice was to get to the truth of the thing first, and, if Evesham admitted it, to tell Katherine before it was too late. But I jibbed when Paul asked me to do the job myself, as a friend of Evesham's and a pal of Kitty's.

"You've got such a bedside manner," he said. "Kitty would take it much better from you than from me. I just blurt out things and lose my temper. It's quite likely that I'll have a row with Evesham, and break his beautiful nose or something."

Needless to say, I refused a mission which was essentially his, and I wasn't worrying about Evesham's nose. But I felt desperately sorry for Katherine. She

had given her heart to Evesham, and believed him to be a white knight, *sans peur et sans reproche*, the Bayard of her dreams. I hated to think of her disillusion, her anguish, the killing of the laughter in her eyes.

Then Hugh Evesham came into my room. It was about a poem of his which he thought I might help him to get published, because of my connections in Fleet Street.

I remember him as he stood in that room of mine in the old publishing house of Carvell & Bliss, so splendid in contrast to its squalor, and, anyhow, as he put his top hat down on a dusty table by the door and pulled off his lavender-coloured gloves. He wore a black morning coat with a white slip, and “peg top” trousers, as the fashion then was, with black and white stripes, over patent-leather boots. His tall and elegant figure, his smiling blue eyes, that little fair moustache of his, made me feel shabbier than I was, and utterly insignificant.

He saw at once that something was the matter with us. We both stood awkwardly, as though caught out in some guilty secret.

“Anything wrong?” he asked carelessly. “You two lads look as though you’d seen the ghost of Hamlet’s father. ‘How now, Horatio? You tremble and look pale!’ ”

Paul Lambert took the crumpled letter from my desk and held it out to Evesham.

“Better read this,” he said. “All rot, of course, but only fair to show you.”

Evesham’s colour changed just a little as he read the letter, or, rather, glanced through it impatiently. Something of the gay confidence with which he had greeted us faded out of his eyes, and for a moment he was distressed—and afraid. Then he laughed uneasily.

“Yes,” he said, “these little things will happen! Always annoying.”

I looked at Paul, who was staring at the floor. It seemed a long moment before he spoke—coldly.

“Then you admit its truth?”

Hugh Evesham flicked the letter on to the table and laughed again.

“Oh, lord, yes! Poor little Evelyn! I met her at a Covent Garden ball. She amused me at the time. You know how these things happen. A glamour of lights—a girl’s ‘Come hither!’—the heady wine of youth—and then the twinge of conscience. Lamentable!”

Paul glanced at him sheepishly before answering.

“Yes,” he said, “I know all that. And I’m not a prig or anything. But in this case it rather looks—well, it doesn’t look as if you’d played the game altogether, if you see what I mean. As if you didn’t care a damn. Not answering her letters or sending her money, when she wants it—badly, I should say.”

Evesham thought it was a mistake to answer letters from girls like that. Far better not to, in his opinion. It was always unsafe. They cropped up afterwards. That was why he hadn't even read her last letters. Just let them drop into the fire. Of course he would send the child something, now that he knew she was in need. He had had no idea about that.

Paul nodded, and there was a moment's silence between us, until he spoke again, rather grimly.

"Isn't it a bit awkward about Kitty?"

Hugh Evesham thought this question out, and I could see that he became rather pale.

"In what way?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Well," said Paul, "she thinks you no end of an idealist and all that. A lily-white soul, and so forth. If she happened to find out——"

Evesham drew a deep breath and answered with emotion.

"She mustn't find out! I suppose I can trust to the honour of you two lads? There's a certain code among gentlemen——"

"Yes, among gentlemen," agreed Paul, with a cruel emphasis on the last word.

Suddenly he spoke fiercely, and rose with his fists clenched.

"Look here, Evesham, it's no good pretending to take this thing lightly. You've been behaving in a blackguard way to my sister, who believes in you. Why, this girl says you were seeing her until a few weeks ago. You've been engaged to Kitty since then. Keeping them both on at once. Good God, man!"

Evesham's face flushed painfully.

"It was terribly awkward," he said. "I couldn't shake her off. She's one of those little sluts——"

He became dramatic for a moment, and his voice trembled.

"I adore Katherine! I wouldn't dishonour her for the world. Of course, I'm not worthy to touch her hand—no man is—but I swear to heaven this affair wasn't so bad as it looks. And I want to bury it, and start afresh, and live up to my own ideals."

"Damn your ideals!" said Paul. "If you hadn't talked such high-flown stuff——"

"Sincerely!" said Evesham. "I want you to believe that. We all have dual natures. I want to live up to my father's name. I'd rather die than be unfaithful to Katherine. Surely you're old enough to understand that one slip doesn't write a man down for ever. I played the giddy goat, got caught, and now all that's over and done with."

"I'm not sure," said Paul sullenly. "You've rotted up my confidence. I thought you were better than the rest of us."

Evesham pleaded with him, and, after a painful scene, left with all his

jauntiness gone, pale to the lips.

When he had gone, Paul and I decided not to tell Katherine. That reference to our honour had rather caught us out, and we were very young, though we pretended to talk like men of the world. We agreed that a man like Evesham, or anyone else, might get into a terrible scrape with a girl without being altogether rotten. If Evesham hadn't posed as such an exalted soul it would have been easier to forgive. . . .

Well, it was Katherine herself who found out that her lover was not such an idealist as she had fondly believed.

By a very great mischance for Hugh Evesham, the father of that girl who had written to Paul—Evelyn Eversley, as she had called herself at the Palace, though her real name was Polly Hart—was a carpenter in the Mile End Road who attended some of the lectures at Romilly Hall. He had had “no truck” with his girl since she had taken to wild ways, but now a desperate letter from her took him to her poor little room in the Pimlico Road, where she had been “took bad,” as he told Canon Lambert one night. Katherine was sent round to see her as she lay dying of consumption, and on the mantelpiece, draped with torn lace, was the photograph of a smiling young man, who had written across his portrait, “To dear little Evelyn, from her loving Brighteyes.” . . .

Paul was right in saying that Katherine would be “knocked edgewise.” I became frightened by the look in her eyes for a time. It was as though she had seen something rather dreadful, changing her view of life. . . . It was, remember, in 1894, when, perhaps, romantic love was more idealistic than is common nowadays, when young women have a shrewder knowledge of human nature, less illusion about life, a closer comradeship with their lovers. Perhaps they may have gained more than they have lost. Their hearts are not broken so easily by unfortunate love-affairs, and, though there is less romance, there is also less tragedy and less hypocrisy. I don't know! . . . But to Katherine it was a horrible shock of revelation that the exquisite Evesham, whom she believed to be a spotless soul, with the most beautiful and delicate instincts, should have been carrying on this squalid love-affair until a few weeks before his first kiss had thrilled her with a sense of ecstasy. I think it frightened her as well as angered her. She was frightened then, and afterwards, of Hugh Evesham's physical beauty, and the lure that he had. She was afraid of surrendering her soul to a man unworthy of all that she believed to be good and noble.

Looking back on that episode of Katherine's early life, I feel sorry for Hugh Evesham, and I'm glad that I tried to put in a word for him. He suffered an agony of remorse, as I know, and there was a dreadful scene between him and Katherine when she broke her engagement. He crumpled up badly, as Paul saw when Evesham left their house for the last time with tears in his eyes.

He went abroad for a few years, to Lord Evesham's Canadian estates, and when he came back again, bronzed, harder looking, as handsome as ever, Katherine was the mother of Michael.

I WAS at Romilly Hall the night Prince Detloff gave an address on the “Dawn of Liberty in Russia.” It was a year after Evesham had gone away to Canada, and three months after Paul had married my youngest and silliest sister, poor dear! Evelyn had written her first novel, shocking my father to his inmost soul because of its alarming audacity—it would be regarded nowadays as innocent and old-fashioned stuff—and the beautiful Beatrice was engaged to a young man in Coutts’s Bank who was very highly connected, she said. I had left the publishing office of Carvell & Bliss—hating the drudgery—and was a free-lance journalist and short-story writer, helping to wear out the pavement of Fleet Street and earning odd guineas now and then, but not often.

It was as a journalist that I went that night to Romilly Hall. That is to say, I had to make a brief report of Detloff’s speech for a Socialist weekly whose editor was a friend of mine and a fellow-member of the Fabians. It was my first assignment of the kind, and I felt absurdly embarrassed and self-conscious because I had to take my seat at the reporters’ table in full view of Katherine, Paul, and my sister Clare, who sat in the front row of chairs between Canon and Mrs. Lambert.

They greeted me with smiling eyes, and Paul was vastly amused.

Throughout the lecture I kept glancing at Katherine, whom I did not see so often now. The affair with Hugh Evesham had somehow altered her. She looked less girlish, more beautiful, I thought, and farther removed from my boyish adoration. I could see that she was deeply interested in a lecture that seemed to me very dull and dreary, and she kept her eyes on the speaker, as though absorbed in what he had to say.

This Russian professor was a man of middle-age, though at that time I should have described him as an old fogey, after a glance at his haggard, thought-lined face. He was shabbily dressed in a frock coat very shiny at the elbows and creased at the skirt, over trousers that bagged below the knee. He wore false cuffs, I remember, and in a moment of eloquence one of them became unfastened, and shot over his wrist, to the great amusement of Paul, who winked at me and gave an audible guffaw. He had a black beard, and his hair, thin on top, was untidy, so that a lock fell over his right forehead. His hands were long and thin and delicate, but neither as a Russian Prince nor as a Professor of Philology at King’s College was he an ornamental figure. Yet he had an air of dignity, and there was both humour and humanity in those deep-set eyes of his.

For some reason I kept the notes I made—perhaps because it was my first

effort at reporting—and, looking over them again after all these years, I see that he told his working-class audience of the utter denial of liberty in Russia under the Romanoffs, and described the miseries of the serfs before their liberation in 1862, and the brutal condition under which the peasantry still lived. Then he gave a series of stories about the men and women who were fighting against the tyranny of a mediæval system so that the Russian people might have some share in their own government, liberty of speech, elementary education, and opportunities of social progress. They were friends of his, he said, these courageous workers. Some of them were his old schoolfellows. They were aristocrats, professors, poets, painters, women of noble birth, girl students, peasant women—the finest types of Russian character and intellect. And they were imprisoned, flogged, tortured, and outraged for no other crime than spreading liberal ideas and denouncing tyranny.

They were going into the fields and factories, disguised as working-folk, to preach ideas of liberty among the people and teach them to read and write. But the secret police routed them out, some of the peasants betrayed them, and they were sent to the living death of the Siberian mines, or kept in solitary confinement in the Schlüsselburg, or the fortress of Peter and Paul, until they went mad, or died, or committed suicide. One girl had cut her throat with a pair of rusty scissors. A young poet, his dearest friend, had beaten out his brains against the prison wall. Another had soaked his mattress in paraffin and burnt himself alive. One beautiful girl—Yakinova—was torn from her young husband because she protested against an outrage on a peasant girl, and, with her four months' old baby, was put in a cell where rats tried to devour her child.

"I do not speak all these things from hearsay," said Prince Detloff. "As a young man I was arrested for writing an article on liberty which displeased the Governor of Moscow. I was taken to the fortress of the Schlüsselburg, fifty *versts* from St. Petersburg, on the island of Lake Ladoga. It was in 1887, when I was a beardless boy with a love of life. Of my fellow-prisoners—sentenced for a revolutionary conspiracy—thirteen were executed, three committed suicide, and sixteen died insane."

He spoke of the freedom in England, the splendour and justice to our constitutional government, and appealed to English democracy to give their sympathy, at least, to their oppressed brothers and sisters in Russia, where liberty was only a dream in the hearts of idealists.

"It is a dream," he said, "that one day will be gloriously fulfilled. It is a dream which is with me, waking or sleeping, because of the agonies of the people whom I love, and from whom I am exiled—the patient, long-suffering, great-hearted, simple-souled Russian race."

As a convinced pacifist, he was not in favour of revolution by violence,

and believed that the liberation of Russia would be accomplished by the spirit of sacrifice, by the education of the masses, and, above all, by the love and humanity which were spreading among the peoples of the world. "Where love is," he said, quoting Tolstoy, "there God is also."

I saw the ardent sympathy in Katherine's eyes as she looked up at the gaunt figure on the platform. Perhaps he saw it too, that evening, and felt the coldness of his life warmed suddenly by the glowing light of that girl with her slim beauty. They had a long talk after the general discussion, which was led by Canon Lambert, who paid tribute to the "noble patriotism" of their distinguished guest, and deplored the agony of Russia, which he contrasted with

Liberty, the chartered right of Englishmen,
Won by our fathers in many a glorious field.

From Paul I heard that Katherine was attending some of Detloff's lectures at King's College, and then one day he blurted out the astounding news that she was going to marry him.

"It's a case of Svengali!" said Paul, laughing uneasily. "The fellow's mesmerised her."

He put his hand on my arm, and said: "Don't take it to heart so much. She knows her own mind. And, after all, he's a Russian prince, though he looks like a tramp. Fairly respectable, I mean."

"It's impossible!" I cried. "Katherine and that old ruffian? It's a crime. It's horrible! Surely Canon Lambert and your mother won't allow it, Paul?"

Paul grinned, and didn't seem to think there was much hope in that quarter.

"The mater is rather taken with the idea of having a prince in the family. As for the governor, he says that Kitty's old enough to choose for herself, and that old Bluebeard—that's my name for him—is one of the noblest men alive. You know my old governor! Always ready to avoid a row and make the best of everything. You had better speak to Katherine yourself. She thinks a lot of you, old man. Never lost faith in *your* idealism!"

I answered as Paul had once spoken to Hugh Evesham.

"Damn my idealism!"

But that night when Katherine came to supper, looking very shy when my father made a flowery allusion to her engagement and hoped that she would be as happy as she made other people by her grace and charm—Beatrice spoilt this rhetoric by laughing in the middle of it—I made some excuse to take her into the billiard-room, so that I might be alone with her while the others were playing whist.

"Katherine!" I said, "For God's sake——"

She knew my meaning, and did not pretend otherwise.

"I shall be very happy. He's wonderfully good and kind, and he worships the ground under my feet! It's time he had some joy in life."

"Yes, but you," I said. "You! Where does your joy come in? An old man like that——"

Katherine laughed in her low-toned voice.

"Not so old, Gilbert! Forty-three. A good marrying age! Past the follies of youth. I shall be safe with him."

"One doesn't marry for safety," I told her bitterly. "One marries for love. Marriage without love is hell. Katherine, I implore you——"

She put her hand on my sleeve and smiled at my emotional appeal.

"I haven't said I don't love him! I do. I love and respect him, and perhaps respect lasts longest."

I made rather a fool of myself then, and prattled about my own love, and even had tears in my eyes. And then I said I'd rather she married Hugh Evesham than throw herself away on an old scarecrow like Detloff.

At Hugh Evesham's name she turned rather pale, but spoke without anger.

"It was that affair which makes it easier to marry an older man. One who has proved himself. Serge has led a life of self-sacrifice. He won't deceive me. Think how unhappy I should have been if I had married Hugh, and then found out!"

She raised my hand to her lips and kissed it, and said: "Don't be miserable for my sake! I've had a lucky escape, and now I'm going to be happy—and safe."

It was that word "safe" which she repeated as though it meant much to her. I know now that she wanted safety from the temptation of Hugh Evesham, of which she was afraid, though he was so far away. It was what the modern psychoanalysts call a "complex," in their ridiculous jargon.

Katherine was married to Serge Detloff on a rainy day in November—at the Brompton Oratory, as her Russian was a Catholic. Canon Lambert was present, and gave his daughter away, much to the scandal of his Bishop, though his own views were so "broad" that he would have gone just as willingly to a Jewish synagogue or a Mohammedan mosque. Evelyn and Beatrice were bridesmaids, in dresses which would frighten the modern "flapper," though they no doubt impressed the crowd outside the church as the last word in loveliness and fashion. Paul was persuaded to wear a "topper" for the occasion, and sat on it in church, to the consternation of Clare and his own hilarious amusement.

My father wore a gardenia in his buttonhole, and his romantic heart was touched by the beauty of the bride, whom he kissed after the ceremony with the style and chivalry of Don Quixote. My mother wept a little, as she always did at weddings, knowing, no doubt, the anxieties of motherhood, and the great

risk, anyhow. Katherine's Russian was, for once, well dressed, in a brand-new frock coat, and the church was filled with his fellow exiles and admiring students, who threw confetti at him as he came out, and kissed him—at least, the Russians did—on both cheeks.

I saw nothing of all that. I was plugging along somewhere between Shaftesbury Avenue and Hampstead, wet through, splashed with mud, with anguish in my heart, with miserable self-pity, and rage against life, and no hope ahead. I was very young and sensitive! Since then I have learnt to smile at life, and steel myself to inevitable tragedies. It doesn't do to expect very much, and self-pity is the worst weakness.

*La vie est vaine;
Un peu d'amour.
Un peu de haine,
Et puis—bonjour!*

*La vie est brève;
Un peu d'espoir,
Un peu de rêve,
Et puis—bonsoir!*

When I saw Katherine and her husband three months after their marriage—a letter from her broke down my silly shyness at meeting her again—they seemed perfectly happy, though desperately poor. The humour had come back into Katherine's candid eyes. She laughed easily, as in the old days before the episode with Hugh. She was glad to see me again, and bullied me a little for staying away so long. And her bearded Russian was so cordial and simple and friendly, that I forgot to hate him, and became one of his devotees.

They lived somewhere in Brixton at first, because it was cheap and Detloff could get up easily to King's College in the Strand. I saw him going in there sometimes, still in his shiny frock coat, but cleaner and neater with regard to his linen—that was Katherine's handiwork—and with his beard cut to a rakish shape. There was the glint of happiness in his eyes. He walked with a brisker step, and looked ten years younger.

Afterwards they moved to a house in South Kensington. That was when one of Katherine's aunts died—a sister of the obscure peer in the family—and left her three hundred a year. It was in the larger house in the Cromwell Road that Michael uttered his first cry in a world which was devising merry tortures for the youth that happened to be born about that time.

VI

SERGE DETLOFF never used the title of "Prince," though it was still given to him by some of his Russian friends, and Katherine was always known in England as Mrs. Detloff.

Her house in South Kensington was a rendezvous for amusing and eccentric characters who came to see her husband, rather alarming at times to conventional young men, her old admirers, now establishing their careers in Harley Street, the Temple, and other highways of professional youth. I was one of those who took tea with her sometimes, and more than once I fancied that the glamour of hero-worship had worn off a little in regard to her husband. That was inevitable. She treated him as a private joke to test her sense of humour, which came back as the remembrance of Hugh Evesham faded. Not that she regretted her marriage with any passionate self-pity. On the contrary they were good comrades, extremely attached to one another, and it was pleasant to see the courtesy and chivalry of Detloff to his young wife. I noticed that he kissed her hand in the Russian style whenever they met or parted, and was always tenderly attentive to her.

But he must have been a trial to her sometimes because of his slovenly habits and absentmindedness. His ink-stained fingers and disordered hair were a strange contrast to the daintiness of Katherine. He spilt his food down the front of his frock coat when excited conversationally on the subject of Liberty, or the relation of the ancient Egyptian language to Arabic and Hebrew, or the influence of Dostoievsky on European literature. He suffered her rebukes as meekly as a child, with a smiling contrition in his luminous eyes, but his untidiness was incurable.

His study upstairs was a horror, according to Katherine, and often when I went there to listen to his conversation, which was always illuminating, and rather thrilling to a young man like me, the room was littered with papers as though a gale had blown them about. He could seldom find his pens, tobacco-pouch, or foulest and best beloved pipe without a prolonged search and agonised complaints that the servants had been "tidying up" again. He needed careful watching from Katherine, lest he should plunge forth to King's College without a hat, or with his boots unlaced, or with crumbs on his beard after a hurried breakfast. There must have been times when Katherine, so sensitive and delicate, was distressed by her husband's lofty indifference to personal appearance. And yet she loved and respected him, I know, for his real nobility of soul, his humane outlook on life, his warm-hearted pity for all suffering people, his adoration of her.

It was those qualities, and the remembrance of what he had suffered as a young man in the cause of Russian liberty, which brought a continual succession of visitors to the house in Cromwell Road. Young English authors came to pay their homage, eager to listen to his ideals and hopes for the progress of mankind. Peace propagandists came to enlist his name on their committees. Russian exiles, newly escaped from Siberia, shabbier than himself, less familiar with brush and comb, haggard and hollow-eyed, rang at the front door bell, after cold scrutiny from the watchful eyes of the policeman on point duty.

They were the professors, poets, painters, and patriots of Czarist Russia, exiled for conscience sake, and inspired with the dream of liberty for which they were ready to dare all things and suffer all things. They all seemed heroes to me then, but I fancy now that some of them must have been rather desperate fellows, ready to be as cruel to their political opponents as the Czarist police. The majority, however, were the intellectual liberals whose idealism seemed ridiculous to a later type of revolutionary.

Before Michael came, Katherine used to listen to the conversations of these men with her husband, learning Russian, excited by pity and indignation because of their sufferings, and identifying herself with her husband's passionate hopes for the future liberty of his people. But she never lost her humour, nor her abiding common sense. When Michael was born, giving her a new interest and purpose in life, she used to listen from afar to all that talk, and smile at any visitor who might be astonished by all the uproar in Detloff's study.

"Dreamers!" she said to me one day. "Hark at them! All with different ideas about the Ideal State, all at sixes and sevens about the meaning of Liberty, all ready to talk for ever and ever and ever! Meanwhile, I've got to give Michael his tub."

Paul, now a serious bacteriologist at the Pasteur Institute, used to breeze in at tea-time pretty often, with or without Clare, who was beginning to think that bacteriology was a dreadful bore and wished Paul would become a fashionable doctor in Harley Street, so that she might wear pretty frocks and live a decent sort of life instead of having to "smug" in Prince of Wales Mansions, Battersea Park. Perhaps that is why Paul came alone as a rule to tea with Katherine. She showed an intelligent interest in his work, and believed in his genius.

He had quite reconciled himself to her marriage, and was great friends with "old Bluebeard," as he called Serge Detloff, though he never ceased to chaff Katherine about her choice. He would enquire after her husband as "that old anarchist of yours," or ask with a roar of laughter whether the Prince still wore false cuffs.

The arrival of Michael appeared to him as the crowning joke.

“Good old Bluebeard! Who’d have thought it?”

But he prophesied dire things to tease his sister.

“That kid of yours is going to be a peck of trouble later on, if I know anything about natural selection or the laws of heredity. Slav melancholy and English sentiment, Russian passion and British cussedness, the Volga and the Thames, with their blood and mud. Poor little devil.”

Those words scared Katherine, though she pretended to laugh them off. She was already perturbed by the unusual character of her infant son, who, at four years of age—how quickly time passed!—had developed a passionate temper, in spite of adorable sweetness which made it so hard to punish him after evil deeds. What made things more difficult was the aversion of the boy’s father to any form of physical punishment, so that Katherine had to spank her rebel privately, and even then his howls would reveal her severity to her Tolstoyan husband, who suffered far more than the small boy and gazed at Katherine with reproachful eyes, as though she had been guilty of inhuman cruelty. He spoilt his son, or tried to, with inordinate affection, and Russian exiles calling to visit their champion in England, or elderly professors desiring to consult the great authority on the history of language, were amazed to discover him playing bears under the dining-room table, or pretending to be a railway train in that untidy study upstairs.

It was when Michael was four years old that Hugh Evesham came home from Canada. He called first of all on Paul, who was very much impressed by his change of manner, and abandonment of the affected pose which he had adopted as a younger man. He enquired after Katherine, and hoped she was happy in her married life, of which he had heard out in the wilds.

“Has she forgiven me?” he asked. “I should like to think so.”

It was characteristic of Paul—the most tactless fellow in the world—that, without consulting Katherine or giving her any warning, he should have brought round Evesham to tea that day. I happened to be there, as I often was, grateful for the open hospitality of Katherine and her husband. I was also by way of being playmate-in-ordinary to the young Michael, with whom I was on excellent terms. To this day I remember that moment when the door opened noisily and Paul announced:

“An old friend to see you, Kitty!”

A piano-organ was playing in the street “Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do!” and a muffin man was ringing his bell from house to house. We had heard the sound of a hansom cab driving up to the front door and stopping with a slither of hoofs on the asphalt pavement, and Katherine had said, “There’s a visitor, and the tea’s cold!”

Then Paul came in with Hugh Evesham.

She had risen from her chair at the table, and at the sight of the man who

had been her lover, all the colour faded from her face and then ebbed back with a vivid and painful blush. For a moment there was silence between them, and just for that moment, but no more, there was a look of longing and regret in Hugh Evesham's eyes. I think Katherine's beauty, more mature than when he had known her last, unsteadied him for that second. Then he spoke a few words in a natural, unaffected way.

"You'll forgive me for accepting Paul's invitation to come along here? I seem to have been away a thousand years! It's splendid to see old friends again."

"I'm afraid the tea's cold," said Katherine. "I'll ring for some more."

She was very nervous for a little while, but Paul's heartiness, and Hugh Evesham's quiet talk about his experiences in Canada, put her outwardly at ease. I noticed that her eyes never rested on Evesham's face, but flitted past him when he talked to her. Once, when I passed her something I touched her hand and knew it was cold.

Presently the nurse brought down young Michael, who was remarkably well behaved for once and was seized with an immediate affection for Evesham.

"Why have you got such blue eyes," he asked in his candid way.

"Can't help it," said Evesham, laughing. "I was born like that."

"My father's eyes are black," said Michael. "That's because he's a Russian. My mother's eyes are blue like yours, but not so tremendously blue. Have you got a little boy like me?"

"No," said Evesham. "I'm a bachelor."

"What's a bachelor?" asked Michael. "Is that the same thing as an exile?"

Even at that early age he was familiar with exiles, those queer people who made such a noise in his father's study, and interrupted games of bears and things, and taught him to speak Russian.

"Very much the same thing," said Evesham, with a laugh and a sigh.

It was unfortunate, but almost inevitable, that young Michael should have led the conversation in that direction. He had a special genius for embarrassing questions, beyond even the unusual quality of his age. Fortunately the Professor came downstairs, and Michael's interest was diverted from Evesham to his chief favourite, at whom he made a rush with a demand for a game of engines. It was the first time Detloff had met Evesham, though he had heard all about him, and for a moment he was startled by his presence. After that he held out his hand very cordially and hoped he would come to lunch one day.

It was unfortunate, that return of Evesham. Looking back upon it, I can see now that Katherine wished to be broadminded, and generous, and forgiving,

and felt herself safeguarded by her marriage and her small boy. And I believe also that Hugh Evesham had no evil intent in his heart when he saw more of Katherine than was good for himself or her. He, too, believed that there was no danger in meeting her at every opportunity, now that she was a married woman with a middle-aged husband. It was little Michael who was partly responsible for this renewed intimacy. He developed a passionate affection for Evesham, after a casual meeting in Kensington Gardens, when they had a wonderful game of Red Indians. Evesham bought him an expensive yacht and taught him how to sail it on the Round Pond, and once, with great heroism, rescued it when it was becalmed a few yards from shore, by stepping into the water, regardless of his patent-leather boots, and grappling it with a crooked stick.

"I like the man with the blue eyes," he told his mother. "I want him to play with me. I like him nearly as much as my rocking-horse."

As he liked his rocking-horse more than anything in the world, it was an expression of high esteem.

I spoke to Paul about the matter.

"Isn't it rather a mistake for Evesham to see so much of Katherine? Anybody can see he's still in love with her, poor devil!"

Paul laughed in his careless, tolerant way, and accused me of being a cankered soul with poisonous ideas.

"One can't write a man off for ever because he makes a *gaffe* in his green youth. Hugh seems to me one of the best, now that he's purged himself of that æsthetic pose which used to make me feel sick. Kitty can take care of herself, I guess. You're not suggesting that she's an unfaithful wife, or anything like that, I hope?"

"Nothing at all like that," I answered hotly, "and I don't know why the deuce you should say such outrageous things."

And yet my uneasiness was justified. Hugh Evesham discovered one day that there could be no friendship between him and Katherine, because he loved her with a passion that broke down all his self-control.

For some time Katherine had become frightened of this friendship. I could see it as clearly as though I could read her mind like an open book. At tea one day, when Evesham was there, she gave herself away when I said good-bye and told her I had to rush off to the office. Evesham had little Michael on his knees and was telling him about the animals in his picture book. She spoke to me in a low voice.

"Won't you stay? Please!"

There was something in her eyes, a look of appeal, which scared me a little. I stayed on, missing an important bit of work, until Evesham rose reluctantly, and, with a hostile glance at me, said he must be going, as he was dining out.

"No, you mustn't go, Mr. Man!" cried Michael. "I want you to tell me about Red Indians."

"Another time, old lad," said Evesham.

He spoke to Katherine while Michael clung to his legs and refused to let him go.

"Won't you let me take you and Michael to the Zoo to-morrow? We could give this youngster a great time!"

"Not to-morrow," said Katherine.

Michael announced that he wanted to go to-morrow. If she wouldn't let him go to-morrow he would think out the baddest things he could do. He would tear Nurse's cap off and throw his sponge out of the bath.

"Not to-morrow," said Katherine firmly.

"Wednesday, then?" asked Evesham, with his winning smile, as he stroked his little fair moustache.

Katherine found that Wednesday would not suit her either. She had to make some calls.

"Some other day," she said nervously. "Let's leave it open."

I saw a look of dejection overshadow Evesham's smile.

"Some other day is so far off!" he said. "It would be such a treat for little Michael—and me! I'd love to take you both."

Little Michael made a disgraceful scene at this postponement of his treat, and I was surprised to see Katherine smack him smartly, with a sudden loss of patience. He was equally surprised, and after one gasp, preliminary to the intention of giving a mighty howl, stood quite quiet, looking at his mother in absolute bewilderment, which made us all laugh.

"I'll tell Father," said Michael gloomily. "He doesn't allow me to be knocked about like that. He's a pacifist, like me."

Katherine put her arms about this conscientious objector and pressed his curly head against her side.

"You're an old-fashioned little monkey," she said, and did not look at Evesham when she held out her hand and said good-bye. Nor did she refer to that whispered word which had kept me from my office and an urgent job.

But a week or two later, when I met her in Kensington Gardens, she suddenly began to cry, as I sat beside her on a seat under the old tree beyond the Round Pond, where Michael was sailing his boat. I was very much distressed, as may be imagined, especially when she became a little hysterical, trying to check her tears with her handkerchief to her eyes. . . . I see her now, in that old-fashioned dress of hers, wasp-waisted, with a little flat straw hat on her high crown of hair, ridiculous as we see such things in fashion pictures of that time, but then beautiful to me.

Presently she spoke to me about Hugh Evesham.

"I can't bear it," she said. "He's terribly in love with me, and I—I'm afraid. What will my husband think? He's so simple and so loyal that he likes me to have companionship with younger men than himself. An old bore, he calls himself, dear heart."

She thought a little, with her eyes still moist with tears.

"Can't you speak to him?" she asked presently.

I was puzzled, and asked, "Who? Your husband?"

She said, "No—Hugh. Tell him that he mustn't see me. There's no use in it. It's only—exciting—and bad. He ought to go away again. Paul only laughs at me."

She said something then that startled me and made me afraid.

"I ought to have married Hugh in spite of what happened. We were meant for each other, I suppose. That's why it's all so—dangerous."

"Frightfully!" I said in a low voice. I was still hardly more than a boy, but I saw the extremity of her danger, the reason of her fear.

That very night I went round to Evesham's rooms. He had come in from the theatre and looked splendid in his evening clothes, as he always did. He was surprised to see me at that late hour, but greeted me civilly with a "Hullo, young fellow! Want a drink?"

I told him I wanted to talk about Katherine. I had a message from her.

His face lighted up, and I felt sorry for him.

"Is she coming to that show with me to-morrow?" he asked.

I told him that Katherine didn't want to go to any show with him. She wanted him to go away and leave her in peace, and never see her again.

"And if you'll take my advice, Evesham," I said, "you'll clear out as soon as possible, for your own sake as well as hers. If you want to play the game, I mean."

"What the hell are you talking about?" he said fiercely.

For some time he was angry and passionate. He called me a dirty little cad for suggesting that he had anything but the most respectful regard for Katherine. Surely to heaven it was possible for friendship to exist between a married woman and a fellow like himself, without all the curs of London snarling round them? He had a jolly good mind to chuck me downstairs. Then suddenly he dropped all that, and strode about his room, uttering little groans and cries and presently leaned up against the wall with his hands clasped above his head, and sobbed in a broken way.

I was stricken with pity and embarrassment. I had seen Katherine weeping because of this man. Now he was in his agony.

"It's perfectly true," he said presently, when he had recovered his control. "Friendship is no use to me. It's cursed hypocrisy. She belongs to me, and I to her. That damned old man of hers——"

He was silent for some time after that, sitting in a chair by the table with his head down on his arms.

"I shall have to think it out," he said at last. "It can't go on like this."

Something helped him to think straight, at least as far as Katherine was concerned.

It was a chapter of English history of which I saw the beginning outside the Guildhall when the Lord Mayor called for three cheers for the Queen, and then three more, on the declaration of war with the Boer Republics, who had "grossly insulted, provoked, and attacked Her Majesty's loyal and faithful subjects in Her Majesty's South African Dominions."

It was the first time I saw the fever of war take possession of the English people, and at the time, like most Liberals in England, young as I was, I was hostile to its spirit and purpose, believing that the Boers had a perfect right to their independence, and sympathising with the "little peoples," who would be smashed to pieces, as we thought, in three weeks, by the armed might of the British Empire. Had I not attended the lectures at Romilly Hall, and pledged my faith to Liberty? Was I not a disciple of Serge Detloff? And yet, so strong is the thrill of war calling to old tribal instincts, that, in that mob of top-hatted young men outside the Guildhall that day, I found myself yelling hoarsely with them, until suddenly I was ashamed of this betrayal of my own convictions and slunk away.

I remember that old London of the Boer War days, through which I wandered as a young man, "torn by conflicting emotions," as my fellow-journalists used to say, carried in the human tides cheering down the Strand, watching the march past of troops ordered to the front, listening to patriotic recitations in the music-halls—the frightful repetition of Kipling's "Pay, Pay, Pay!"—with flags unfurled, bands blaring the National Anthem, young men shouting wildly, girls laughing and screaming in shrill ecstasy. Something broke loose in the English spirit at this fag end of Queen Victoria's reign, with its long years of peace—except for little wars on far-off frontiers—its dull respectability, its lack of adventure in suburban life. In the voice of the crowds yelling against the "dirty Boers" there was a note I had never heard before. It was the rising of old primitive passions, the call to the brute in us, and, at its best and highest, the old romance of the fighting spirit. A wave of Imperialism, intolerance, self-conscious patriotism, overwhelmed City clerks, shop-girls, elderly women, working men, most of my own set, my father and sisters. They "killed Kruger with their mouths."

It was a crowd which filled Trafalgar Square, where the recruiting sergeants were busy, that I came face to face with Hugh Evesham. He greeted me with a friendly smile, and said:

"I'm off on Monday! A commission in the C.I.V. My governor worked it

for me. Thank God for the jolly old war!”

He took off his hat, and shouted “Hooray!” with the rest of the mob which was cheering a patriotic speaker on the plinth of Nelson’s Column.

He was badly wounded on some kopje in the Transvaal, some time after Magersfontein and that Black Week which shocked us to the heart because of the list of casualties. It seemed so long, in those days before another war, with its endless columns in small type. “South Africa was a picnic!” said the soldiers of a later day. But women wept, just the same, for those who fell.

VII

I WENT abroad a good deal—France, Germany, Italy—and lost what Paul had called my “lily-white soul,” or at least the simplicity of youth, by seeing too closely behind the scenes of passing history, and observing the falsity, corruption, and stupidity of people in high—and low—places. But I developed a sense of humour, made many good friends, wrote some extraordinarily bad short stories, learnt to know the cheapest restaurants in Paris, had several mild love-affairs which came to nothing, and returned to London from time to time with a sense of strangeness which wore off rapidly after one night in my old home or a walk down Piccadilly.

I was aware at these homecomings of slight, almost imperceptible changes among my family and friends. My mother’s hair was getting grey. My father had lost a little of his old flamboyance, and was occasionally rather querulous. His distrust of old Gladstone, and his contempt for Campbell Bannerman, had changed to a hatred of Lloyd George. He smelled the smouldering of revolution in England. Beatrice was getting fat, and had three plump babies, and adored her husband in Coutts’s Bank—Hubert Glyn—who was also a major in the Honourable Artillery Company and an imperialist of the Kipling school of thought—which was going out of fashion. Evelyn, married to the Reverend James Abercrombie Smythe, curate of St. Peter’s Hanover Square, was writing sensational stories for the *Woman’s World*, and moving in the very highest circles of Belgravia and Mayfair, where her husband was regarded as a “dear man” with High Church views and an inside knowledge of sporting tips.

It was to Katherine’s house that I always turned after my trips abroad, not to renew that boyish love-affair of mine which had belonged to the time of my growing-pains, but sure of finding the same understanding friendship, sympathy of ideas, and warmth of heart which seemed to me the ideal of womanhood. It is impossible to convey this character of Katherine to those who did not know her. She was not clever or brilliant, only wise and kind. She was not beautiful, though I have called her so, but she had the effect of beauty because of some spiritual touch. She did not talk much, or vivaciously, or possess any unusual talents, except, perhaps, her musical gift, but she was wonderfully good company, even when she was almost silent through a long evening, letting other people do the talking—me, especially, I’m afraid!—while she did her needlework, listening with a smile about her lips, or putting down her work for a moment with a quick sigh at some tale of tragedy, or shaking her head with a look of incredulity or disagreement or amusement at some wild flight of fancy by one of the hot-heads in the room, of whom there

was generally one, and sometimes half a dozen.

It was curious how most people there—they used to drop in after coffee in the evenings—always turned to her for a kind of judicial verdict after their argument.

“Don’t you agree with me, Mrs. Detloff?”

They were disappointed when she laughed a little and said, “Not altogether,” or “Haven’t you gone rather too far?” Seldom more than that, and never any of that eloquence which used to play round that shabby old room in the Cromwell Road, when literary men and women, scientists, Socialists, and young students—Detloff’s young men from King’s College—used to gather and give tongue about the ethics of life, political ideals, social progress. They were all of the Liberal school of thought—my father would have been horrified to hear their democratic hopes—and they all looked forward to some new Utopia—they never agreed on the particular brand—when wars would be eliminated by international law, when crime would be treated as disease and disease as a crime, and when the common people of the world would work less for more wages, in a beautiful sanitary state.

Those people I met at Katherine’s house were typical, I think, of the wave of sentimental Liberalism which followed the Boer War, with its blunders and disasters. Most of them were ashamed of the loud-mouthed vulgarities which had called to their patriotism. They had been shocked by the inefficiency which had postponed victory so long. There was a strong tide of international idealism flowing against the military Imperialism of “Joe” Chamberlain and his school. King Edward had come to the throne, and with the passing of Queen Victoria, and all that she stood for, in social life—a rather dreadful smugness—we had a sense of liberation. People talked more frankly, thought more fearlessly. Women began to assert their intellectual equality with men. There was among most of these people a touching faith in the coming triumphs of knowledge and science which would give humanity a “leg up” on the plane of civilisation. Things were moving faster, they thought. Taxis had taken the place of hansom cabs, the old horse-bus was being displaced by the motor-omnibus, there was some talk of flying. And men’s minds seemed to be moving quicker, more audaciously.

H. G. Wells represented as well as led the common mind, analysing, looking forward, scrapping old ideas, leaping ahead to new discoveries which would make life easier and cleaner, and more beautiful for the common folk. The Boer War was becoming a stale old memory. The common sense of civilisation was going to make another war impossible. We were going to get on with the victories of peace.

So we talked and talked, and Serge Detloff, with his fine humanity, his love of liberty, his intellectual enthusiasm, his insatiable passion for

conversation, never wanted to go to bed.

Sometimes I used to watch Katherine while all this jawbation was in progress, and wondered whether she was happy in this queer marriage or hers.

Evesham had come back wounded from South Africa, and was now Lord Evesham, and something in the War Office—marked out for a brilliant career, according to accounts I heard. He had married a daughter of an Irish peer, and their wedding had made a great fuss in the papers. Katherine never met him, so Paul told me, and their lives lay apart, it seemed. Did she ever think about him, I wondered, or remember those words which she had once spoken to me in an unguarded moment: “I ought to have married Hugh. We were meant for each other”? No just as my boyish passion had died out, all its anguish no more than a sentimental memory at which I could smile, so I was sure Katherine could think of Hugh Evesham without a heartbeat or any sense of fear. It is the one consolation of passing time that passion passes also, and leaves one in peace. At least, with most of us.

Katherine had one source of happiness which made life good to her—that boy of hers, young Michael, who grew so fast between the times I saw him that I was always startled. A good-looking lad, with a shock of fair hair, a broad forehead like Detloff’s, and Katherine’s eyes, with their humour in him, except when he had queer fits of moodiness and temper which worried his mother a good deal, though they didn’t last long. It was a pretty picture to see him playing the violin to her accompaniment, though he was occasionally inclined to break his fiddle and tear up his music when he found a passage too difficult and came a cropper over it, much to the amusement of his uncle Paul, who saw the Slav in him.

“Scratch a Russian and find a Tartar. What did I tell you, Kitty?”

Paul had changed, too, a good deal since his medical student days—and time enough, too, as the father of a boy and girl almost as old as Michael. He was less rowdy—except when his old hilarity burst out at odd times—more thoughtful, sometimes rather melancholy and self-absorbed. His marriage with my sister Clare was not altogether a success, I fancied, and Katherine was sure of it, and sorry for both of them. But he liked dropping in at Detloff’s house for those conversational evenings after supper, and was always rather revolutionary and violent in his ideas, though I think he often exaggerated for the sake of an intellectual lark, and to set other people’s tongues wagging. I remember one evening when he had an argument with Detloff, though it was only typical of the usual kind of talk. I suppose it comes back to me because of things that happened later, showing that Katherine’s husband had an intuition of dangers which to the rest of us were unguessed and unimaginable.

Paul talked largely about the possibilities of science, and let his imagination rip. It would soon be possible, he said, for people to communicate

with each other across space by means of electrical vibrations acting on the ether—no wires or anything of that sort, like the telephone and telegraph, but wireless waves caught up by sensitive receivers. Distance wouldn't count. Berlin would talk to London, Moscow to Paris, . . . perhaps England to Mars! Flying, of course, would soon be an accomplished fact. We could go to breakfast in Paris, lunch at Monte Carlo, and get back home in time for tea. Men would live to a hundred or more—old Mechnikov was on the right line. Civilisation would change more in the next fifty years than in three thousand years before. Nations would be brought closer together, frontiers would be abolished, and there would be a common language and universal law.

Detloff listened to all this with a glint of amusement in his deep-set eyes. He liked to hear Paul letting himself go on electrons, and atomic energy, and scientific prophecies. But that night he challenged these ideas.

"I'm not so sure about all this science of yours, Paul. Isn't it leaving God and the devil out of account?"

"Why not?" asked Paul blandly. "I thought we were talking in terms of science."

"I'm not doubting the scientific possibilities," said Detloff. "It's quite likely that men will soon be flying. But suppose they use that new power for destructive purposes? A war in the air, as Wells pictures? Not a pleasant thought, that! Is humanity sufficiently advanced to make use of all these inventions? Are our ethics, the religion that is in us, keeping pace with our control of these mechanical forces?"

"Certainly," said Paul, with simple confidence. "The human mind adjusts itself to every scrap of new knowledge. The younger generation of to-day, morally and intellectually, are streets ahead of their fathers and grandfathers."

"I quite agree," said young Michael, who was sitting on a low stool with his knees up to his chin and his hands clasped round them.

He flushed and frowned at the laughter which greeted this comment.

"Be careful, Paul!" said Katherine, pulling her boy's hair a little, so that he squealed. "Some pitchers have long ears, and it's difficult already to maintain discipline."

"Quite right too," said Paul carelessly. "Discipline is death. Think of the discipline of our young days. Family prayers—church three times on Sunday—and the frightful platitudes of poor old Dad, trying to improve our minds at the breakfast-table. It's a wonder we didn't go to the dogs, as a natural protest against so much moral exercise."

"That's unfair!" said Katherine rather hotly. "Father was always liberal-minded. He did his best to make us happy, as he did his best to help the world, by tolerance and example."

It was a year since Canon Lambert had dropped asleep one day in his little

room in Romilly Hall, and failed to wake up again when one of the old charladies came to light his fire. The whole of the East End had turned out to see his funeral pass.

"I've unhappy recollections of early youth," said Paul, "before the poor old governor saw the light, and broadened out a little."

Detloff came back to the argument.

"Aren't we rather too sure of ourselves about all this scientific progress? Sometimes I have a terrible feeling that underneath this crust of civilization of Europe there's a molten lava of human passion, on the move, pressing upwards, ready to break out. This European peace, our sense of security—isn't it rather flimsy? Do the nations love each other any more? Aren't they beginning to pile up armaments for some frightful challenge of strength in which the common folk, duped by their governments as usual, will be driven against each other again into the shambles? All these standing armies—this manufacture of great guns——"

"Elaborately old-fashioned!" said Paul. "Grotesquely out of date! The make-believe of little kings and emperors who don't know that history is leaving them behind, and making their toy soldiers as ridiculous as knights in armour or men with bows and arrows."

Detloff shook his head and gave a heavy sigh.

"The powers of evil are still strong. I'm beginning to think that human nature isn't changing as fast as I once hoped. We little intellectuals here, we idealists and visionaries—we dreamers!—forget the terrible forces of ignorance and hatred and tyranny in the world outside these cosy rooms in London. Look at my own people—a nation of illiterate peasants ruled by a weak, well-meaning man under a system of mediæval tyranny—tyranny of the mind and soul—with the Secret Police and the Cossack knout. Look at a new nation, taking a foremost place in civilisation, the best educated, the most virile, the most highly organised, the most industrious—and the most dangerous. I mean Germany."

"Why dangerous?" asked Paul. "As scientists they lead the world—at least, in applied science, and scholarship."

"That's my point," said Detloff quietly. "In spite of all their science and social organisation—marvellous!—they are dominated by ideas which may end all our dreams. That Kaiser of theirs, with his shining armour and his mailed fist—I read his speeches with a sense of calamity."

"A *poseur*," said Paul. "A mountebank with some talent. Look at all the Socialists in Germany. Do you think they're going to play up to all that rhetoric, his 'me and God' sort of talk?"

Detloff nursed his knees with his long, delicate hands.

"I've been in Germany lately," he said. "I had a talk with Edward

Bernstein, the great Socialist leader and my old friend. He rather disheartened me. He's not quite sure that the forces of Liberal democracy are strong enough to resist other forces at work among his people—that superman philosophy of Nietzsche, the cult of brutality in the Universities, a sense among the whole German people that God has destined them to be the greatest power in the world, now that England, as they think, is growing old and weak and unable to hold what she has grabbed.”

Paul laughed light-heartedly.

“You’ve been eating lobster, Prince. You’re looking at things with bilious eyes. A touch of liver!”

“A sense of fear,” said Detloff, “growing stronger.”

“That’s it!” answered Paul, in his breezy, dogmatic way. “Humanity must throw off fear before it gets liberated from the old darkness of the mind. We’re hampered and imprisoned by old fears, due to heredity, superstition, and ignorance. Thank God we’re getting free from some of that. Look at the pluck of modern women. They decline to be the slaves of crinolines or the playthings of men. They’re coming out to take their place in the world. And so it is with the human mind everywhere. It’s facing up to realities. It’s going to put things straight fearlessly.”

“It’s nice to think so, in this cheerful room,” said Detloff. “Anyhow, I believe that things are going to happen before long in Russia. For good or evil. A new bid for Liberty.”

His heart was still in Russia, in spite of his long exile. His house was still the sanctuary of Russian exiles. One of them took refuge with him at this time, and it was a queer little episode in Katherine’s life which seemed to have no special significance at the time, though afterwards I saw that it was a kind of hint of future history in which she was caught like a bird in a net.

VIII

KATHERINE was the first to speak to me about Father Dolin, whose name had suddenly become famous in the world because of a tragic incident in Russian history. He had led a peaceful procession of peasants, students, and women, to present a petition of right to the “Little Father” at the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg. They were unarmed, and at the head of the procession this young priest carried a cross. They went singing a Russian hymn. And suddenly, at the gates of the palace, an order to fire rang out across the snow, the singing changing to cries and groans, the snow was stained red with the blood of murdered men and women.

This crime shocked the civilised world. Even *Punch*, no friend of revolution, had a cartoon showing the Czar—unfairly—as the figure of Death sitting on his imperial throne, smiling upon his victims. Liberals in England, in public meetings, denounced this outrage against liberty, and in Katherine’s home in the Cromwell Road poor Detloff groaned and wept and cried out, “How long, O Lord, how long?” because of this bloody act against his people.

Even young Michael was old enough to turn pale at his father’s narrative of what had happened outside the Czar’s palace, and I remember some words the boy spoke to me afterwards, when I was taking him round the Tower of London on one of those jaunts together which had made us the best of comrades.

“When I’m a man I’ll go to Russia and fight against Tyranny.”

“Dangerous work,” I said, laughing at him. “Look at the old walls round us, and think of all the men and women who had their heads chopped off.”

“P’raps they died for Liberty,” he suggested calmly. “That’s a good thing to do, isn’t it? My father thinks so.”

He was eleven years old at that time, and not priggish, but with a strange, old-fashioned gravity at times which was very startling, because as a rule he was so gay and boisterous, and high-spirited; passionate, also, and enormously self-willed, unless one appealed to his affection, when he melted easily. But his father’s habit of talking to him as though they were of equal age and knowledge, and all those queer conversations which he heard at home between men of advanced views and intellectual brilliance, had made him older in mind than most boys of his age.

I remember arguing the matter out with him that day, as we stood in the tower where Sir Walter Raleigh had been a prisoner.

“Your mother wouldn’t like it if you got shut up in the fortress of Peter and Paul.”

"No," he answered, "that would be rotten for her, and of course I shouldn't like it either. But it would be rather a joke carving one's name on the prison wall, and I'd make a rope and let myself down, or dig a tunnel like Monte Cristo."

"Much more comfortable in the Cromwell Road," I said, and that seemed to amuse him.

"Not much adventure!" he protested. "Let's go and see the dungeons. That place where Guy Fawkes couldn't stand up and couldn't lie down. It's frightfully thrilling!"

One of the old Yeomen of the Guard turned and smiled at this tall boy, with his fair hair and grey eyes, who might have been one of the little princes of the Tower come back to life again. Some strain of his father's blood, and Katherine's grace, had given him unusual distinction, which marked him out from other boys of his age and class.

It was a few weeks after that when Katherine spoke to me about Father Dolin. The man who had led the procession to the Winter Palace, and had fallen with his cross among the wounded and murdered people, was actually in her house as a refugee from the Czarist police.

"Serge thinks him a saint," she told me, smiling a little at the thought of her husband's emotionalism.

They were sitting in the dining-room when the maid came in, rather flustered, and said: "A gentleman from Russia to see you, sir. He don't speak no English." Detloff asked the little maid to show him in, and it was a youngish, broad-shouldered man, with a clean-shaven face and smiling, mystical eyes. "Queer eyes," said Katherine. He spoke in Russian after the door was shut, and said: "I'm Father Dolin." Detloff couldn't believe it at first. Then he kissed his hands and embraced him, and they shed tears together in each other's arms.

"I've put him in the best bedroom," said Katherine, laughing, because she had put so many strange people in that best bedroom—exiles, out-of-works, cranks, idealists.

Katherine was right about Father Dolin's eyes. They were curiously luminous, but with a tragic, haunted look, I thought, when he was off his guard and not smiling. He was certainly afraid at first, and had a trick of looking sharply over his shoulder when he ventured to go out of doors. If a door opened suddenly he would start up as though he might be attacked and then laugh and shrug his shoulders. It was plain to see that his nerves were in a bad state, and I sympathised with him when I realised that even in London he might be in danger from Russian agents of the Czarist police, who would send him to Siberia, or worse than that, if they got him back in Russia. He had escaped by shaving off his beard and disguising himself as a peasant, to whose

class he belonged.

He and Serge Detloff used to talk for hours in the study upstairs, mostly about the state of Russia, and the chance of liberty—that old dream-word. But after a time, during which he kept close to the house, he became restless, and went for long walks in London, sometimes with young Michael, who liked to talk Russian with him, and sometimes alone. In the evenings he played halma with Michael, or sat watching Katherine with his queer, luminous eyes while she played to Michael's violin. I didn't quite like the way he gazed at Katherine—there was something mesmeric in his fixed, smiling stare—and I know that she liked it even less.

One day she spoke to me about him again.

"That Father Dolin," she said in a frightened way. "He's not a good man. I'm sure he's been drinking. Last night when he came in late he smelled horribly of whiskey, and he tried to take my hand and kiss it—not in the Russian way of courtesy, but in a slobbering way that made me shudder. I'm afraid to tell Serge. He thinks him a holy patriot."

"I should certainly tell him," I said. "I should say he's a bad egg."

"It's for Michael's sake I'm most afraid," said Katherine. "He tells the boy vulgar peasant stories. Rather coarse and beastly. Michael thinks them funny, and doesn't see the harm in them, thank God."

Afterwards she told her husband, but he refused to believe that there was anything wrong with Father Dolin, for whom he had the deepest admiration and reverence, until one evening when something happened in that house in the Cromwell Road which verged on melodrama.

Father Dolin, as he called himself, was sitting upstairs in the study with Serge Detloff when three Russians called and were shown into the drawing-room, where Katherine was playing with Michael. She had never seen them before, but one of them, as she knew afterwards, was Prince Anton Maniukoff, who is supposed to have killed Rasputin later in history, though that is not certain. He was a tall, handsome young man, said Katherine, and bowed very low as he entered the room after the little maid, with his two companions, who were also young men.

He spoke in Russian, and gave her the title of Princess, which always seemed to her ridiculous.

"You have a man here named Father Dolin," he said politely. "My friends and I very much want to see him. We should be deeply obliged if you would let us know in what room he is sitting. As he knows us well there is no need to announce us."

"I will call my husband," said Katherine, rising from her chair and moving towards the door. "I know nothing of Father Dolin."

From the first she seems to have suspected that there was something

sinister about this visit, and her husband had warned her to keep Father Dolin's presence a secret from all but close friends.

The three Russians didn't seem pleased with the idea that she would call her husband. They would prefer, they said, to go up unannounced. When Katherine insisted they bowed again, and the tall young man said: "As you will, Princess."

Father Dolin and Detloff were playing chess when Katherine opened their door and told them of the visitors.

"Bring them up!" said Detloff. "I know Prince Anton by name and reputation. He is a very liberal young man, and on our side."

Katherine noticed that Father Dolin was uneasy. The colour of his skin had a greenish look, though his lips smiled; but he did not say a word.

When Katherine brought up the visitors they saluted Detloff very courteously, and then remained silent for a moment.

"Have you brought any news?" asked Detloff. "I live in fear and trembling about what may happen. Our poor Russia——"

The tall young man answered quietly.

"We have some news about Father Dolin here. Not good news. My Prince, this fellow has been abusing your hospitality. Doubtless you think him a very saintly man, and a Russian patriot. Did he not lead the poor people to the Winter Palace? Was he not with them when they were shot down in cold blood? Yes, that is true. But he led them there so that they might be shot."

"It's a lie!" said Father Dolin. "It has been put about by my enemies, and the enemies of Russian liberty."

He spoke calmly, without any show of fear, except that greenish pallor which Katherine had noticed.

"This fellow," said the tall young man, ignoring Father Dolin as though he were a dog, "is an *agent provocateur* of the most infamous type. He was in the pay of the police. With your permission, we propose to take him away and deal with him as he deserves."

Detloff was stupefied by this accusation against the man whose hands he had kissed as a saint. It was he who told me of Katherine's courage and common sense.

"That kind of thing isn't done in England, or this house," she said. "This man is our guest. Whatever his character, he is staying here under our protection—and under English law. We are in the Cromwell Road, you know."

"We are Russians, Princess," said the tall young man. "This dirty fellow has committed one of the blackest crimes in the history of our poor country. We hate to annoy you, but, if you permit us, we will take this man away quietly, and without the slightest violence."

Katherine said: "I do not permit you."

Detloff himself, deadly white, spoke to his visitors.

"We have no proof of what you say. It is incredible. I utterly decline to believe it."

"It's a lie," said Father Dolin, with a smile about his lips. "You know how these lies are made, Detloff!"

Prince Anton took some papers out of his pocket, and held them out to Detloff.

"Read these, my dear Prince. The proof is here, this testimony of the people he betrayed, these damning documents, written by himself, his receipts for payment."

"Forged," said Father Dolin. "The old trick!"

Detloff ignored the papers then, though afterwards he read them with anguish, but also with doubt. The proof was not absolute.

"My wife is right," he said. "This man is under our protection—our guest. I beg of you to leave this house."

The young man twisted his moustache with a gesture of vexation.

"You are over-chivalrous. This man is Judas! We must insist on taking him away."

Katherine laughed at him.

"This isn't Moscow, you know. There's a policeman at the corner of Cromwell Road."

Her laughter, her absolute refusal to give up her guest, much as she distrusted him, seemed to persuade the tall young Russian.

"This man is very lucky for the moment," he said. "We apologise for this intrusion, Princess."

He bowed, and smiled at her, and spoke a word to his companions.

"Some other time," he said quietly to Father Dolin.

That night Detloff's guest left the house in the Cromwell Road under the protection of two officers from Scotland Yard, for whom Katherine had telephoned. Two months later he was heard of at Monte Carlo, accompanied by a woman of low reputation. He was killed—or killed himself, the true facts were never known—in the gardens of the Casino.

This queer little incident in Katherine's quiet life seems, as I have said, to have no meaning except as an accidental episode, and as a revelation of her character and courage. Yet I see now that it was a kind of forewarning, a shadow reaching out of a great darkness which was to envelop her life and link it up, through her husband, with tragic history, in which she needed greater courage.

IX

I WAS rather worried now and then about Paul and Clare. It was painfully obvious at times that their marriage was not a complete success, as I saw when I stayed for week-ends, occasionally, between my gadabout journeys abroad. Paul and I were good friends, though he always had an amused contempt for me as "one of those writing chappies," and he would talk for hours about his scientific work, the philosophy of life, the future of civilisation, and now and again, though not often, let out a word or two about his domestic troubles. The truth was that he was not really cut out for married life, in spite of his boy and girl, who amused him vastly, and whom he allowed to run completely wild.

Clare was certainly unsuited to this scientific, unsocial, unconventional husband, who was absorbed in his work, which he thought the most important thing in life, and was utterly regardless of money, social amenities, and even, as she complained bitterly, of ordinary respectability.

There was something to be said on Clare's side—there generally is in such cases—and I could quite see that poor old Paul was very trying to a wife like my sister, who liked putting on pretty frocks and powdering her nose, and indulging in the chit-chat of afternoon teas, and whose sentimental and utterly false views on life were shocked continually by Paul's rather brutal realism and ruthless sense of what he thought to be truth. It was decidedly uncomfortable for her when he left the Pasteur Institute and set up a kind of farm for bacteriological research in a remote part of Sussex, where he bred guinea pigs, rabbits, and mice, which he inoculated with various diseases and then treated with anti-toxins. He also kept knock-kneed horses and miserable donkeys for the same purpose of scientific experiment.

His collection of sheds, stables, and laboratories, and the old farm-house in which he put Clare and the children, were shunned by the local gentry, because they were afraid of catching one of those diseases which Paul kept in test-tubes, studied under the microscope, and injected into his menagerie. Even those who were bold enough to call upon Clare because they thought she might be an agreeable neighbour dropped away when they found (according to her theory) that her house was a "regular pigsty," and the children like young savages, and when Paul alarmed them by coming in to tea in clothes that were only suitable for the backwoods, and behaving like an anarchist. That is to say, he had no parlour manners, chaffed his wife's visitors, failed to hand them bread-and-butter at the proper time, and talked dangerously about the rights of the lower orders, the disgraceful condition of their cottages, and the crying

need of social reform in England.

There was considerable gossip in the neighbourhood, so Clare told me, about the way in which he made friends with young farmers, gipsy folk, and mechanics in the village, whom he treated with more courtesy than his wife's guests, and as though they had greater intelligence, which, said Paul, when he discussed the matter with me, was as true as the law of gravity.

"I'd rather talk five minutes with Gipsy Lee or young Slocombe, the poacher," he said, "than five hours with the Honourable Charlotte Wincott or Lady Brierley—the Berkshire Brierleys, you know!—and learn more in the time. These Sussex men are wonderfully wise about the way of nature, and they've no false ideas about the importance of clothes, family connections, and clean hands. I like their manners, and they're as honest as death, which is the only thing one can be quite sure about."

Paul's girl, Dorothy, whom he called "Puggy"—much to Clare's annoyance—was a long-legged young lady, as I remember her in those days, with a wild mop of brown hair and eyes like a young deer's—a beauty afterwards. Clare had no control over her whatever, and Paul laughed heartily at her uncivilised ways. She climbed the highest trees, hunted rats with an old wire-haired terrier, fought with the farmers' boys, and gave one a black eye when he tried to kiss her.

She was the despair of the mistresses in the local day school, except that she read omnivorously, wrote amazing poetry, and still more amazing novelettes, and startled them by scientific theories which she picked up from her father. But her manners were shocking, and her language worse. At twelve years of age she swore like a stable boy, having learnt these bad words from the lads who looked after her father's diseased horses, and there was a dreadful scene one day with her mother when she called the Honourable Charlotte Wincott an unmentionable name because the old lady rebuked her for showing too much of her legs as she sat curled up on the sofa reading David Copperfield.

Poor Clare! How could she establish any kind of discipline, as Paul roared with laughter when this was repeated to him, and slipped upstairs with some of his own food when Dorothy had been sent supperless to bed for this unpardonable offence?

It was the same with the boy, young Humphrey, whom his father called "Bumps." He was a year younger than Dorothy and an attractive-looking lad, with fair hair, hazel eyes, and freckles, who looked as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, but had a genius for getting into mischief, and an air of bland and innocent surprise when rebuked for his evil deeds.

"But mother," he would say, "I meant no harm! How could I possibly know? It's jolly unfair blaming it on to me!"

That was when he had burnt down the greenhouse, after an experiment with some explosive chemicals, and again when he was expelled from a day school kept by two ladies because he frightened a little girl into hysterics by putting a toad in her desk.

“Why should a kid be frightened of a jolly old toad?” he asked. “It’s so silly. Isn’t it, father?”

Paul agreed.

“Ridiculous, old man. But the female species is like that—except Puggy and a few others.”

It was this agreement with all their sins that was so exasperating to Clare. That, and a thousand other things which prevented husband and wife from seeing eye to eye and gradually established a kind of feud between them, or at least a continual sense of grievance on Clare’s part, and uneasiness, disillusion, and annoyance in Paul’s mind. Clare was not in the least interested in his research work. She hated the smell of his laboratory. She loathed his experiments on guinea pigs and rabbits. She was sceptical of his results, and made a mockery of his ambitions.

“What’s the good of all this silly old science?” she asked plaintively. “We got on very well without it. I believe in a good family doctor. I can’t see how it helps the world at all.”

Paul tried to explain.

Surely it would be a good thing to eliminate such scourges as diphtheria, cerebro-spinal meningitis, perhaps even cancer one day. They had already got on the track of the typhoid bug. They had practically destroyed malaria, yellow fever, typhus. They had reduced plague in India by discovering its carrier—the rat flea.

“It’s all so disgusting,” said Clare. “I want to forget disease. In any case I don’t see why we can’t live in London and have some nice friends, and go to the theatre now and then, and live like respectable people. I seldom see a soul from week’s end to week’s end.”

“That seems to me a great advantage,” argued Paul. “The average standard of conversation among one’s ‘nice friends’ is enough to sap one’s intellect. . . . ‘Have you been playing tennis lately?’ ‘Did you read that last speech by that scoundrel Lloyd George?’ ‘What appalling weather for the time of year!’ ‘Do you take sugar in your tea, Lady Snooks?’ . . . Oh, Lord! Thank Heaven for this escape, with good old trees round us, and birds singing, and honest old nature telling no lies and making no mischief, just working out the laws of God, without a fuss!”

“You don’t believe in God,” said Clare bitterly. “You’re an infidel, without religion, as you’ve taught me to be.”

“On the contrary,” said Paul, “I’m becoming a mystic. The more I see of

nature, and the closer I get to scientific truth, the more reverential I become to the great plan, and the Mind behind.”

He spoke as though in one of his satirical moods, and winked at me, but I fancied he was serious enough; and indeed, later, when we walked together in the woods about his house and on a lonely heath near by, where I loved the scent of the heather and the song of the larks and the distant view of the Sussex downs, he talked at length about this new “mysticism” of his.

“I used to jeer at the old Dad,” he said, “for his mixture of doubt and faith, his pitiful little attempts to square up Christianity with science, and the goodness of God with the awful mess of things. In those slums of his, for instance! But I’m beginning to see that he was just groping, like I am, and perhaps just about as near to the meaning of the riddle! There’s a law somewhere. Life didn’t begin by accident. At least I hardly think so. I’m almost beginning to admit that there’s a conflict between good and evil—bad bugs and good bugs fighting like hell—health and disease, life and death. As for what we call matter, it’s only another name for force. Atoms, electrons, energy, always changing into other forms of force, but never lost. What’s the truth? That’s what I want to get at. . . . Clare doesn’t see the use of truth. Her mind doesn’t work that way. She sees life in a pretty cloud of falsity, and craves for sentimental illusions—frocks, fashion, furniture, romantic love, all the things that don’t matter. She believes in caste, and hates my democratic instincts. And she thinks I’m a dull fellow because I glue my eye to a microscope and watch the life-history of disease germs. Rather a pity for both of us, eh?”

He gave a heavy sigh, and then laughed.

“Of course I’m an awful old bear, and those kids of ours are frightful young whelps, though it’s my fault, and I like ’em as they are.”

It was rather painful at times to see the increasing strain between husband and wife. Clare kept up a ceaseless quarrel with him because of his failure to check the children’s naughtiness, and meals became rather intolerable because of her attempts to make Dorothy behave “like a little lady,” and Humphrey to sit still and eat his food nicely, while Paul was having private jokes with the girl, making her laugh in the middle of her mother’s rebukes, and pulling the boy’s hair and making him squeal. At other times Paul would sit glum and self-absorbed, as though thinking out some scientific problem, and then laugh satirically at some remark of Clare’s about the latest gossip in the village.

“Old Mother Wincott objects to my lecture at the village institute, does she? Thinks it puts false ideas into the heads of the lower orders? What do they want to know about sanitation? Well, perhaps she’s right. They can’t afford to be clean on the wages she pays her gardener.

“God bless the Squire and his relations,
And keep us in our proper stations.”

“I wish you wouldn’t call her ‘old Mother Wincott,’ Paul!” said Clare fretfully. “It’s not kind, and it’s not good for the children to hear.”

Paul said she was motherly, which was much to her credit, and old, which was not her fault. And, anyhow, he hated her like poison.

“I like her,” said Clare. “She’s the only real lady who lives in the neighbourhood, and she’s very kind to me.”

“As long as she’ll keep her tongue off me——” said Paul.

In the evenings, when I went down for the week-end, Paul used to get me up in his study for a yarn about his latest adventure in research work, or general discussion on abstract ideas, until one evening Clare opened the door rather violently, and, looking very pale and distressed, protested against this “selfishness,” as she called it, and as, indeed, it was.

“Here am I, buried alive in this horrible old house,” she said, “never seeing a soul of my own kind from one week to another, and when my own brother comes you take him up here and leave me alone. It isn’t fair. It’s—it’s disgraceful!”

For once Paul was apologetic.

“That’s true!” he said. “Sorry, old girl, but I thought you were busy with the children. Let’s go down and have some music, or play a hand at whist.”

But half-way through the game of whist he became restless, and flung his cards down.

“This is the last refuge of imbecility! You two have a game of halma or something while I go and do a bit of work on the microscope.”

Clare spoke to me with tears in her eyes after that.

“Paul’s impossible!” she said. “And this life of mine! I can’t stand it much longer. These lonely woods get on my nerves, I never get any pleasant society, never go to a theatre, never see well-dressed people . . .”

I suggested that she should go and stay with Katherine now and then, but she shrugged her shoulders and said; “I can’t stand freaks. Katherine’s house is full of vegetarians, pacifists, traitors, and Russian anarchists.”

“They’re amusing,” I remarked. “And Katherine is wonderfully kind.”

“She’s too much like Paul,” said Clare. “Always thinking about the truth of things. I hate truth.”

She spoke those words passionately, as though she had a real grudge against that truth of things for which Paul and Katherine were searching.

It was about that time that she came to know young Doctor Farrell, who bought the practice in the neighbouring village. He attended her for a slight illness, and they became great friends. Paul was glad of that, until he became a

little jealous because she saw so much of this good-looking young man, who discussed the latest novels with her, or the latest society sensation, and came to the house more often than was pleasing to Paul. Even then he didn't object very much, as long as he could leave them talking while he slipped off to his laboratory, or had a look at his sick rabbits, or took a stroll in the quiet woods on summer nights. . . .

I have suggested, perhaps, that he had no great love for Clare, and yet I'm certain that, in spite of his grumpiness and her lack of sympathy with his work and ideas, he had a sincere affection for her. After all, she was the mother of his children, whom he adored, and though Paul was selfish in a way, and ruthless regarding truth, or what he believed to be truth, he was not without sentiment and tenderness.

It was Katherine who told me that a tragedy had happened, or something approaching tragedy. It was when I looked in one day at the house in the Cromwell Road on my way back from a trip to Ireland, where things were boiling up for trouble.

"How are you?" I asked. "And how's everybody?"

"Haven't you heard about Clare?" said Katherine.

She saw that I had a blank look, and told me the news.

"She's fallen in love with a young doctor—or thinks she has."

I'm bound to say I didn't take this revelation very seriously.

"It's just the kind of thing Clare would do! But has the young doctor fallen in love with her?"

Katherine smiled for a moment, and then was grave again.

"It looked like it when Paul found them together in the woods one night. He gave the young man a thrashing, rather too violent, I'm afraid, and Clare became hysterical. That night she went to your sister Evelyn's house, and made a great story of Paul's "brutality" and her life of "torture." She refuses to go back again, and Evelyn is on her side."

"Clare can be very pig-headed," I said; "and Evelyn's an idiot—a mass of sentiment. . . . Poor old Paul! And those two little savages."

Katherine nodded, and her eyes filled with tears for a moment.

"Paul's heart-broken. He cried like a baby when he came to tell me. I'm going to stay with him and take Michael with me. He hasn't dared to tell the children yet—pretends that Clare is coming back again. Poor little Humphrey was devoted to his mother."

"How long ago did all this happen?" I asked, and Katherine told me that Clare had been away a month, but had not seen the young doctor who was the cause of all the trouble. He had gone into a nursing-home in London.

"Paul must have hit him rather hard!" I remarked, with a touch of irony. "It's the worst of a pacifist when he does take to physical force!"

“What a curse is passion!” said Katherine suddenly. “This silly sex stuff—like Clare’s with that man. It’s the ugly devil in life, spoiling marriage, spoiling friendship, spoiling loyalty. Look at that pretty sister of yours. A few silly talks with a good-looking man, a little emotion between them, and she breaks her vows, abandons her children, and smashes up a happy home. It’s senseless!”

“It wasn’t a happy home, I’m afraid. That was the cause of it all. Paul wasn’t altogether blameless.”

“No,” said Katherine. “It was the idea of romantic love, and lawlessness, instead of loyalty.”

“Clare believed in law,” I reminded her. “It was Paul who preached liberty. Clare was a conventionalist. That’s what makes it so strange.”

“She was full of false ideas,” said Katherine. “The sort of stuff Evelyn writes in her sentimental novels. I wish they could all be burnt! She wanted a “soul-mate,” and couldn’t put up with Paul’s grumpiness or see the splendor of his work.”

Suddenly some remembrance overwhelmed her, and a wave of colour swept her face.

“Oh, I’m intolerant, and talking foolishly! I pity Clare more than I blame her. We’re so weak, all of us. This absurd thing called love, beyond control sometimes—with some terrible power over us!”

I knew she remembered Hugh Evesham, and the spell he had put upon her once.

“I’m harking back to the need of religion,” she said, and smiled, as though I might find it funny. “We’re not strong enough alone. That’s why I’m teaching Michael to say his prayers—only he will interrupt and ask all sorts of questions that make me laugh.”

She asked me to go down and cheer up Paul for a week-end before seeing Clare, as I supposed I ought to do, and it was there, at the old farmstead in Sussex, that I spent the last days of my comradeship with Katherine before her belief in loyalty took her away for a time.

IT was about two years after the South African War when I came face to face with Hugh Evesham, who was now, as I have said, Viscount Evesham, after the death of his father. I had read of his marriage to Lady Betty O'Brien, daughter of the Irish peer who had done so much on behalf of the Irish Land Acts in the House of Lords, and I knew that Evesham was something in the War Office. But I wasn't quite certain of him for a moment when I met him in Whitehall, although it seemed only the day before yesterday since I had seen him below the plinth of Nelson's Column when he had raised his hat and shouted "Hooray!" with the cheering mob. We passed each other and then slowed down. I had seen a look of recognition come into his eyes, and no doubt he was aware of my slight start and second glance. He was slightly stouter than in his younger days, with harder lines about the jaw and mouth, but still wonderfully good-looking, and immaculately dressed in tall-hat and morning suit, with a white slip to his waistcoat. We both turned, and he came back with outstretched hand.

"Hullo, Chesney! Delighted to see you after all this time!"

I was pleased by his cordiality and his forgetfulness of my rather priggish behavior in his rooms one night, when I was consumed with jealousy and moral righteousness. We talked a little about old times while we stood under the nose of one of the Life Guards' horses in Whitehall, and he asked quite simply, "How's Katherine?"

"Well," I said, "and happy with her boy Michael."

His face flushed a little, and he laughed rather shyly.

"I made rather an ass of myself before that South African adventure. Well, time rubs out most things! You know I'm married?"

I nodded, and he said, "My wife presented me with a little daughter some time ago—Gladys, after my mother, and Moira, after hers. An Anglo-Celtic alliance. For Betty's sake I'm trying to be civil to her Irish relations, but find it hard. I've no patience with Home Rule and all that tosh."

He saw my look of surprise, remembering his Liberal sentiments as a younger man.

"South Africa rather changed me," he said, smiling, "Those damned Boers who put a hole through my lung and nearly did me in. There are too many sentimentalists about, and I'm fed up with all this talk of liberty and independence. We won the war, and now we've chucked away everything we fought for. It's going to be a Dutch South Africa, and if we're not careful we shall lose the British Empire. . . . Ireland, Egypt, India, all conspiring against

us in the sacred name of Liberty, and idealists at home loving every country but their own. I believe in the firm hand and the good old British Army.”

I acknowledged myself to be one of the sentimentalists, with an ardent faith in liberty and self-government. For a moment he looked annoyed, and then laughed it away.

“Hang politics! Come down and stay at my place one day. Betty would be delighted to see you, and I’d like to keep in touch with you. How’s old Paul and your jolly sisters?”

He would not take a refusal, and a month later I went to stay with him for a few days at Evesham Hall, in Sussex, a wonderful old house, Tudor in every brick, with a noble park about it. He came to my room on the evening of my arrival, and stood in front of the deep old fireplace with his hands in his riding-breeches.

“By the by,” he said casually, “I’ve told Betty something about Katherine. Only fair, don’t you think? But I wouldn’t dwell on the theme, if I were you, in case Betty brings it up.”

I laughed at his anxiety.

“Not likely!”

“Well you know what women are!” said Evesham. “They like to drag things out, and Betty is darned curious about my wild oats. Gets humorous about them sometimes, and suspects more than there were.”

It astonished me to see how much Evesham had changed. The æsthetic pose of his youth had fallen from him, and he no longer wrote romantic verse, or took much interest in art and literature. His accession to the title and his soldiering in South Africa seemed to have taken him back to type—the old family type of hunting and fighting men. Catholic in religion, intolerant of social change, Conservative and Imperialist in politics, born to a tradition of mind and character from which I suppose it was impossible to escape in this old house, with its portraits of men and women who had been brought up in that spirit through centuries of English history. Now and then I seemed to see some different strain in him which broke away a little from that heritage of mind. His real love of music, an occasional gleam of imagination and passion, distinguished him from the men of his own age and class who lived in the neighbourhood—fellow-officers in South Africa and the hunting set in Sussex. Perhaps a touch of Irish blood in him, of which his wife reminded him at times, though he hated to acknowledge it, made him a little less conventional—though not much—than this very English crowd to whom he belonged.

So I thought that night at dinner, when I sat next to Lady Evesham, a pretty girl with a delicious suspicion of the brogue in her voice, and a merry way with her. To the left of me was a young officer of the 8th Hussars who had been with Evesham in South Africa, though he hardly looked old enough, and

on the other side of Lady Evesham was the Vicar of the parish church, a man on the right side of middle-age, with a ruddy, clean-shaven face and a hearty manner, with an Oxford voice. Next to Evesham was Lord Banstead, a young peer who seemed to own most of the land thereabouts adjoining Evesham Park—a good-looking boy, who sat very silent most of the time, but occasionally made a remark, which he followed invariably with a nervous laugh, as though stricken with self-consciousness at the sound of his own voice. I remember also, rather vaguely, two other young men from neighbouring estates, well groomed, polite, and very knowledgeable, it seemed, on the subject of horses. It was the Vicar who led the conversation on my side of the table, in that well-modulated Oxford voice which was pleasant to hear.

“Rather dreadful weather, don’t you think, Lady Evesham?”

Lady Evesham said, “Quite English, as usual,” and gave me a smile with just the slightest suspicion of a wink from her left eyelid, as much as to say, “I’m Irish, you know, and this dear man amuses me!”

“Still,” said the Vicar, “it’s good hunting weather, so we mustn’t complain, what? Bad for the crops but good for the hounds. Ha, ha! What do you say, Lord Banstead?”

Lord Banstead said, “Toppin’ huntin’ weather!” and gave his shy laugh.

“That’s a pretty little mare of yours, Pollard,” said the Vicar, turning to the officer in the 8th Hussars.

He agreed, and looked pleased.

“I like her. Nice tempered, too. But just a trifle nervous.”

“Ah!” said the Vicar, “the ladies are always like that. Isn’t that so, Lady Evesham?”

He laughed heartily at what seemed like a joke.

“I don’t know what nerves are,” said Lady Evesham. “But, then, I’m Irish, you know, and ill bred.”

“Oh, I say!” said Lord Banstead, and he blushed rather deeply at this interjection, and laughed again.

“Betty always drags in her Irish blood,” said Evesham rather irritably.

“It’s my humility,” said his wife, and made a little grimace at her husband in a comical way.

The conversation turned to horses again, with some remarks about recent races and the prospects of the Grand National. Presently it drifted to the South African War and the use of cavalry in future wars.

Pollard of the 8th Hussars thought that cavalry would always hold its own. Evesham was of opinion that the machine-gun would put cavalry out of action. Pollard said, “Not on your life, old man!”

After that there was a good deal of talk about Charlie This and Freddy That, who seemed to be in India, South Africa, or Egypt. Evesham thought

dear old Charlie was one of the best. Pollard of the 8th Hussars thought Freddy was a bit too thick with that blighter who commanded the something or other in that action when he let down the whole blooming squadron. "Isn't that rather unfair?" asked young Banstead with his shy laugh.

Sitting there in the old dining-room of Evesham Hall, with its panelled walls dark with the smoke of many wood fires, I felt an outsider in this company. I knew nothing about horses, having spent my early days in Clapham Park without patronage of the local riding-school. I knew nothing about cavalry, or racing, or machine-guns, or dear old Charlie, who was one of the best. But I had no sense of intellectual superiority to comfort me against this isolation. These, after all, were the type of men who had made England, who had gone out from old houses like this to build up the Empire, who ruled in India, and fought our little frontier wars, and died very gallantly when their country had need of them. Their conversation was not brilliant, but there was some quality in them better, perhaps, than my knowledge of books and my vague "idealism."

They had no morbid doubts, I imagined, about the meaning of life or their place in the scheme of things. They accepted their caste as a God-given state, with certain duties they would do faithfully and simply, and with certain privileges they would defend as sacred rights. I wondered what they would think if I blurted out my hatred of Jingo-Imperialism, and my pacifist principles. They would regard me as one of those extraordinary fellows who loved every country but their own. They would think it treachery to their code, and shocking bad form.

I think Lady Evesham—Betty, as she afterwards allowed me to call her—guessed something of what was passing in my mind as I listened silently to the talk around the table.

"Deliciously English, aren't they?" she said in a low voice, and looked round at her company with a dark-eyed smile.

"I'm English, too," I reminded her, "but somehow different. Not so traditional."

"Not so narrow," she was pleased to say. "You write books, and Hugh tells me you're a Liberal. I wouldn't be surprised if you're in favour of Home Rule for Ireland!"

"I am," I admitted.

She patted my hand, and said, "Nice man; only you mustn't say so in a loud voice in *this* house! Hugh thinks dear John Redmond ought to be shot. He hates me to remind him of an Irish grandmother, and, of course, I do. Everyone round here—the county, you know!—regards the Irish as savages."

"Hugh has changed since the old days," I told her. "He used to be an idealist. All for democracy and the liberty of peoples."

"It's this old house that's dragged him back," she said. "It reeks with the ghosts of Tory Englishmen. It smells of Intolerance and the House of Lords. No one has ever been a rebel in it—except me!"

She took me upstairs to see her daughter Gladys, lying asleep, with her hair like a shower of gold on the pillow, and one little arm lying outside the bedclothes, like Sleeping Beauty in the fairy-tale.

"Hugh and I quarrel sometimes," said Betty Evesham. "It's my Irish temper, and I like to shock his English mind. . . . This little witch is our bond of loyalty. Did you ever see such a darling ladybird?"

In the drawing-room downstairs, before Evesham and his guests had left the dinner-table, she spoke some words about Katherine, and asked what sort of a woman she was. When I said, "Charming," she laughed, and complained that it was an overworked word.

"Hugh told me about that love-affair," she confided to me. "And about that poor little ballet girl. So English of him to be as honest as that! Well, I wasn't hard-hearted. Having been brought up in a convent school, I was always taught that men are very naughty fellows, and that women have a lot to forgive when they marry. As a matter of fact, I'm astonished by Hugh's virtue and fidelity. It must be difficult when a man is so good-looking, don't you think?"

"Not with such a beautiful wife," I said, gallantly and sincerely.

She dropped a curtsy and said, "Sure, and ye've kissed the Blarney stone, kind sir! . . . Well, I'm grateful for such a handsome husband, though he does disapprove of my disorderly relations, poor dears!"

She alarmed and embarrassed me by another reference to Katherine.

"Hugh is still in love with that girl."

"Rubbish!" I exclaimed. "That was a romance of boyhood."

She shook her head and laughed.

"He keeps her photograph where he thinks I can't find it. He wore it next to his heart when he was wounded in South Africa. A bullet went clean through it, but didn't spoil her beauty, only her old-fashioned frock. I'm just a little jealous of her. Silly, isn't it? But that's how women are, and the Irish blood in me."

"It's a sentimental remembrance," I assured her. "Like the thrill of one's first kiss from a girl whose name one forgets."

"Perhaps!" said Lady Evesham. "And, though I'm jealous, I'm not ridiculous. I'd like to meet Katherine one day. She must be rather pleasant. Can't you arrange a meeting?"

It was an easy thing to do, but it happened accidentally. I was walking with Katherine and Michael in Hyde Park one day when I saw Evesham and his wife riding in the Row—a pretty sight, which drew all eyes to this handsome couple on lovely horses. We were just by the rails, and Betty Evesham reined

up and gave me a jolly “Hullo!” Then she looked at Katherine, and seemed to guess who she was, perhaps from that photograph with the bullet through it.

“Won’t you introduce us?” she asked.

I said, “Lady Evesham—Mrs. Detloff,” and I saw a faint colour creep into Katherine’s face.

“My husband often talks about you,” said Betty, and I heard no irony in her voice, no spite.

Evesham dismounted, and spoke to Katherine and Michael, and laughed rather nervously.

“It seems ages . . . before the Boer War . . . except once at some dinner. . . . How splendid this young man looks! . . . I don’t suppose he remembers me at all.”

Michael was staring at him.

“Yes,” he said gravely. “We used to play Red Indians, and you rescued my boat from the Round Pond. Why didn’t you come to see us after that?”

Evesham evaded the question, and looked with a touch of his old shyness at Katherine.

“May we call one day?” he asked. “We have a little daughter now. I’d like you to see her.”

It was a kind reminder that he was no longer dangerous, and that she need not fear any passionate episode or folly of youth.

“I should be delighted,” said Katherine—just a little coldly, I thought. And then she added warmed words. “I should love to see your little girl.”

It was the renewal of friendship between Katherine and Evesham, the beginning of friendship between Katherine and Evesham’s wife, which for a time worried me a little. She went with Michael to stay with them at Evesham Hall, and took her shabby husband to dine with them at their town house in Grosvenor Square. Several times, at rather rare intervals, I was present at these meetings between those who had once been lovers, and was disconcerted because Betty looked mischievously from her husband to Katherine, and then smiled at me.

One night in her drawing-room Katherine played some music while Evesham stood at the other end of the piano, smoking a cigarette. I noticed that suddenly he raised his head sharply and then smiled, with a faint wave of colour creeping up from his neck. His eyes had a look of reminiscence. I, too, had a sudden shock of remembrance, and the years slipped away. It was the same melody by Chopin which Katherine had played when she went for the first time to Evesham’s room, one night, with Paul and me. Evesham had stood then, in the slim splendour of his youth, with folded arms and a look of ecstasy. It was when we were boys and girls, before Katherine was the mother of Michael, before Evesham was the father of Gladys, before I had lost the

sense of romance. We were changed now, and I was remembering our own young ghosts.

Betty Evesham whispered to me:

“Hugh never listens to me like that when I play my Irish jigs!”

“Do you still pretend to be jealous?” I asked.

“It’s good for teasing,” she told me, and I saw the laughter in her eyes.

That night, when I took Katherine back to her house in the Cromwell Road, she spoke to me in her candid way.

“That piece I played! Do you remember?”

I said, “Yes. That night in Evesham’s rooms.”

She nodded and smiled in the darkness of the taxi.

“It was the night I fell in love with him. . . . Now I’m the mother of Michael, and happy with my Russian bear.”

“No regrets?” I asked.

“None,” she said squarely. “Passion dies, thank God.” She added words which made me laugh.

“Hugh is getting stout, don’t you think?”

“Stout and reactionary!”

“Yes. He thinks Serge a dreadful revolutionary! And he used to be so liberal.”

“Idealism passes with the ardour of youth nine times out of ten,” I remarked. “Young rebels, old Tories, that’s the way with most men, especially when they begin to put on flesh.”

“It won’t happen to you or Serge,” said Katherine. “You’ll never put on flesh. You’ll keep thin for liberty and progress.”

I accused her of becoming a reactionary like Hugh Evesham, but she only laughed and said, “I’m the mother of Michael. That’s good enough for me.”

XI

KATHERINE and Michael had a pleasant time on the whole at the old farmstead in Sussex, in spite of Paul's domestic tragedy, which had hit him hard. I know that in after years both of them looked back to those weeks as a good memory of life, and the glimpse I had of them is one of mine. It was in April, and the weather was wonderful, so that the Sussex woods were in the glory of their first green, with the sun slanting through the oaks and beeches, making each leaf a jewel. The wet ditches round Paul's farm were glinting with primroses, and there was a carpet of bluebells through a copse of silver birches. In the wine-coloured heather on the common beyond his gate the bees were busy, and in every hedge and bush the birds were twittering gleefully.

To Katherine, who had come from the Cromwell road, it was all a source of ecstasy, and her eyes were mystical as she walked hand in hand with young Michael through the enchanted woods.

The lad saw the beauty of it too, and in a spell of enthusiasm bought a box of water-colours and tried to get some of the colour on to his sketching-block. Not too badly either. Indeed, I was struck with his talent, but, with his usual impatience and temperamental quality, he began to hate himself because he couldn't fulfil his ideas, and in a savage moment tore up all his sketches and chucked the paint-box into the little river that went down to a mill-house.

He was kept busy in other ways by Dorothy and Humphrey, otherwise called Puggy and Bumps. At first they were hostile to this cousin of theirs, slightly older than themselves, shy of them, and tidy. Humphrey confided to me that he thought Michael a smug, and Dorothy said he was jolly stuck up with himself. But they melted to him when he went ratting with them and became enormously excited, uttering wild whoops and yells when the wire-haired terrier unearthed a victim in one of the sheds, though he became pale, suddenly, when the rat was killed. They agreed that he was not without pluck when he followed them to the topmost branches of an elm tree, and from that altitude sang a funny old Russian song in that queer gibberish which he had learnt from his father.

Katherine was alarmed at the rapidity with which he reacted to the savage state under the influence of Paul's little pagans. He tore his clothes in jumping a wired fence, fell into the river while balancing on a floating log, and came back in the evenings, after long expeditions with Puggy and Bumps, muddy, dishevelled, and incoherent in his joyous account of all the adventures of the day.

He brought back wild flowers, which he kept in water-jugs in his bedroom, and thrilled with ecstasy when he found some thrush's eggs. But he had moments of weakness in the eyes of his two companions. He hated to see animals killed, and actually cried one day—at least, there were tears in his eyes, said Dorothy scornfully, when Bumps knocked a rabbit on the head! After his first excited rat-hunts, he even abandoned that form of sport, because, as he admitted, he was always on the side of the rat. He had a sentimental tenderness for beetles, field mice, and ants, and, with regard to the latter, had a fierce quarrel with Humphrey and called him a destructive young devil because he liked to prod up ants' nests just to see them carrying away their eggs and rushing about in a panic.

"It's as if some stupid, blundering giant were to upheave London just to see the mess he could make of all the little houses and their funny little inhabitants," said Michael. "I don't call it playing the game. It's silly and cruel. I hate cruelty."

"You're a ninny!" said Dorothy, with pretended contempt. "You're one of those mammy boys."

Secretly, I think, she was startled and impressed by these sentimental notions. They distinguished Michael from all the farmer's lads and other young louts in the neighbourhood, from whom she had taken her ideas of boyhood. Before the end of his visit she had fallen passionately in love with him, as we all noticed with hidden amusement, and as she revealed in a thrilling romance, afterwards discovered by Paul, entitled "The Exiled Prince," in which Michael was unmistakably the hero and herself the heroine. They had fourteen children, and lived happily until the young prince, then twenty-one years of age, was stabbed to death by a Russian gipsy.

Katherine had a civilising influence on Paul's pagans. Humphrey adored her, and would sit as quiet as a mouse while she told him fairy-tales or played old dance-tunes. And Dorothy took to brushing her wild mop of hair, and did not slide down the banisters so often, but actually behaved for ten minutes or so in that ladylike way which her mother had so often desired, when Michael brought out his violin and Katherine accompanied him on the piano. Even at that age Michael could play with a touch of passion and a sense of emotion which I thought wonderful, though the boy himself pooh-poohed his talent, and had to be coerced by Katherine into practising. An impatient young rebel! I remember one evening that, when he bungled a difficult passage, he flung his violin on the sofa and sulked for half an hour, until Dorothy restored him to good humour by letting him beat her at noughts and crosses.

They became good comrades, those two, and Dorothy even allowed him to read some of her romantic stories scribbled in penny copy-books, which no mortal eye but hers had ever been allowed to see till then. But that sign of

esteem and affection led to a serious quarrel, because Michael laughed at these lurid novelettes so uproariously that in a sudden fit of passionate humiliation, and with all the wounded pride of an author at unkind criticism, she tore one of them out of his hands, flung it on the fire, and then burst into tears. When he tried to apologise she swore very dreadfully, said he was a “dirty little cad,” and then rushed upstairs to her bedroom, and refused to come down to supper. Katherine found her lying face down on her bed, with the corner of the pillow in her mouth to stifle her sobs, and she only kicked her heels up when Katherine protested that Michael hadn’t meant to be unkind, and, anyhow, was much too critical. There was a reconciliation next day, when both Michael and Dorothy looked very sheepish at breakfast, and exchanged no conversation until midday, and then, according to Bumps, who had been watching this situation with a mingling of amusement and alarm, kissed each other in the summer-house.

Before Michael went away from that visit Puggy gave him a little gold heart which she had worn as a locket. He slept with it under his pillow for a week, and then lost it down a gutter. His gift to her was an eight-lined verse about a field-mouse, which she thought better than anything by Shakespeare, as he was inclined to agree. She kept it in a drawer with her most precious things, which included a lock of her mother’s hair, a portrait of Charles Dickens, her copy of the Exiled Prince, and a black pig in bog oak presented to her by a gipsy boy for whom, at one time, she had concealed a hopeless passion.

On one or two of those week-ends when I escaped from Fleet Street to this woodland scene Paul took long tramps with me and discussed his domestic tragedy. Clare didn’t answer his letters, and he had made up his mind to go and see her. The doctor had recovered from his bruises and gone to London, but so far Dorothy hadn’t joined the man, as Paul knew from my father, who was exceedingly distressed by the affair and blamed Paul for everything.

“The worst of it he’s right, too!” said Paul. “I see now that I was a selfish kind of brute. There’s nothing for a girl like that to do down here, and I became too absorbed in my work. . . . And I ought to have kept my jaw shut about politics and things, instead of always getting across her Tory instincts—your father’s influence, old man!—and exaggerating my socialistic notions.

“It’s been a revelation to me in other ways, and damned unpleasant. I mean, what’s the good of civilisation and all that, as represented by my Cambridge education, my “high ideals,” my sense of being rather an intellectual fellow with superior views on international peace and so forth, when the jealousy of the old cave-man breaks through all that veneer on the first suspicion that the wife I’ve neglected is carrying on with another fellow? Why, I nearly killed that man Farrell. Went at him like a blind brute, and

mauled him about. Me, the bacteriologist with a kindly interest in streptococci! The latest product of scientific progress! If I behave like that, murderously, out of control, seeing red, what about the millions of illiterates, and the fellows without my upbringing and home-life, and the refining influence of Romilly Hall? That's what gives me a scared feeling. It's a blow to my belief in human progress. It also knocks my self-pride off its perch."

Well, this humility and self-reproach saved the home from shipwreck. He patched up a peace with Clare, and she came home again. Katherine had some of the credit of that, after a long and painful interview with Clare, which seems to have persuaded my sister at last that she was acting wickedly and making a fool of herself.

"I was a regular bully!" said Katherine. "I just went for her hot and strong, and then made her cry, though I felt sorry all the time."

Clare's home-coming was also due a little to the behaviour of Dr. Farrell, who admitted to Paul—they became quite friendly!—that he thoroughly deserved the hammering he had got, and that he had been carried away by the folly of a moment and some romantic emotion of which he was utterly ashamed.

That was after Katherine's visit to Sussex, and before the beginning of a longer journey.

She had been home a week, and was having tea with Michael, who was just back from the City of London School, when a motor-car drew up at the door and some visitors were announced. It was a tall, bearded Russian, whose card bore the name of a Grand Duke of Russia, and with him was his wife, a pretty woman with a friendly smile. The lady talked vivaciously to Katherine, and fell in love with Michael—so it seemed—while her husband was upstairs with Detloff for half an hour or more. Then they said good-bye, and Detloff stood at the window and watched the motor-car drive away.

"What did they want?" asked Katherine, pouring out another cup of tea for Michael. "It seems queer that you should have a visit from a Grand Duke, you old anarchist!"

Detloff turned from the window and looked at Katherine rather strangely.

"My dear," he said, "we shall have to make a rather serious decision. It would alter all your life, and mine. It is your wish that will decide."

Katherine said: "Do you want to go back to Russia?"

She told me that her heart began to beat, and that a sense of fear overcame her when she made this guess and knew that it was right.

"I've been asked to go back," said Detloff. "It's a message from the Czar—that poor, weak man! There's to be a liberal régime in Russia—my old dream! They want me to help."

He was silent for a moment, and Katherine did not speak.

“You won’t like to leave England?” said Detloff, after that moment. “All your friends, your own people? No, I can hardly ask you.”

She heard the wistfulness in his voice, the deep breath he drew. His old dream coming true! The chance of service to Russia—after all those years of exile! She could see what was passing in his mind.

She quoted Scripture to him, as she told me afterwards, laughing.

“ ‘Where thou goest I will go, and thy people shall be my people.’ ”

And that middle-aged husband of hers—old Bluebeard, as Paul called him—went down on his knees, and put his head in her lap and his arms about her, and his tears were wet on her hands.

Young Michael was astounded, but the idea of going to Russia thrilled him enormously. That Russian blood in him heard some call of race.

I saw them off at Charing Cross. Paul was there too, with his boy and girl. There was also a little crowd of Russians, some members of the Fabian Society, a group of students from King’s College, and some of those literary and socialistic fellows who had talked me tired sometimes in the house in Cromwell Road.

I had the chance of only a few words with Katherine.

I said: “Thanks for your friendship—our comradeship.”

She pressed my hand, and said: “Distance makes no difference to that,” and then contradicted herself by quoting some lines of a French verse which I had liked to hear her sing:

*“Partir, c’est mourir un peu;
C’est mourir à ce qu’on aime.”*

When I waved my hat to the disappearing train I knew how much her friendship had meant to me, and felt desolate in London.

XII

AFTER Katherine had left London I hated passing down the Cromwell Road where that house of hers had always been open to me. Even London itself became rather intolerable now and then, and I was glad that my journalistic work took me abroad a good deal, as special correspondent, in Paris, Rome for a time, Berlin. But it was rather hard on my father and mother, who were lonely now that Beatrice, Evelyn, and Clare were all married, leaving the big house in Clapham Park with a sense of emptiness and silence after all the riot of our family life.

For their sake I threw up my job as a regular journalist, only going on special missions at irregular intervals, and writing fiction in the rest of my time. One novel of mine—*The Splendid Vision*—had a fair success, and the critics—that mysterious confraternity—were kind to it, but I couldn't compete with the popularity of my sister Evelyn, who sold thousands where I sold hundreds. She was one of those wonder-women who can write three serials at the same time without apparent effort, doing her eight thousand words a day as regularly as clockwork, by the simple process of sitting down before a typewriter and letting her subliminal self, as she called this mysterious part of her psychological apparatus, dictate her flowing narrative.

"It's easy!" she used to tell me. "All you've got to do is to give your subconsciousness a chance by shutting out the external world—I find a little room with green wallpaper very helpful!—and then let it rip."

With me the experiment never worked, and I suffered agonies in trying to make my characters do what I wanted them to do, but which they utterly refused to do, so that before I was anywhere near the end of a novel I hated them all like poison, and hurried them to early deaths or a scrambled finish.

"You'll never write a successful novel," said my sister Evelyn, "because you *will* indulge in sordid realism. The great throbbing heart of the British public revolts against realism. There's too much in ordinary life. What it wants is romance, sentiment, the love-affairs of nice people, beautiful thoughts, happy endings."

Well, she had certainly found the right recipe, and it was very pleasant for the curate of St. Peter's, Hanover Square, who delighted in his wife's fame and fortune, and in the tea-parties they gave to the best people, and in the invitations which were showered on them from ladies of title, who thought Evelyn almost as great a novelist as Marie Corelli, and a very spiritual influence in English life, because she wrote so nicely of their class—always with some charming references to the Royal Family—and showed how good

and generous they were to the lower orders, in spite of ingratitude.

I found Evelyn's condescension rather trying at times, and felt hopelessly ill-at-ease among so many countesses and pretty ladies who crowded her drawing-room. Not because I had any grudge against them, but because their society chit-chat always gave me a headache, and did not have any reference to my line of thought, which at that time was rather absorbed in the study of industrial conditions in Europe. Perhaps I did have a grudge against them! I was unfair to them, as I see now. They seemed to me utterly empty-headed, frivolous, pleasure-loving creatures, without any serious purpose in life or any quality of character, with false smiles, false complexions, false hearts. I hated to hear them simpering about "dearest Evelyn." I loathed their pretty affectations. But a little later in history, when things happened to test them, it was some of Evelyn's friends—these very women—who showed fine courage, a quality of steel, a defiance of nasty kinds of death.

Anyhow, I did not go very often to Evelyn's house in these days, partly because the Reverend James Abercombie Smythe used to bore me a good deal by telling undergraduate stories in his smoking-room, some of them as blue as his wallpaper—which he had chosen as a contrast to the green of Evelyn's study—and discussing the racing news, about which I was utterly ignorant. He adopted a man-of-the-world attitude with me, and only occasionally alluded to his "spiritual work" in the parish, which I fancy consisted entirely in taking tea with the charming ladies of Belgravia and Mayfair, and discussing the scandals which sometimes invaded those sanctuaries of wealth and fashion.

I liked my sister Beatrice better, and played the benevolent uncle to her three plump children—two boys and a girl—who were growing apace, though younger than Paul's boy and girl. They were glad of my visits, because I always brought them some little things from my travels abroad, and there were screams of delight when I revealed such exciting curiosities as a "Petit Guignol" from Paris, or elegantly dressed dolls from Berlin. Beatrice basked in motherhood. It was a pretty sight for any sentimentalist to see her with her two fair-haired boys, Harold and Cuthbert, and the girl Winifred, with her yellow pigtail, singing old nursery rhymes round the schoolroom piano.

She was also the happiest and most loving of wives to the husband in Coutts's Bank, whom she regarded as the noblest, bravest, and most handsome man alive. He was, indeed, an excellent fellow, though he tired me a little by his descriptions of smoking concerts in the Honourable Artillery Company, and by solemn disquisitions on the need of military service in England—he firmly believed in Lord Roberts as the prophet of an European war in which England would be tried to the uttermost—and by singing patriotic ballads such as "The Midshipmite," or Kipling's *Barrack-room Ballads*, in a hearty baritone—one of those simple, honest, patriotic souls who do their duty

according to the light that is in them, and have no doubts; but sometimes make a fearful mess of things when intelligence is wanted as well as character.

I still saw a good deal of Paul and his family. They had come to town again, as Paul had returned to the Pasteur Institute, having abandoned the Sussex disease farm for Clare's sake. He was becoming a rather famous man in his own line of research, especially in Germany, where I happened to meet some scientists who spoke of him with reverence, as though he were one of the pioneers of knowledge. In England he was not thought of much account by his neighbours in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. Out of their windows they watched him at times lying underneath early types of motor-cars and emerging with a worried look and a lot of oil. They saw him striding off to his laboratory in shabby old clothes and a big pipe in his mouth, looking more like an artist than a scientist, and not caring how he looked. Sometimes he came out with a tall, long-legged girl hanging on to one of his arms, and a sturdy, cheerful, good-looking lad stepping out on the other side. They were still Puggy and Bumps to their father, though Dorothy and Humphrey to the rest of the world that may have happened to meet them. This trio made a lot of noise as they passed, laughing at their own jokes, talking loudly, sometimes chasing each other down the street, to the alarm of old gentlemen with gouty feet or bunions.

After that affair with Dr. Farrell, Clare had come back listless, melancholy, and at times hysterical. She had a habit of sitting in her room reading neurotic novels, or—when they were still in Sussex—staring out of the window at a rain-swept countryside during the dismal winter that followed the spring and summer when I had gone down for week-ends. Paul had become rather alarmed about her, and tried to show her some of his old tenderness and comradeship, thereby neglecting his work. But he had not succeeded very well. She repulsed his affectionate advances in a way that hurt him. She saw no humour in his little jokes, carefully prepared to raise a smile from her and falling flat. He went about with an anxious line in his forehead, stealing wistful glances at her, wondering how he could restore something like happiness in this married life of his, and then, when his nerves were all ragged, said some sharp, impatient thing which made her cry or denounce him as a selfish brute, who was utterly regardless of her happiness and had killed her love for him. Deplorable!

Then something happened which changed Clare completely. It was when they moved to London, and on an afternoon when, complaining that she had nothing to do in the world, and wished she was dead—Puggy and Bumps had scrambled over lunch and gone to school again—she went to a meeting at the Kensington Town Hall and heard an address on votes for women. She came back with lighted eyes. It was as though she had been transfigured by a spiritual vision. She became cheerful, energetic, argumentative, satirical, keen.

She read omnivorously of books by John Stuart Mill, and authors unknown to Paul, dealing with the rights of women, the equality of the sexes, the failure of man. She attended drawing-room lectures by earnest women, and presently, as time went on, when Paul came home from the Pasteur Institute, he found his own drawing-room invaded by large numbers of remarkable looking ladies, some of them with short hair, and some exceedingly masculine in their way of dress, who had a habit of breaking into shrill cheers and tapping on the polished boards with the points of their umbrellas. What was most astounding to Paul was that Clare was “giving tongue,” as he called it, and arousing her visitors to great enthusiasm by her eloquence. When he encountered them in his hall, they regarded him with an air of hostility, or with a smiling contempt, as though he couldn’t help being a ridiculous man, but ought to be ashamed of himself, anyhow.

Paul didn’t resent this. On the contrary, he was profoundly glad that Clare had found a new interest and happiness in life, though he couldn’t accept her views that women were suffering under a devilish tyranny of man-made laws, and that there could be no human progress until women had gained the vote. But he was tolerant.

“By all means have the vote, my dear,” he said to Clare one day when I was there at lunch. “If you’d like mine, I’d give it to you willingly. I’ve only used it once, and that was on behalf of a Labour chappie who turned Tory, and was the most reactionary blighter who ever presided over a Government Department.”

After Clare had left the room, and while we stayed on, smoking, he alluded to the subject, after a short laugh.

“Clare has become a fanatic! Well I’m jolly glad. I’m all for fanaticism, which is another name for courage in one’s own convictions. But, of course, it’s nothing but a mirage, this votes-for-women idea. It won’t make motherhood easier, or heal broken hearts, or eliminate vice and disease and temptation. It won’t even improve the honesty of politicians. They’ll find a way to dodge the women as now they dodge the men. It’ll mean a larger crowd to dupe, more catchwords for the semi-educated, new dope for hysterical females to go with the old dope for hysterical men—the emotion of the mob.”

“I thought you were a democrat,” I reminded him. “Out for liberty. One of the dreamers.”

“Yes,” he said, “that’s all right. We must have a little dream of some sort. Mine is science. Clare’s is the Vote—mystic word! Detloff’s is Liberty. Other people’s is love, or power, or their particular idea of religion—Christian Science, Spiritualism, the Salvation Army, Joanna Southcote’s prophecies. . . . Dreams, eh? What would happen if we woke up some day and found we’d all been wrong? Very awkward! We should feel rather silly with ourselves.”

"It's a tragedy that's likely to happen," I suggested. "I suppose it's the history of humanity. We keep on finding out how wrong we are—disillusion following hopes—the dream and the awakening. After all, it's how we learn and get ahead."

"Do we get ahead?" asked Paul. And then he laughed in his jolly, hearty way and said, "Avaunt, dark doubt! I'm out for truth at all costs, even if my experiments end in failure every time, as they mostly do; even if the elimination of disease prepares new horrors for humanity—in over-population, the struggle of races, infernal competition, the failure of the world's food supply. The old microscope amuses me, and Clare gets a lot of fun out of a new world entirely bossed by short-haired women. Also I hear from Katherine that old Bluebeard thinks Russia is on the eve of liberty. God bless our dreams!"

He looked across the table, and changed the subject.

"Have you heard from Kitty lately? I miss her abominably."

I agreed with that last remark.

"I heard from her yesterday. And I miss her so much that I'm going out to Moscow to have a look at her again. I've been commissioned to write some articles, and perhaps they'll cover expenses."

"Sound idea!" said Paul, not so startled as I thought he would be. "Give her my love, and tell her I'm too lazy to write."

That idea of going to Russia had been working in my mind for some time, and it had been brought to a definite plan by one of Katherine's recent letters:

"Come out here for a few weeks! It would be an act of chivalry to an unfortunate lady who languishes for news of England and old friends. Paul never writes, the villain, and your dear letters are my chief link with a way of life which seems already remotely distant, although it is less than a year ago since I waved to you from that train, and could see nothing because of silly tears! . . . But what are letters? I want to talk, to ask a thousand questions, to hear an English voice. Michael grows more Russian every day. I have lost my English son, except now and then, when he reappears and rejoices my heart by his Anglo-Saxon moods. . . . Do you want a journalistic reason for a trip to Russia? Business as well as friendship? Here is a good one. Russia is on the eve of revolution. Not a bloody one, so Serge thinks and hopes, but a great victory for liberty all along the line. A wonderful chapter in the history of this people. The old chains of tyranny are getting rusty and are ready to break! The Czar is ready for concessions. He has summoned the Duma, and Serge is elected. There is free speech—such a lot of it!—a free Press for the first time, a sense of coming liberation and the golden age. Serge walks on air, and forgets to

eat, and lives on eloquence. It's all very thrilling—and rather frightening. . . . So come as a chronicler of history and a good friend!”

It was the editor of my old weekly paper who gave me the chance of answering that call. “It sounds interesting,” he said. “Only don’t go and get shot behind a barricade. Those Cossacks are not very careful, I’m told.”

XIII

I WENT from Berlin to Moscow, through East Prussia and the Baltic States. A dreary journey through flat country, with nothing to see through the carriage window but interminable stretches of snow-covered land, or forests of silver birches, black against this whiteness, and here and there little villages of wooden houses, snow-capped and strangely silent. At the railway stations there were generally small crowds of peasants in fur caps and sheepskin coats (with the wool inside) and canvas, or bast boots. It was often difficult to tell which were men and which women—if the men were young enough to have no beards. Some of them had their legs tied up in rags. Many of the children went barefoot on the hard snow. They all looked to me a sad and sullen lot, and I saw no sign of gaiety, heard no laughter. Their sledges were drawn by small horses which looked half starved and were clotted with mud. Some of them dragged their sledges, laden with birch-wood for fuel or sacks of flour.

At the bigger stations there were always a few soldiers or military police, who pushed the peasants about, bullied them, and sometimes kicked them. I saw one soldier knock down a young boy with the butt end of his rifle because he stood in the way of a farm-cart which was being unloaded by men who looked like prisoners. The boy lay quiet in the snow, as though stunned, but nobody paid the slightest heed to him. It did not look to me much like the eve of liberty in Russia. . . .

On the station platform at Moscow there were many well-dressed people waiting to meet my fellow-passengers, and suddenly I saw Katherine and Serge Detloff and young Michael. Katherine wore a fur cap drawn down below her ears, but with a loop of hair showing each side of her face, and she was wrapped in a long fur coat above her snow-boots. A Russian princess! But still Katherine, as I saw by the shining welcome in her eyes, and knew by the way she took my hands and held them for a moment.

"A long way from Clapham Park!" she said. "How splendid of you to come! What tremendous talks we are going to have!"

I was embarrassed by the greeting of Serge Detloff. He took me by the shoulders and hugged me like a bear, and kissed me on both cheeks.

"My dear friend!" he cried. "All the way from London! My place of exile, dear, dirty old London! City of liberty and good comradeship! Well, I want you to like Moscow. You've come at a good time. We're all a little drunk with hope. We're all talking our heads off. The dream is coming true. My old dream! Freedom of thought, freedom of speech, the end of tyranny!"

Michael had grabbed me by the arm—and was laughing at his father's

effusiveness.

"How's everybody?" he asked. "How's Uncle Paul, and how's Puggy and Bumps? I've almost forgotten how to talk English. If it wasn't for Mother, I'd forget every blooming word."

He was almost as tall as I was, and looked more sturdy than in the old days, in a fur cap, very jaunty, over his fair hair, and a short coat with an astrachan cape, and long black boots up to his thighs.

"Let's get home," said Katherine. "I expect Gilbert is frozen to death. We shall have to lend him a fur coat. Besides, I want to hear everything about everybody."

Outside the station there was a very smart *droschke* waiting for us, provided with black bearskins for our covering. The driver, or *isvostchik*, as Michael called him, was a flat-faced young fellow, who pulled off his cap to me as though I were a great lord. He wore a double-breasted coat with a heavy pleated skirt, and carried his whip in one of his top boots.

Katherine spoke to him in Russian, of which I didn't understand a word, and we set off at a great pace over cobble-stones so unevenly laid that we jolted horribly. But Katherine put her hand on my arm and said, "Fear nothing! We shall get home by God's grace. At least, we generally do!"

Above us was a steel-blue sky, below us a snow-covered ground, and beyond us a walled city so fantastic and so beautiful that I could hardly believe my eyes. It was a city within a city, enclosed by a double line of high walls with fan-shaped battlements pierced by low gateways. Above them in all directions were tall white towers like minarets, crowned by immense pear-shaped domes of golden metal, so that the sun flashed from them and sparkled on them. It was like an Oriental dream-city imagined by some drunken artist.

"This is called the White City," said Detloff. "It's the outer city. Round here there's a ring of boulevards with trees, intersected by wide streets which radiate from the Kremlin. Here are the rich folks—the summer mansions of Grand Dukes, the private palaces of Petersburg merchants, and the government officials, who are getting frightened because there's liberty in the air!"

"Time enough for politics, Serge!" said Katherine, laughing behind her bearskin, which she held up to her nose.

We drove through a narrow gateway, and I noticed that Serge and Michael and the *isvostchik* pulled off their caps, and that some peasants and soldiers passing along the side walk crossed themselves repeatedly.

"The shrine of the Iberian Virgin," said Katherine. "There's a holy picture inside, hundreds of years old, and miraculous, the Russians think, poor dears. At least the simple folk. Even the Czar has to say his prayers here before he gets to the inner city. I think he needs them. . . . Now we come to the Kremlin and the Red Square, so look out for ruts and bumps!"

Some of the cobble-stones had been dislodged in the great open square through which we drove, and the wheels of our *droschke* lurched into deep holes, and once our lean horse stumbled and nearly fell, so that Katherine gave a little scream, and then laughed. On one side of us were high walls again, and above them clustered groups of those golden cupolas on tall white shafts, and, beyond, a vista of churches, palaces, and whitewashed barracks. The atmosphere was intensely dry and clear.

Serge spoke to me from the front seat, where he had his back to the driver, with one arm round young Michael.

"These stones bleed with the tragedy of Russian history. This square was the place of massacre and martyrdom. The gallows-trees, the scaffold, and the stake were planted here. In my time I have seen the Cossacks riding down the crowds, swinging the *nagaika* which cut men's faces open, and women's breasts—damn them! The Krasnaya, or Red Square! Red with blood and shame. Let's hope it has seen the end of all such history!"

He pointed to the domes and spires above the walls on my right, and said, "The Kremlin—haunted by grisly ghosts—the stronghold of tyranny and torture. May God's curse be lifted from it now!"

I noticed that Katherine leaned forward and touched him on the knee, as though to hush this outburst, and he smiled at her and then was silent.

I watched the people crossing this Red Square—strange and picturesque types unlike any I had seen in other cities of Europe. Russian peasants trudged slowly by, dragging their little sledges or wheeled carts, and the old *moujiks* with long white beards and unkempt hair prodded the snow with gnarled sticks. There were beggars, looking hardly human in bundles of rags, and Tartar women in wide petticoats and boots of scarlet leather, and tall, handsome fellows in astrachan coats reaching to the tabs of their black boots, whom I learnt to know as Cossacks of the Don. Brutal fellows when charging a mob, said Detloff. Smart little sledges, drawn by well-groomed horses, dashed across the Square, in spite of bumps and ruts, and from two or three of them pretty women with furs up to their ears waved friendly hands at Katherine.

We were held up for a minute or two by the passing of a column of soldiers in ragged and threadbare uniforms. Some of them wore high caps of matted fur, others flat field-caps, and the faces underneath were haggard and yellow and tanned. They straggled past in a disorderly way, and I never saw a crowd of more dejected, weary, and sullen-looking men. I could see that the passers-by stared at them curiously, and Detloff and Michael stood up in the *droschke* to look at them. Detloff cried out in English, with pity in his voice:

"Poor devils! Poor devils!"

He turned to me and explained.

"The last victims of the Japanese war! The remnants of that great defeated

army of ours. That tale of tragedy and shame! . . . No one cheers them, you see. The war has been forgotten long ago. These men have been a year on the road.”

I looked at the men again, and felt a sense of horror. What memories of agony in ice-bound trenches, of cold steel, and hunger, and frozen blood, and cholera camps, and piled death, lay behind those sullen eyes! I was glad when our *droschke* went forward again and left them behind.

We passed a church which made me cry out with astonishment because of its wild, its mad, architecture. It seemed to have two stories, which were surmounted by a dozen cupolas, strangely shaped like the turbans of Oriental princes, and spires painted in many vivid colours and twisted like sugar-sticks. Above all this fantastic adventure in stone, massive gilt crosses glinted in the steely sky.

“The Cathedral of St. Basil,” said Katherine, watching my face with a smile. “When I first saw it, it frightened me. It’s so Russian—and I felt so English!”

We drove over a bridge which crossed the river Moskva below the Kremlin walls, and came to a road which I knew afterwards as the Sophieskaya. It was ankle deep in muddy snow.

“Here we are!” shouted Michael, and he sprang down to open some iron gates which led into a cobbled courtyard in front of a stone-built house with some broad steps leading up to the front door.

“My Russian home!” said Katherine, as she gave me her hand to help me out. “A world away from the Cromwell Road!”

XIV

KATHERINE'S Russian home was a large square house built some time in the eighteenth century, when one of Detloff's ancestors had been the Governor-General of Moscow, and a tyrant with a taste for torture. Although it had been confiscated when Serge had got into trouble and into the Schlüsselburg prison for liberty's sake, it still contained much of its old furniture and many of its old pictures, now that it had been restored to him as an act of Imperial clemency. Everything had a shabby grandeur. The gilt had been worn off the Louis XV chairs; the tapestries were torn and had threadbare patches; the wallpapers were mouldy with the damp of many winters and unheated rooms; the cut-glass candelabra had lost some of their pendants; the portraits of Detloff's ancestors—bearded men in Russian uniforms, hard-visaged women in the fashion of a hundred years ago and more—were badly cracked.

Yet, when the curtains were drawn and the lamps were lit, there was a faded splendour about these barely furnished rooms which was rather impressive, and it was a good background, I thought, to Katherine's elegance. She looked less English than when I had seen her last, perhaps because of some little trick of fashion which I could not perceive; and I thought, and told her, that she had the look of a Russian princess. That did not please her at all; and she confessed to me that she hated the house and everything in it.

"It has the smell of old ghosts. I think most of the people who lived here must have been hard and cruel and hateful. There's an evil atmosphere in these hideous old rooms."

She had furnished a boudoir for herself beyond the *salon*, and felt more at home there. It was a little corner of England, with chintz-covered chairs and flowered wallpaper, and photographs of Paul and Clare and me, and of other relatives and friends, on the mantelpiece and cabinet. She had brought her own writing-desk from England, and I liked to think of her sitting there as she wrote the letters which kept me in touch with this new life of hers.

Michael had a small room next to this, where he could practise his violin, read his books—they were crammed untidily on some shelves which he had made himself—and scribbled queer little stories which amused, and sometimes alarmed, Katherine, because of their lurid imagination. He had a fancy for ghost stories, dark and dreadful murders, gloomy tragedies. There was one story he wrote—about the tortures of a Russian patriot imprisoned in the fortress of Peter and Paul—which made Katherine shiver when she read it. In spite of its childish style, it had a grim realism which was quite shocking,

though the boy only laughed at her when she told him so, and took it as a compliment to his literary success, as indeed it was. "He's like a baby Dostoevsky," said Katherine. "His Russian mind dominates all my little efforts to keep him English."

It was in Katherine's boudoir that we had our talks, hour after hour, in those winter evenings when, outside, Moscow was quiet under the snow. We forgot Russia at times—Katherine deliberately, I think—and talked of Paul and Clare, and my sisters and their husbands, and the things that were happening in England—the latest play by Bernard Shaw, Wells's latest novel, the new buildings in London.

"Tell me about the fog in London," said Katherine. "You say you had to walk from Hyde Park? What an adventure?"

She liked me to tell her about the look of London, about rainy days there, about the crowds in Piccadilly, the new window-curtains in her old house in the Cromwell Road, any small detail.

I could see that her spirit yearned for London again. She was painfully home-sick, and this life in Moscow was an exile which she only suffered for her husband's sake, out of loyalty. Yet she was gay and gracious to her husband's friends, spoke Russian with a fluency which startled me, and took, or forced herself to take, an interest in their political hopes and social pleasures.

Their main social pleasure, I found, was bound up with politics. Whereas in England—in Evelyn's drawing-room, for instance—the conversation of the pretty ladies ran upon frocks and fashions, hunting, tennis, croquet, the weather and "dear Lady So-and-So," the Russian ladies and their men, who came to drink tea in Katherine's shabby old *salon*, plunged at once into heated discussions on the abstract ideals of liberty and constitutional government, on Imperialism versus Republicanism, on the work of the coming Duma, on the suppression of the Secret Police, on international arbitration, the abolition of war, the education of the peasants, the communal system of land, the separation of Church and State, and the freedom of the Press. As most of this conversation was in Russian, when the discussion became general and everybody talked at once, I could understand none of it; and these afternoon teas became political meetings, in which everybody disagreed, though their heated arguments were relieved by gusts of laughter, and ended always in perfect good humour. But, as nearly everyone there could speak English or French, I was not left out in the cold altogether, and had separate conversations with most of them, so that I could see the ideas working in their minds and learn a good deal about what was happening in Russia.

Briefly, what was happening was the arrival of the working man, and even the peasant, to a consciousness of power strong enough to overthrow the tyranny of ages. That was new, they told me. Until the last few years the fight for liberty in Russia had been waged by the intellectuals, or, at least, the educated people. The Liberal aristocrats, like Detloff himself, like some of the people in this room, had been the advocates, the heroes, and the martyrs of liberty. They were the professors, the students, the writers, who had gone down into the country districts to lead the life of peasants and preach the gospel of the rights of men. It was they who had gone into the factories and urged their comrades to break the chains of industrial serfdom, who had been arrested, imprisoned, banished to the Siberian mines, shut up in solitary cells, flogged and tortured, mentally if not physically. Now the working men had formed themselves into unions; they were becoming the driving force behind the general demand for the decent liberties of life. They had become aware of one terrible weapon in their hands—the general strike, the laying down of tools, the cessation from all work. They had tried it once, and the Government had surrendered in panic fear. It was because of that action, which had paralysed Russian life for three weeks, that the Czar had agreed to summon the Duma, that the Press had regained its liberty, and that a thousand reforms were promised. . . .

“It is not without its dangers, this working men’s movement,” said Serge Detloff one evening. “We old Liberals are rather afraid that things may move too fast, and that some of the new leaders may be too violent in their methods and demands. The Social Democrats, with their harsh and rather arrogant doctrine—according to Karl Marx—wish to overthrow the whole basis of society. They prefer a revolution by blood and terror to a peaceful evolution and reform which is now within our grasp. Fortunately they are in a small minority, and the mass of our people are idealistic and pacific. We are going to win by the spirit, and not by the force—which would only lead to bloodshed and reaction.”

Most of the men who came to Katherine’s Russian home were the older type of Liberal, once exiles like Detloff but now amnestied, or professors of Moscow University who had lived in the backwaters of ideas and action. Two or three of them reminded me of portraits I had seen of Tolstoy, with his deep-set eyes, prominent forehead, sensitive nostrils, and shaggy beard. Like him, they wore the Russian blouse, fastened with a leather belt. But there were several younger men, of my own age, who interested me more, and seemed to belong to a more modern school of thought. They had clean-shaven faces, and hair that had a habit of falling over their intense, brooding, melancholy eyes until they jerked it back with impatient hands. One of them was the famous writer, Suvorin, with whom I became friendly during the few weeks I had in

Russia. He had a great admiration for Katherine, and spoke very simply of it in a way that made me like him.

“Serge Detloff’s wife creates a sense of beauty,” he said. “It is not that she is really beautiful—her features are not good—but her spirit touches them, and looks out of her eyes. It is the spirit of purity and serenity which I find characteristic of English-women. But she has a sense of humour, which is rare—is it not?—among your countrywomen. You see how she smiles at all our wild talk, our vague idealism!”

At another time he spoke about Detloff.

“They are rather pitiful, these old exiles! They have come back expecting hero-worship and leadership. But really they are only tolerated out of kindness. Detloff and his friends are historical ghosts, speaking a dead language. They still talk the old Liberal idealism—revolution of the spirit, bloodless reforms, constitutionalism with a limited monarchy, as in England. It is all an illusion. We younger men know that when revolution comes it will be through rivers of blood. As I am a coward, I think of killing myself sometimes to avoid all that horror.”

“Is it coming soon?” I asked.

He looked at me with a profound sadness in his eyes.

“We live on the edge of hell’s pit. The flames may break out to-morrow, or next week, or next year. There is no certainty. Sometimes in the morning I think, ‘It must happen to-night!’ But the days pass, and we talk and talk!”

It was sometimes with Suvorin and sometimes with Serge Detloff—and often with young Michael—that I went to political meetings allowed by the Government in this time of free speech. They were always crowded, and queues lined up outside, long before the doors were opened, like people in England eager to see the latest piece at the Gaiety or a sensational divorce case. But these people—students, working men, girl clerks, shop-girls, ladies of fashion sometimes—came to listen to long orations on the trade-union movement, or the power of the general strike, or the reforms expected of the Duma. And, though the speeches might be dull—I could not tell—they listened, not only with patience, but with ecstasy, because free speech was a kind of miracle in Russia, and the mere sound of men and women talking the truth that was in them, expressing their emotions and ideas, was intoxicating. Sometimes I glanced at the boy Michael’s face and saw how he drank in all these words, and was lit up by enthusiasm.

Suvorin used to translate here and there, or give me the gist of an oration, and it was he who explained a dramatic thing which gave me a thrill I can hardly describe. When one of these meetings began, a gaunt old man mounted the platform and unfolded a long scroll, and spoke three words of Russian. Instantly all the people in the hall rose to their feet and stood in deadly silence,

while tears ran down many cheeks as the old man on the platform read out a list of names.

Suvorin whispered to me: "The roll-call of those who have died for liberty. Our Russian martyrs."

He, too, was weeping, and very pale, as though this emotion made him ill; and in Russia, and in this hall, I knew for the first time the meaning of that passion for liberty which is unknown in England after so many centuries of self-government fought for in the past. It was a passion, I thought, which might brutalise as well as spiritualise, and make men cruel and mad, as those of the French revolution under the Terror; but at these meetings in Moscow I saw no hint at that. They were idealists, and decent, high-thinking, liberal-minded folk, as it seemed to me, when I gazed round on them and watched their faces. Yet some of them had dared all things and suffered all things for this ideal. Several times I saw an old wrinkled woman who sat on the platform or underneath it, smiling, nodding her head to people in the audience, or knitting with hands that seemed twisted by rheumatism. Suvorin pointed her out.

"That is old Vera Sassoulitch! She tried to kill Trepoff's father because of his bloody deeds. They acquitted her in 1878, and she was the last political prisoner to be tried by jury. See how she smiles because she thinks that liberty is coming to Russia after all those years!"

Amongst Katherine's friends were Prince Miliukoff and his wife, who had a daughter about Michael's age—an impetuous little lady called Tamia, whom Michael heartily detested because she teased him so much, and called him a rude little English boy. They had a country house about forty *versts* from Moscow, and Katherine was invited to bring me with Serge and Michael to stay with them for a week-end.

"Rather a bore for you," said Katherine, "especially as Michael quarrels all the time with Tamia. But you ought to see something of the Russian country life, and Olga—Princess Miliukoff—is a dear soul. Her husband is going to be in London for a time, so you might find them useful afterwards."

It was but a brief glimpse I had of that Russian country house, and yet it gave me an insight into the life of the old noble class in its last phase, as I supposed, and as Princess Miliukoff prophesied one evening when we sat together in the window-seat of the long gallery. She was a vivacious lady, with very bright, bird-like eyes and a charming laugh, and that wonderful candour which I found was characteristic of most Russian women. She had lived in the United States for a time, and spoke with an American accent and a touch of slang.

I was looking at the long row of her husband's family portraits—not so

damaged as those of Detloff—and she read my thoughts.

“Yes,” she said, “you’re quite right! There won’t be any more to add to those poor old pomposities. We people of the noble class in Russia—in these draughty old houses—are just waiting for the almighty smash, the bonfire which is going to burn us all up. I wonder how it feels to be frizzled?”

She gave that little sparkling laugh which came so easily and often, and then put her hand on my arm and spoke more seriously.

“That beautiful sister-in-law of yours—isn’t she something like that?—take her back to England with her boy Michael. This is no country for people who don’t have to live here. We’re not civilised, though we talk so wonderfully. We’re all savages, really, underneath our skins. When the trouble begins it’s going to be dirty work.”

I told her that I thought the educated Russians, as far as I had met them, were the most civilised people in the world, but she shook her head and would not agree.

“Some of us are rather pleasant people,” she said. “I rather like myself in my best moments! We’re like children playing with fire. My husband, for instance, and little me, playing with Liberal ideas which are going to ruin us and end all that we are and have. It’s so amusing, so exciting, so interesting! But we’re not the Russian masses. Here are the people who make up Russia. Look!”

She rose from the window-seat and pointed to a group of peasants chopping wood in the courtyard. A bearded *moujik* was leaning on his axe and talking to two women. He seemed to be angry with them, and, when the younger woman of the two answered him, he threatened her with a clenched fist. Another man came across the yard and argued with him, and the older man swung him roughly to one side. Then they went on chopping wood silently in the slush and snow.

“A hundred and ten million like that,” said Princess Miliukoff. “Some of them go into the cities and learn to read and write, and get this idea of liberty from our intellectuals. The others stay in the land and want more for themselves, and get flogged when they don’t pay their taxes—not on this estate, but in many parts of Russia where the Liberal idea isn’t liked. They’re simple folk, good as gold when they’re not drunk on vodka and when they’re not beating their wives. They have all the animal passions—of course; are they not human?—and when they rise against us because of what our ancestors did to them, and some are doing now, they won’t be delicate and gentle. They’ll be like beasts, poor dears. And, because it’s our fault for keeping them down so long, they won’t be kind to us.”

“And yet you’re a Liberal?” I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

"It's the fashion. Besides, one can't put the clock back, and it's very slow in Russia. Time to wind it up and keep other people's time! And, anyhow, I believe in liberty. Haven't I been to England, and the United States, and France?"

She laughed again, with that merry little lilt in her voice which I liked to hear, and she repeated the words which Madame Roland spoke on the scaffold: "*O Liberté, comme on t'a jouée en ton nom!*"

Then she drew the curtains across that snow-covered scene in the courtyard and the stables beyond, shutting out the cold grey light of the afternoon, so that the long room was more cosy in the lamplight. It was warmed, like all Russian houses, with a tall porcelain stove, into which logs were thrust at intervals by a woman servant, who came silently over the polished boards in bast slippers, and crossed herself thrice on the threshold, and curtsied to the Princess.

"Let's get Katherine Detloff to play us some Chopin," said that lady, and she led the way to the little *salon* next door.

The snow kept us indoors mostly, though I trudged through the village once, with its rows of log-built houses and wooden barns and wattle cattle-sheds, built in a square, with a small whitewashed church at one end. Suvorin, who had come down with us, took me into one of the houses, where a peasant with a straw-coloured beard and blue eyes rose from the wooden table, where he sat with his children, and bowed to us gravely. His wife was scrubbing the floor, and, while on her knees, she also bowed and crossed herself—out of courtesy, I supposed, and not to avert the evil eye! The room was spotlessly clean, and very hot. The eldest son had been having a bath, and lay steaming on the shelf above the stove, naked except for a blanket over him. Suvorin spoke to the man in Russian, and he answered, and Suvorin laughed.

"What does he say?" I asked.

"He says that he is happy because Russia will soon have happiness now that the Duma is coming. . . . These peasants think the Duma will make our country flow with milk and honey, abolish their taxes, give them the land, kill all the *Koulaks*, or Jewish moneylenders, and make an earthly paradise for every Christian."

Several visitors came to the Miliukoffs' house while I stayed there with Katherine, and there were already four or five other guests, who seemed to be dwelling there for an indefinite time. The Princess told me, indeed, that it was quite a custom for young men of the intellectual class—poets and writers mostly—to accept an invitation for a week-end and stay on for several months, to save the cost of food and lodging until they drifted on to another house of the same kind. They slept in barely-furnished little rooms which domestic servants in good English houses would have sniffed at, and they went about in shabby clothes and with untidy hair, discussing art and literature, or lounged

about idly in a melancholy way, or shut themselves up in their rooms except for meal-times.

The other visitors were of the same class and character as the Miliukoffs—wealthy landowners, Liberal in their views, well dressed, charming, frightened of the future, but hiding their fear by a sense of humour. There was something simple, almost childish, about their way of life in this country house, and I found it extraordinarily attractive—as though we had all been shipwrecked on a desert island, with plenty of food and no hardships to endure, and nothing to do but pass the time as merrily as possible.

They played music, and chess, and dominoes. One evening they acted a little play by Chekov, and then the younger men and women had a pillow-fight up in the long gallery. Some of them had an insuperable objection to going to bed, and sat talking in their rooms until the small hours of the morning, and did not appear again until luncheon-time. Suvorin was one of those who sat up late, and one night we talked until one of the servants brought us in our morning coffee. The conversation was entirely about art and realism, and Suvorin would talk for an hour, lying on an old horse-hair sofa with his hands behind his head, and then spring up and thrust his fingers through his hair and talk for another hour, sitting straddlewise on a wooden chair, and then make himself some tea in a samovar on the stove, and drink it steaming hot while he delved deeper into the mysteries of creative art. He was savage, melancholy, ironical, mystical, and inspired. He roared with laughter at some fantastic utterance which stirred his sense of humour; he groaned in agony at some of the atrocities of modern writers; he shed tears over the beauty of some line by Shelley which he had learnt by heart. He left me exhausted in mind and body, but with a conviction that the night had been well spent.

There was one exciting incident between Michael and Tamia which distressed Katherine and startled the rest of the company. They had been playing perfectly quietly in the little *salon* next to the long gallery when there was a sudden noise of shrieks and yells in young voices, followed by a deadly silence and the abrupt appearance of Michael, very flushed and with bloody scratches on his face.

Katherine had been playing, and I was turning over the music for her, while Princess Miliukoff sat on a low stool by the piano, and Suvorin lay full-stretched on a bearskin rug with his eyes shut.

“Good heavens!” cried Katherine, slurring her notes and dropping her hands in her lap.

“I’ve killed Tamia,” said Michael. “She cheated at dominoes, and when I told her so she called me a liar. I smacked her face, and she dug her nails into my cheeks. Then I strangled her.”

Katherine and I made a rush to the other room, followed by Olga, as she

wished me to call her. We were relieved to see Tamia sitting up, with her black hair touzled over her eyes, and making little gurgling noises in her throat. When she saw Michael standing in the doorway she put her tongue out at him. It was clear that she had been shamming dead to frighten Michael and ease the situation. Katherine ordered the boy to bed, but he was reprieved by the intercession of Princess Olga, who said that Tamia was a little savage who ought to be whipped.

Our visit ended next morning, and we went back to Moscow, where I spent three more weeks in Katherine's house, barring a visit to St. Petersburg with Serge Detloff, where I went to more political speeches, walked round the Winter Palace, and thought of that crowd which had been shot down in the snow; watched the well dressed crowds up the Nevsky Prospect—and saw no sign of social upheaval.

I could stay no longer in Russia, because I had a telegram saying that my father was ill, and, in any case, I might wait months if I stayed for the outbreak of revolution and the fulfilment of Detloff's dream of liberty.

On the last night Serge had to go to a meeting, and I sat up late, talking with Katherine in her "English" room. Michael had sloped off to bed, after reading *The Cloister and the Hearth*, which had fired his imagination, and we were alone, as sometimes in the old days in the Cromwell Road. She had made some tea for me as it is always made in Russia, and we spoke of the old days at Romilly Hall, and of Paul again, and of Hugh Evesham and his wife, and of Michael's moods of rage and melancholy, and of my next novel.

Presently I saw that she was weeping.

"My dear, my dear!" I said.

I stretched across the table and took her hand, and she put her forehead down upon it, and it was moist with her tears.

Presently she told me that she was afraid.

"Afraid of what?" I asked.

"This dreadful country," she said. "There are terrible things moving underneath. I can feel them—the passion about me, the cruelty that lies hidden. I feel as though I'm living over molten lava. One day it will break out. I don't believe in Serge's peaceful revolution, and I'm afraid for Michael's sake."

I tried to reassure her.

"It all seems very harmless—a lot of talk, a lot of idealism. I like the Russians."

"I love them," she said simply. "I have made dear friends here. But they're not quite civilised—in our way. The people have been oppressed too long, and I can see something in their eyes—terrible things. And on the other side there's an awful brutality. The old order won't yield without a struggle. I hear them talk sometimes. They'll have no mercy if the people rise. Sometimes, when it's

quiet in Moscow, I think I hear—dreadful sounds.”

She went to the window, and pulled back the curtains and looked out. I went to her side, and we stood there looking across the river to the battlements of the Kremlin, outlined by frozen snow, and above them to the white towers, palaces, churches and barracks within those walls, all crowned by the clustered cupolas, glittering under a sky of stars.

“How beautiful!” I said, drawing a deep breath at this vision.

“One day,” said Katherine in a low voice, “that snow down there will be red with blood.”

“It’s getting on your nerves,” I told her, “all this talk of revolution. You ought to come back to England—for a holiday, at least.”

She shook her head and said, “I must be loyal to Serge. His work is here—his life.”

A little later she laughed and called herself a coward.

“It’s all nerves!” she said. “I’m ashamed of myself! I thought I had more courage.”

She made me promise that I would write to her more often. She sent her love to Paul and all my family, and messages to Evesham and his wife. She let me kiss her before I went to bed that night, and there was no guilt in it.

Next morning I left Moscow. . . .

MY father died soon after my return to England, and it was only when he lay dead in the front room of the old house in Clapham Park that my sisters and I understood, or remembered, his devotion to us, his noble character, his old-fashioned chivalry, his simplicity of heart, and the rather tragic loneliness of his last years. As youngsters we had been inclined to jeer, and exchange winks with each other at his little eccentricities, his moral platitudes, as we called them, his familiar and oft-repeated anecdotes. We had resented and evaded his attempts at discipline—never very severe—and his incurable romanticism had seemed to us very funny and rather ridiculous.

He dramatised the small incidents of life. I remember that when they played "God Save the Queen" at the theatres where he sometimes took a box for us—the old Gilbert and Sullivan operas were our chief favourites—he would stand rigidly to attention, as though prepared to die for his Queen and Country at that very moment, and defend them against all traitors. He would help unknown ladies out of omnibuses as though he were Sir Walter Raleigh laying down his cloak, and I have known him to escort old beggar-women across the street with a very noble courtesy that used to make us blush with self-consciousness if we happened to be with him. He had a reverence for womanhood which was constantly being shocked by Evelyn's slang and Beatrice's flirtations. He turned all his geese into swans, and regarded the unsuccessful authors, shabby old journalists, and impecunious painters who frequented our house when we were all together, as the brightest gathering of genius and intellect in England.

He was a sentimentalist of the most exalted type, and often I had seen his eyes moist with tears at some old song which reminded him of his own boyhood, and he would recite the poems of Tennyson and Wordsworth with an emotion which used to make us squirm. Our youthful flippancies, our deplorable cynicism, our contempt of the Early Victorian mind, and my pro-Boer sympathies in the early days of that dreary old war, hurt him profoundly, and made him believe that something had gone wrong with England. Indeed, he became convinced in his latter years that the spirit had gone out of us, and that our Empire was doomed because of the levity of the younger generation and the wickedness of trade unions, encouraged by the red radicalism of Lloyd George and other political leaders, who, in his opinion, and he was a gentle man, should have been hanged to the lamp-posts of Whitehall.

To the last he remained true to his own ideals of loyalty and chivalry, and, strolling out at night, he used to wear his overcoat like a cloak over his right

shoulder, and carry his umbrella like a sword, remembering, or at least believing, that the blood of Norman barons ran in his veins, and that he was dedicated to the spirit of *noblesse oblige*. It was in that spirit that he attacked and routed a drunken coster who was beating his wife, and then had his face scratched by that ungrateful lady. It was also in accordance with that code that he gave half-crowns which he could ill afford to any plausible scoundrel who told him a hard-luck tale. I think of him as a mixture of Don Quixote and the immortal D'Artagnan, translated into the shabby-genteel villadom of Clapham Park, and fettered to the frightful drudgery of a Government office.

After the marriage of my three sisters, and my own long absences abroad, he fell into a melancholy state of mind which alarmed my mother, and I truly think that it was the lack of our companionship, and our rather selfish neglect of the old home, that broke his heart and led to his early death.

My mother was stricken by this blow. Her sense of humour had never failed to observe my father's eccentricities, and sometimes he had tried her patience by platonic love-affairs with middle-aged ladies, mostly very plain, in whom he found peculiar beauties and charm of soul; but all that was wiped out of her mind by the memory of his early love for her, his real and abiding worship of her, and his childish simplicity. She clung to my companionship as her last hope in life, and it was for her sake that I took a little house in Church Street, Kensington, and put all ideas of marriage out of my head. In any case, there was no lady who could take the place of Katherine in my heart, and never has been.

My father's illness, which had brought me hurrying back from Moscow, caused me to miss an outbreak of revolution which happened there almost immediately after my departure. Katherine's forebodings had been to some extent true, for the snow-covered ground had been stained with blood, and dreadful things had happened. From her letters, which I have kept, I learned the general story of it, and some details which either she or Detloff had seen as eye-witnesses.

It was just before the Russian Christmas that another general strike was declared, as a protest against the Czar's delay in granting reforms, as he promised, on his feast day. The schools and university were closed, the shops shuttered; the gas was turned off; and all the work-people walked out of the factories and wandered up the Tverskaya, which is the High Street of Moscow. For a time the police held their hands, and the people tried to fraternise with the soldiers, who sat quiet on their horses, grasping their loaded whips. Street orators addressed the crowds, and the Social Democrats tried to incite them to violence. But it was the forces of the Government which began the violence. As a crowd of people left a meeting in the Aquarium they were set upon by police and beaten with clubs and whips.

On the following day about two hundred men and women were assembled in the house of a revolutionary lawyer named Fiedler, just opposite the British Consulate, when they heard a knock at the door and a summons to surrender shouted from the street below. They were surrounded by soldiers and police, and across the pavement was a battery of field-guns. From one of the windows in the house a bomb was thrown by one of the Social Democrats—a mad fool—and it killed an officer as it fell and burst. It was the signal for the guns to open fire, and there was a steady bombardment of the house, the shells crashing through windows and walls. The revolutionaries were caught like rats in a trap. A hundred and twenty, including ten girls, surrendered and were dragged off to prison, already overcrowded after numerous arrests in all parts of Moscow.

That night barricades sprang up in many streets, and Katherine, looking from her windows, saw that the gates of the Kremlin were shut. She could hear the sound of rifle-fire from the roofs of houses, and saw a body of Cossacks riding at a gallop towards the Red Square. Detloff had not come home, and she was desperately afraid. Michael stood by her side, terribly excited. He was all in favour of the revolution, though his father, that morning, had deplored the premature rising, and denounced the Social Democrats as madmen who would play into the hands of reaction. Presently, as they stared out, they saw the dark figure of a man creeping close to the Kremlin walls. Suddenly it made a dash across the snow which had been beaten hard by the hoofs of the Cossack horses. A shot rang out from the Kremlin walls, and the figure staggered, and then sprawled and fell, with outstretched arms.

For some dreadful moments Katherine thought it was her husband. She went downstairs and opened the front door, and cried to Michael to stay indoors. But he was by her side when she ran into the roadway and stooped over the body of the fallen man. It was not Detloff, but Suvorin, the young writer who had kept me up all night at the Miliukoffs' country house. He recognised Katherine, and said: "Leave me here. Those devils don't care——" Then he groaned in agony, and Katherine saw that blood was oozing from his left leg, which was twisted under him.

Some more rifle-shots rang out, and bullets spat into the snow about her, but by some strange trick of mind she had no sense of fear either for herself or Michael. "Help me to drag him," she said to her boy.

I have often thought of her there, with young Michael, under the Kremlin walls, in the moonlit snow, bending over the body of Suvorin and trying to haul him across the road. He was far too heavy for them both, and it was only by putting an arm about her neck and hobbling on one leg that he reached the shelter of her house, and then fell again and fainted in her hall.

So Detloff found them when he came home ten minutes afterwards, having

dodged the barricades and the snipers by some miracle of luck. He was deadlly pale, and cried out against the madness of the Social Democrats, who were attempting to force a revolution by unarmed crowds against a Government who would use its weapons ruthlessly.

“It’s a death-blow to our hopes,” he said. “These barricades of bandboxes and wheelbarrows! These silly snipers! What can they do against artillery and trained troops?”

They could do nothing. The barricades were blown to bits. Little groups of revolutionaries were killed in heaps. Soldiers sniped anyone who tried to cross the streets, even if they were peasant girls or inquisitive reckless boys. Not a day passed for a week but Katherine, looking from her window, saw groups of young men and women with their hands tied behind them being pushed in front of armed soldiers on their way to prison, from which nothing more was heard of them. Single prisoners, their hair clotted with blood, or with open gashes down their cheeks, were tied to the saddles of Cossack cavalymen, and taken at the trot. The Semenoffsky Guards were brought down from St. Petersburg, and this crack regiment was more brutal in its treatment of fellow-countrymen than the Cossacks or police. They massacred men, women and children in the workmen’s barracks attached to the great Prokhoroffsky cotton mills, and shot down those who tried to escape across the frozen river.

“I saw nothing of the fighting,” wrote Katherine, “but at night the sky was red with flames, and the sound of rifle-fire sickened me. . . . All our Liberal friends, and Serge himself, were against this attempt at revolution instigated by the Social Democrats, but their hearts are filled with bitterness and rage because of the Government’s brutality and all that needless bloodshed. In many cases it was just murder. Now all Liberal papers have been suppressed, there is no more free speech, and black reaction has set in. I can only marvel at Serge, who still believes that he will live to see the fulfilment of his dream by peaceful means. After his time of despair, his agony of lost faith and courage, poor dear, he is talking again of what the Duma will do, and trying to encourage the faint-hearted spirit of his friends. Michael frightens me a little because he weeps so much over the execution of political leaders and the sufferings of the prisoners. Some of them are the fathers and brothers of his school-friends, and he hears many dreadful things. . . . Oh, my dear, I would give everything I have, except Serge and Michael, to be in safe old London again. Perhaps we may come back one day, and I get courage by this good hope.”

It was a hope that I shared; but Serge Detloff stayed on stubbornly in

Russia, believing that his influence with the leaders of moderate opinion, and even with those who belonged to the Right rather than to the Left, might one day help his unhappy country on the road to a Liberal régime by peaceful reforms. The Duma was dissolved before it could carry through any radical measures, and after that there were alternate periods of hope and disillusion, as the Czar made new promises which were frustrated by his Ministers, as amnesties were followed by new arrests, and the brutalities of the Secret Police and the mounted Cossacks were revenged by peasant uprisings here and there, political assassinations, and the bomb-throwing of anarchists.

Katherine kept me in touch with all that history, and yet I confess that for a time it ceased to have any vital interest for me, and even Katherine herself became no more than a gracious memory, a shadowy and beautiful figure belonging to some inner sanctuary of my mind, but no longer sharing my everyday life and thoughts. However much we try, however loyal is friendship, it is impossible to keep in close spiritual touch by letter-writing at long distance. Even our letters, as Katherine complained, became less frequent as time slipped by, and less revealing when they arrived. She was being drawn more closely into the life of her husband's people. Now and again she gave a foreign turn to some of her phrases. She alluded to people and events outside my knowledge, just as I mentioned friends and things remote from her mind. It came to me as a shock one day that time had been slipping by so stealthily, that she and I were drawing near to middle-age, that a younger generation was beginning to take our places, and that any romance there might be in life or love was theirs and not ours. I had reached the stage of being a bachelor uncle to a number of young people who regarded me as belonging distinctly to the older crowd. Terrible and devastating thought when it is first revealed to a man who has not been conscious of the flight of time!

XVI

I HAD become great friends with Paul's boy and girl, and they regarded my small house in Church Street, Kensington, as a kind of sanctuary into which they could slip at any time when they were "fed up," as they called it, with the domestic situation in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, or when they wanted me to take them to some show for which I could get free tickets, and sometimes—I regret to say—when they wanted to establish an alibi after a late dance or riotous evening which they wished to keep strictly private at home, for reasons of their own. My mother was so devoted to them that her moral austerity was broken down by Dorothy's wheedlings and Humphrey's hugs, and, as I told her, she was becoming an accessory after the fact in many escapades of which Clare knew nothing and to which Paul turned a blind eye.

"Poor dears!" said my mother, when I accused her of that, fully conscious of my own weakness, "let them be happy while they're young. They will have plenty of trouble later on."

She seemed to have some foreboding of tragedy lying in wait for youth, but whether this was based on any intuition, or some hidden understanding of social and world troubles fermenting beneath the surface of life, I have no means of telling. Certainly in England things were beginning to look a little unpleasant, because of so many strikes and a chronic state of industrial unrest, and since the death of King Edward I was beginning to have rather gloomy anxieties as to the state of Europe, after trips abroad to Germany and France, where I was conscious of political strains of thought which did not promise well for the peace of the world, though I comforted myself by the good sense and peaceful purpose of the common crowd.

I doubt whether my mother had any inkling of things like that, though sometimes she startled me by quiet words which revealed more knowledge than I had guessed, and by a wisdom which I acknowledged humbly to be worth more than my superficial and journalistic views of life. I think also she was profoundly sorry for Puggy and Bumps—the old names still stuck to them with us—because she strongly disapproved of Clare's character and way of life, now that she had become utterly absorbed in the suffrage movement.

Poor old Paul was certainly having a rough time with my sister, and it reached a crisis, or rather, a series of crises, shortly before Katherine came back at last with young Michael, after I had given up all hope of seeing her again this side of eternity.

The sense of humour with which he had consoled himself for some years of strained relations with Clare—who told him quite frankly that she intended

to “lead her own life”—broke down for once when she was arrested for smashing a plate-glass window in Oxford Street as a moral protest against Lloyd George—goodness knows how it was going to hurt him!—because he was obstructing the passage of a Bill in Parliament after definite pledges of support for the Women’s Franchise.

Paul was at the Pasteur Institute, with his eye at the same old microscope, and his spirit exalted by the squirming of some bacilli which seemed to prove that he was on the track of the diphtheria germ, when he was summoned to the telephone by a white-coated assistant who looked sympathetic. It was a message from Bow Street police station. His wife was in custody and he was wanted to bail her out.

At that time—before he became hardened—it seemed like a dreadful tragedy to Paul. It was as though his wife had been taken up for being drunk and disorderly, bringing disgrace to his home and name. Indeed, when he went to the police station, she looked like that, with the feathers in her hat broken, and her clothes torn in a struggle outside Dickens & Jones’s. But there was the light of triumph in her eyes, and on the way home in a taxi she exulted, he told me, in the blow she had struck for liberty.

“It was thrilling when that stone went through the window! I had hidden it in my muff. There was a glorious old smash, as though the Crystal Palace were falling down!”

“But my dear girl,” said Paul, “how on earth does this sort of thing advance your cause? It’s sheer hooliganism. It’s—it’s damned disgraceful. I wish to God you wouldn’t do it.”

She pitied him for his inability to see the splendour of it, its spiritual significance. It was a paradox that Paul, whom she had called an anarchist and a traitor because of his Liberal opinions, was forced back into the position of a reactionary, while Clare, the conventionalist, had become the champion of liberty, and the advocate of destruction.

He suffered agonies of uncertainty, never knowing what Clare would do next, and she generally had a new surprise. She squirted poisonous chemicals into pillar-boxes, rose early in the mornings to print “Votes for Women” on the pavements with a rubber stamp. Paul gravely suspected her of an affair of arson in Richmond Park. He argued with her interminably about the ethics of the business, and used his knowledge of biology to impress her with the essential differences of sex, the inevitable limitations of womanhood in the affairs of life. She was unimpressed, and quoted modern scientists of whom he had never heard, and whose unknown necks he desired to twist.

At times he paced up and down the room, raging at her, using lurid language, losing his temper completely, giving himself away, because she used all this against him with a superior smile and a maddening tolerance of his

male stupidity. It was worse when she brought friends to convert him—intellectual women who had their facts marshalled, sharp-tongued women who bullied him, pretty, elegant women who cajoled him, women with an acute sense of humour who laughed at him, young girls hardly older than Dorothy who discussed the elemental facts of life with a candour which alarmed him.

“There’s something more than Votes for Women in all this,” he told me once. “And it’s more than the excitement of a game to bored women. It’s something moving in humanity, something biological and elementary. I can’t get the hang of it quite. Perhaps it’s a revolt against villadom and modern civilisation, with its thwarted impulses. Perhaps it’s a boiling up to some world catastrophe which will bring us back to the savage state. Of course I’m all in favour of votes for women. Why not? But what makes me shudder a little is this anarchy of educated women, this lawlessness, this smash up of the old decencies and graciousness of life.”

It amused me to hear Paul talk like that, this comrade of mine who, a few years back, had been all out against convention and respectability, all against discipline—“Discipline is death,” he had said!—all for liberty and progress.

“It’s a judgment on you,” I told him, and he rubbed his lean jaw and grinned, and said, “It’s the devil when one’s own wife is out for martyrdom. I don’t mind other men’s wives sacrificing themselves to make a Roman holiday. I shiver to think of Clare in those London mobs.”

I saw her roughly handled by a mob in Trafalgar Square on a day when the women marched from Caxton Hall to Westminster. Mounted police broke up their procession. But, working in couples, they dodged through the seething crowds, and tried to break a way through the cordon of foot police round the Houses of Parliament. One old lady charged the good-natured bobbies repeatedly in an invalid chair, and the crowd yelled with laughter and cheered her courage. Other women slipped through, and were chased across the green outside the House, and flung into the crowd again.

Presently the mounted men pressed the mob back down Victoria Street, and then some of the women—utterly fearless, as I must say, and risking death—seized the bridles of the horses and clung on, in spite of their rearing and plunging. Some of the horses were terrified by these desperate ladies, and it was a horrid sight. I saw Clare in the midst of this affray. The horse whose bridle she held went down three times, and each time she came up with it, kicked and bruised, but undaunted. I shouted to her, “Clare, for God’s sake! . . .” but of course my voice carried nowhere amid all that yelling and screaming of suffragettes and spectators, who were being hard pressed by the cordon of police.

That night Clare was in prison again, and Paul’s offer of bail was refused. She was brought up at Old Bailey, and waved her hand to a crowd of friends in

the gallery who displayed the purple, white, and green flag and jeered at the judge until he cleared the court. She was sentenced to three months in the second division. In Holloway Gaol she went on hunger strike, and was liberated in a weak and pitiful state. Paul sat by her bedside, and she stroked his hand and seemed to renew the love she had had for him in their early married life. Six weeks later she assaulted a Cabinet Minister, and was sent to prison again, and Paul raised his hands to heaven and asked how long he was to endure this thing.

XVII

IT was to please Katherine that I kept in touch with that little Russian lady, Princess Miliukoff, who had been her best friend in Moscow, and, apart from that, I found it amusing to go now and again to her “receptions” and meet an odd crowd of Russian aristocrats and intellectuals, French and Italian singers, foreign diplomats, and German princelings, who gathered on those evenings at her house in Queen’s Gate.

In spite of Prince Miliukoff’s Liberal sentiments—perfectly sincere, I am sure—he kept up considerable style, with numerous liveried footmen, who used to look askance at my rather shabby tall-hat, which I rubbed up for these occasions, and was obviously a man of great wealth. Nor did his political views ostracise him from the Embassy crowd in Chesham Place, who turned up at his parties in orders and decorations. He was always very civil to me, and I liked his straightforward way of speech, his fine, soldierly appearance, and his smiling devotion to a wife who flirted under his very nose with many admirers. Even I had the honour of her attentions in that way, and might have had my head turned if I had not cultivated a sense of humour, and observed that it was merely a little game which amused her and meant nothing. Her charm was a certain childishness and simplicity of manner which went with extreme intelligence and wit—an irresistible combination of qualities. At those evening receptions, when many distinguished guests kissed her hand, her laughter rang out merrily, as I had heard it in her country house near Moscow, and she had a trick of suddenly abandoning the dignity of hostess and her place at the top of the stairs, and behaving like a naughty schoolgirl looking for a lark. She would flit up to some curtained alcove with the first secretary of some foreign legation—if he happened to be good-looking—or with a French or Italian singer invited to exhibit his talent, and “shush” away any intruders who came to interrupt her private conversation in one of the half-dozen languages which she spoke with equal vivacity. Or she would sit on a low footstool in the centre of the polished boards, and command her guests to form a family circle and talk of love or life.

“Let’s forget we are in England, where it’s necessary to be well-behaved, and hide behind impenetrable masks, and be so deadly dull. Count, tell us about your first love-affair. Then all the others will reveal their earliest romance.”

So I heard her challenge the company one night, and for four hours or more a Russian general, a French diplomat, an Italian singer, a German prince—von Schwarzenberg—and several other distinguished guests thrilled us, and made

the very room shake with laughter, by candid confessions—mainly imaginary, I am sure—of their first love-affairs. After that there was a philosophical discussion on love itself, which the Russian general described as a regrettable weakness of human nature, and the French diplomat as the most elegant pastime invented by the good God to alleviate the boredom of human life, and the Italian singer as the passion which inspired all great art, and Prince Albrecht von Schwarzenberg as the foundation of that domestic happiness needed by man for the development of his soul-strength and mind-mastery.

Leaning against the folded doors of Princess Olga's drawing-room, I listened to all that with amusement, and the company and its conversation reminded me of those ladies and gentlemen in Boccaccio's books who told each other merry and immoral tales in a garden of Italy while outside a plague was raging. Outside this house in Queen's Gate, in the countries from which these people came, there was, as some of them knew, I think, a mortal malady working, and creeping closer to us. . . .

One evening the little Princess produced a Russian "medium"—a fat woman with a pasty face and black hair cut like a man's—who went into a trance and spoke in the voice of "spirits" in several different languages. As I knew only French and German, I missed the Russian part of her performance, but it was obviously sensational, for the company looked distressed, and one woman fainted, and Prince Albrecht von Schwarzenberg broke into a cold sweat and mopped his neck.

I spoke to a man I knew, standing next to me. It was Suvorin, the Russian writer, with whom I had once stayed up all night, and who had been wounded outside the Kremlin walls and rescued by Katherine. He stood there with folded arms, a lock of hair falling over his forehead, and his pale face smiling in mockery.

"What does she say?" I whispered.

"She sees a red mist over Europe," he said. "She hears the dying groans of innumerable men. It's old Bismarck who is speaking through her—from hell, no doubt! He foretells a universal conflict which will overthrow kings and dynasties, drag great nations to ruin, and soak the earth in blood. I needn't go into a trance to foretell all that! Any fool can see it coming."

I smiled at him—this incurable pessimist, this melancholy prophet of woe! My own forebodings were feeble compared with this certainty of horror.

"It won't happen in our time," I said, but we could not argue the matter out, as Princess Olga said "Hush!" and raised her finger at us in reproof.

On one of these evenings she took me by the hand and said: "How bored I am! Come and make love to me?"

I said: "I'm a fool at that game, Princess!" But she led me through a door and took me into a little sitting-room into which the guests did not come. I had

no opportunity of practising the art of love-making, because Tamia was there in her nightgown, with a dressing-gown thrown over her shoulders, and her hair in pigtails. She was sitting on a low stool, with her toes up close to the fire, reading a book which I found to be one of mine.

“Good God!” said Princess Olga. “This wretch ought to have been in bed three hours ago. I’ve a good mind to spank her.”

“I’m reading an instructive work,” said Tamia calmly, and not at all abashed by my intrusion or by her bare feet. She had grown a lot since that day when Michael had nearly strangled her, and was taller than her mother, and no longer a child.

“Do you think it’s good?” I asked, testing her sense of sincerity.

“It’s intelligent,” she was kind enough to tell me, “but like most English novels, it shirks the truth, does it not?”

“Truth is generally so painful,” I said weakly in self-defence. “One needn’t wallow in it.”

She turned to her mother.

“I’m not sure of that word ‘wallow.’ What does it mean?”

“It means that you are going to wallow in grief if you don’t go to bed, my savage! Off you go. *Seichas!*”

There was a chase round the table, and Tamia overturned the chairs as obstacles to her mother’s pursuit. Her pigtails were flying, her bare legs went scampering, her black eyes had fire in them, and she was more than a match for Princess Olga, who ended the chase when she had torn her frock. Both of them had enjoyed themselves vastly, and panted with laughter.

“That’s a punishment for not letting me come down to-night,” said Tamia. “As if I weren’t old enough to talk to your silly old men!”

“It’s because you’re getting so old that I keep you as my dark secret,” said the Princess. “I can’t let all my lovers know that I’m the mother of a savage, three inches taller than myself, and almost as beautiful. . . . Now what am I going to do about this frock? I’m disgraced. They’ll think that Mr. Chesney has been pulling me about.”

She risked the disgrace on the strength of a pin, and we went back together, trying to look innocent, but her flushed face, and a slight disorder in her hair, called for ironical comments from the Russian general, while Prince Miliukoff raised his eyebrows and laughed, and said: “*‘Et tu, Brute!’*”

These people who, to some extent, pulled the strings of European diplomacy, and who were certainly behind the scenes of international politics, took life lightly, it seemed. It was only now and then that they talked seriously and revealed a sense of uneasiness, a knowledge of forces moving underneath the surface of European peace which was rather alarming.

I remember one night Prince Miliukoff spoke to me about affairs in Russia,

and the character of the Emperor and Empress. He mentioned a name which I heard for the first time. It was that of Rasputin, a monk, of low origin, and almost illiterate, who seemed to have some strange influence over the Imperial Family.

“Russia,” said Prince Miliukoff, “is at the mercy of an uneducated peasant, who is half a charlatan and half a mystic. His ravings and his cunning dominate the mind of the Empress, upon whose advice the Czar of all the Russias acts, or fails to act. What a situation! What a tragedy in the Shakespearean style!”

And on another night at the Miliukoffs’ Suvorin took me on one side and said: “I’ve been talking to that German Prince, Albrecht von Schwarzenberg. He was too stupid to know that I was pumping him. He tells me that the Kaiser is getting more and more under the thumb of the militarists, who believe that war is inevitable if Germany is to fulfil her destiny.”

“I’ve heard too much of that ‘inevitable war,’ ” I answered. “I believe in the common sense of European democracy.”

“Then you’re believing nonsense!” said Suvorin savagely. “Democracy is at the mercy of its leaders, and of its old tribal passions. There is no common sense. Only ignorance and the fetish worship of national stupidities.”

He looked at the crowd in Princess Olga’s drawing-room. Some of them were playing round a ouija board, while a German tenor was singing a Schubert love-lyric. Princess Olga was flirting with the First Secretary of the Austrian Embassy. Albrecht von Schwarzenberg was listening to his beloved Schubert with a look of deep sentiment in his grey-blue eyes.

“Those people!” said Suvorin. “They’re playing baby-games while the world is rushing to ruin. They’re philandering in the *salons* of Europe while the world is cracking under their feet. Above hell-fires.”

He thrust back the lock of hair from his forehead, and laughed.

“Perhaps they’re right! What can we do? . . . I’m going to play halma with Tamia.”

“Not to-night!” I told him. “I’m taking Tamia to a dance with my niece Dorothy.”

He smiled ironically.

“You too!” he said. “Fiddling while Rome burns. . . . Well, let it burn. It will clear a lot of rubbish away.”

XVIII

DOROTHY, who was now an adventurous young person of seventeen, was not a convert to her mother's faith. She thought the whole thing idiotic, and wished to goodness her mother wouldn't make such a fool of herself, though she was candid enough to declare to me—and at times her candour was alarming—that it had its compensations, because it left her free to develop her own individuality.

"My dear Puggy," I said, "the best thing that could happen to your individuality would be to get popped into a finishing school for young ladies under a head mistress of high ideals and a stern sense of discipline."

She didn't agree, and thought I was being funny. It made her laugh, and when Puggy laughed it wasn't a ladylike little ripple of merriment, but a good, hearty noise from an open throat. She was in that stage when she was half a child and half a woman, rather leggy and loose-jointed, with a mop of ruddy brown hair which refused to keep tidy—though that didn't worry her—and large brown eyes which had a look of adventure in them and a daring curiosity with life, which she found amusing. She was a creature of unconventionality, and didn't care a toss what people thought of her, unless she liked them very much, when she was easily hurt, I found, by ridicule or neglect. Those early days of indiscipline, when Paul had let her run wild in Sussex with stable-boys and village louts, had left their mark on her, and she was like a young colt if anyone tried to check her inclinations or make her keep along the humdrum path—a Gipsy thing, lawless, passionate, merry, untamed, out for joy, and exceedingly attractive.

There were several young men who discovered this attraction in her, and Paul had cause to feel uneasy at times, because of her recklessness, though he seldom had the pluck to tell her so, because she could twist him round her little finger, and spoil his sermon by making him laugh, and rumpling his hair, and quoting his old sentiments of liberty.

"It's not a bit of good, father!" she used to say. "You brought me up as a Mænad, and you can't suddenly turn round and try to make a little Puritan maid. I'm a child of liberty."

"Liberty!" groaned Paul. "Haven't I heard that word before?"

Puggy put her cheek against his sleeve.

"You needn't worry your poor old head. I may be a little wild but I'm not wicked, and, though I won't be driven, I'm easily led."

That, of course, was all nonsense. Nobody could lead her. It was she who did the leading with her brother Humphrey, who was devoted to her, and with

several nice boys, of whom Hilary Dick was the best, I thought, and she led them a pretty dance at times.

There was one episode which gave me rather a scare, and I was seriously tempted to tell her mother and father, though she swore me over to secrecy as her “very best pal” (that was her artfulness!).

She was supposed to be staying with her Aunt Beatrice—my prettiest sister in the old days, but now rather too plump, like a beauty by Rubens—and her three cousins, Harold, Cuthbert, and Winifred, whom she cordially detested, because they were too easily shocked by her free language. Humphrey was staying with me, rather gloomy and depressed because his mother was in Holloway Gaol again and hunger striking.

I had been asleep for at least four hours one night when I was awakened by a shower of gravel at my bedroom window.

For a moment, in a dazed state between sleeping and waking, I thought that Clare had probably broken my window as a glorious demonstration on behalf of liberty. I remember saying “Damn silly!” in a peevish way. But when something else struck the window-pane I got out of bed and looked into the street. It was four in the morning, as I heard a moment later by the clock of St. Mary Abbott’s, and Church Street was deserted except for two figures standing under the lamp-post in front of my house. One of them spoke to me cheerfully.

“Hullo, Nunky! Sorry to disturb your beauty sleep!”

I recognised the voice of Dorothy, and saw her face and her smiling eyes in the glimmer of the lamplight.

“What the dickens are you doing at this time of night?” I asked rather savagely.

“It’s a long and tragic tale,” she answered brightly. “If you’d like to hear it, come down and open the front door. Hilary and I are homeless and hungry.”

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself,” I said. “As for Hilary——”

“Sorry, sir!” said the young man, very politely.

I heard Puggy give a half-suppressed laugh.

“You nice, kind uncle! Bully me when I’ve come indoors. There’s a bobby watching us from the corner of the street and he’s full of dark suspicions.”

I put on a dressing-gown and went downstairs quietly, for fear of disturbing my mother, and opened the front door. Puggy put her arms round my neck and gave me a kiss, and then said, “Come on, Hilary,” to the young man who lingered by the lamp-post.

“Everybody’s asleep!” I said grumpily, and then opened the dining-room door and turned on the light, and tried to look at those two young people with the severity which the occasion warranted.

Hilary Dick, the son of the famous barrister, and generally supposed to be reading for the Bar, looked guilty and uneasy. He stood there, shifting from

one foot to the other, like a witness under his father's cross-examination. Dorothy seemed very much amused by his discomfiture and my attempted wrath.

"I thought you were staying with Aunt Beatrice," I said. "Perhaps you'll explain the meaning of this adventure?"

"Adventure's the name for it!" said Dorothy, and she sat down in a chair and laughed till the tears came into her eyes, with a handkerchief stuffed to her mouth to choke the noise of it.

I turned to young Dick, after shutting the dining-room door, and said, "Perhaps you'll tell me. It's rather disgraceful you know! Playing about the streets at this hour with an innocent girl!"

"I'm most frightfully sorry," said young Dick. "I quite see that it looks extremely bad. And it's entirely my fault, sir, I must admit."

"The boy is lying," said Dorothy, recovering from her attack of laughter. "It was I who led him into the way of temptation. I am the vampire who lured him from the path of duty. Upon my poor head be the wrath to come, and oh, little uncle, for heaven's sake reveal where you keep the cold mutton, because Hilary and I are starving to death."

"I won't give you a thing," I said, "until I hear the meaning of all this nonsense—if it isn't worse than that."

"It is worse," said Dorothy. "It's a concatenation of deplorable events."

From what she told me, between fits of giggling, she had become utterly "fed up" with Aunt Bee's fussiness. She had also quarrelled violently with Cousin Winifred, who was, she said, as stupid as an owl though as pretty as a wax doll. She couldn't bear another evening at home, when Uncle Hubert was sure to sing "On the Road to Mandalay," and when a number of suburban ladies and gentlemen were certain to play progressive whist, followed by charades. On the previous evening Cousin Cuthbert had had the damned cheek to kiss her—a boy like that, with big hands and feet like a policeman's, and no manners! The whole atmosphere of the house at Ealing had choked her. They hadn't an idea in their head about life and literature. They were shocked when she said "damn." Aunt Beatrice accused her of sprawling about and showing her legs, as though there were any harm in that: and Uncle Hubert said family prayers before breakfast, with the cook and the parlourmaid kneeling on the polished boards with their caps all cock-eye. Liberty and life had called to her. She had shaken the dust of Ealing off her shoes and taken a taxicab to Chelsea.

Then suddenly, out of the taxi window, she had seen Hilary Dick in his new motor-car. She had waved to him. He had stopped, like a gentleman. She had transferred her bag to his car. She had said, "Drive me to the open spaces of the world, where I may breathe free air and get back to nature." He had said, "I'm going to see my aunt in Hendon." She said, "To Hades with your aunt in

Hendon! Let's go to where the wind blows on the heath, brother." Hilary had resisted the temptation like a good boy. Then he had yielded, like the sportsman he was.

They had driven to Hindhead, lunched at the Huts, wandered forth into the countryside, weaved—or was it wove?—daisy-chains, and talked of life, the latest novel of H. G. Wells, the jolly shapes made by the clouds in a southwest breeze, and so forth. Then, after an hour's sleep, with Hilary's head in her lap—and no harm in that—they had strolled back at dusk to the edge of the road where they had left Hilary's brand-new car. It had, unfortunately, gone. Most distressingly, it had gone. Someone had pinched it. They had gone to the police station and made enquiries, given particulars, signed documents. The police inspector was a jolly old dear. After that—and it took an awful time—they had dinner at the Huts. After that, again, they had taken the last train to town. "I'll see you home," said Hilary, "It's been a priceless day." "Too good to end yet," said Dorothy. "There's a merry little dance place, where I know some nice boys, at the back of the Six Bells in the King's Road."

Hilary had insisted upon taking her home. If he hadn't insisted so much she might have gone home. But he overdid his arguments. Talked about respectability, and all that nonsense. So, of course, he had to yield again, and thoroughly enjoyed himself with a most amusing bunch of artists and their models. Unfortunately—and that was where Fate had taken them by the neck—she had quite forgotten that her father had gone away to the country for the week-end, giving the servants a holiday, now that her mother was in prison again. The fact had dawned upon her just as she had given the first thump on the door-knocker.

"Good heavens!" she had cried to Hilary. "All my people are away, and mother's in prison. You'll have to take me to your own house."

"Not if I know it," said Hilary. "My father's a Conservative, and my mother is president of the Girls' Friendly Society, but she wouldn't be friendly to you at this hour of the night. Quite impossible, Puggy."

"Very well," said Dorothy, "I quite realise the stupidity of your people. Fortunately, I have a most obliging uncle. Let's take a taxi to him."

Then the last blow befell them. When Hilary had hailed a crawling taxi he discovered that he had spent all his money except fourpence, and Dorothy was penniless.

"What about your obliging uncle?" asked Hilary.

But Dorothy had thought it was hardly playing the game to wake me up and then make me pay for a taxi. There was a limit, she thought, even to my good nature, although even that was doubtful. (Her artfulness again!) Still, it was a moonlight night, and she felt as fresh as an unplucked daisy, and it would be rather a joke to walk through the silent streets of a sleeping city.

"So here we are, dear Uncle," she said, at the end of this remarkable narrative. "And now, what about the cold mutton?"

As a matter of fact, it was cold beef, and I was weak enough to have some with them, and thoroughly enjoyed this picnic meal, tiptoeing about in the kitchen, whispering to Puggy to shut up when she burst out laughing because she discovered the cat asleep in the pantry, and entirely forgetting the higher ethics and my years of discretion with those two youngsters—because they were young, and the adventure of youth is better than the wisdom of age.

There we were discovered by Humphrey, who thought there were burglars in the house, and came down with a poker, which was very plucky of him. He stood in the doorway in his pyjamas, with his hair rumpled, a tall lad with hazel eyes and the face of a young Pan by Phidias.

"Well I'm damned!" he said, with extreme astonishment.

"Hullo, Bumps!" said Dorothy. "Come and have some beef and pickles. They're fine."

"I thought you were at Aunt Bee's," said Humphrey. "What's the game, anyhow, and why wasn't I invited to join in?"

"It's a disgraceful business, old man," I said with mock severity. "This sister of yours is on her way to perdition."

But, of course, it was rather late in the night to talk morality and do the heavy father business, after I had sat down to table with those partners in guilt. So Bumps joined in, and insisted on drinking a bottle of stout with his beef and pickles. I found it rather difficult to explain the situation next morning to my mother when the servant reported the wreckage of that feast, and when I had to explain that Dorothy was sleeping like a babe in the best bedroom, and Hilary Dick was on the sofa in the drawing-room. It was after this incident that my mother began to regret her "weakness," as she called it, with regard to these abandoned young people.

"Gilbert," she said, "I don't want to be severe or old-fashioned, but I'm getting frightened about Dorothy. It really isn't right for her to behave so wildly. Goodness knows what might happen one day. And I'm afraid you only laugh at her, however naughty she is."

"On the contrary," I said, "I reproved her with the utmost severity last night. But what the deuce can one do with a little hussy like that? It's all Paul's fault. He brought her up like a Gipsy, and a Gipsy she remains."

"It's lamentable," said my mother. "All this lack of discipline will lead to disaster. But what can you expect of the younger generation, when their mothers assault public men and fight with the police? What authority can they have with their children? How can they teach good manners and good morals?"

"Quite so, mother. I agree entirely. But the queer thing is that the mothers

of the younger generation are the children of the last. I mean—Clare is your daughter. How do you account for that?”

“I can’t account for it,” said my poor mother. “I brought you all up as nicely as I could. I can’t think what has happened to the world. It’s this idea of liberty that is making everybody mad. I’ve no patience with it. Nobody talks of duty nowadays.”

“Well, you’d better talk about it to Puggy,” I said. “Nothing I say has the slightest effect on her.”

My mother smiled a little.

“You’re as bad as the rest of them,” she protested. “You take their part. You’re just as big a baby, and don’t approve of discipline any more than they do.”

“I believe in liberty as far as possible,” I admitted. “We want to get rid of the old restraints.”

“One day,” said my mother darkly, “you’ll find that liberty has gone too far—when everything has been pulled down and the world lies in ruins.”

“You’re as gloomy as Suvorin!” I answered, laughing at her.

I have only related one adventure of Puggy’s. There were others, some of which I didn’t know, but only guessed. There was, for instance, a fancy dress ball at the Albert Hall, when that audacious niece of mine went as a wood-nymph, with Bumps as Bacchus and Hilary as a faun. By good fortune it was a warm night, for the clothes they wore between them were not enough for one. My mother was really scandalised by the scantiness of Puggy’s costume of faded leaves, but I confess she looked so pretty and graceful a thing—as though she had just been caught in a glade in Thessaly—that I hadn’t the heart to be shocked. As for Bumps, he was so much like young Bacchus, with vine leaves in his hair and a goatskin about his body, that I was not surprised to see his portrait in *The Sketch* a week later as winner of the first prize.

Unfortunately, he played the part so well that he drank too much red wine, and became disgracefully but hilariously tipsy some time after midnight, and I had to take him home in a cab.

I was there that night, dressed as Dick Sheridan, and met many of my own friends in strange costumes which made their faces unfamiliar. But I felt out of it—a middle-age ghost looking on at the world of youth. I went up into the gallery and looked down on all those pretty Columbines, Spanish dancers, Stuart Cavaliers, cowboys, pierrots, Oriental princes, and fairy princesses. They were mostly the sons and daughters of my contemporaries, the younger generation who had come along so quickly, who had been children only a year or two ago, as it seemed. Surely it was only the day before yesterday that Katherine had played the heroine in my romantic drama, with Hugh Evesham as the gallant Royalist, when I had agonised in the fierce jealousy of calf-love?

Good God! the years had slipped by, and Katherine was the mother of Michael, far away in Russia, and I was a lonely bachelor, looking on at life, out of the game. . . .

I watched the shifting scene of silken colours, of laughing young faces, of white arms and legs, of grotesque figures and phantasms of English history—a moving picture, a living tapestry of English youth in that year of grace. I wondered for a moment what would happen to all that laughing crowd before ten years had passed, and at this thought I shivered and felt cold, with some horrible foreboding of tragedy. . . . Perhaps it was due to all those gloomy prophecies of Suvorin's, or to that Russian medium, with her “red mist” and her groans of dying men.

There was a light touch on my arm, and a merry voice spoke to me.

“Hullo, Nunky! You look like Hamlet, meditating on the graveyard skull. ‘Alas, poor Yorick!’ ”

It was Dorothy on the arm of Hilary Dick, who was dressed in a tigerskin.

“You’re an indecent young hussy,” I said. “But you’d better come and have some coffee with me or you’ll catch your death of cold. Where’s Bumps?”

It appeared that Humphrey was rather intoxicated with the blue eyes of a Columbine who, in private life, was the Honourable Gladys Evesham, daughter of Viscount Evesham.

It was later in the evening that he drank too much red wine.

XIX

IT was Paul who told me the joyful news that Katherine was coming home with Michael for six months or so. It was seven years since he had seen his sister, and I don't suppose in all that time he had written her seven letters, being the worst correspondent in the world. But that was not a sign of forgetfulness or lack of affection. I know he thought of Katherine as his ideal of womanhood, and contrasted her with Clare because of her sense of humour and sanity and comradeship.

"She's leaving old Bluebeard behind," he told me. "He may come along later, if things stay quiet in Russia. I expect that boy Michael will be a bit of a trial. Kitty says he's got the Slav temperament, all passion and moodiness. . . . Well, now that Clare is in quod again Puggy will have to see they get enough to eat."

Dorothy was excited about the coming of Michael and her aunt, and looked forward to it with a mixture of alarm and amusement.

"I expect Aunt Kitty is so used to being a Princess that she'll be horrified with this household. Bumps *will* leave his boots in the drawing-room, and father is the most untidy man in the world. Even I am not a creature of outstanding method! In fact the house is a damned disgrace to people of refinement and a sense of decency. Those servants of ours can't cope with one scientist, one tramp, a Gipsy, and a mistress who spends her time in prison."

She recalled old memories of Michael, that quarrel they had had, and the kiss of reconciliation.

"He ought to be a good-looking lad," she remarked to me, "if he's anything like my remembrance of him. But I daresay he's very hoity-toity now that he's been living with so many Russian aristocrats. Well, we'll soon reduce him to our squalid state."

"Judging from Aunt Kitty's letters," said Humphrey, "I should say he's a very poisonous sort of chap. Seems to spend his time writing rubbish and dreaming dreams. I expect I'll have to give him a licking before we've done with him."

Humphrey was now an undergraduate at Cambridge, like his father in our old days of comradeship—another dreadful reminder of time's flight! He was hoping to get his rigger blue, and, as regards future life, had vague aspirations of becoming a motor engineer, with occasional leanings towards an Australian sheep farm. Since his acquaintance with Gladys Evesham he was rather settling on the engineering idea, as it would mean a home job.

We all went to Victoria Station to meet Katherine and Michael, and I was

inwardly as excited at this homecoming of mother and son as Paul and Puggy. Something of my father's sentimentalism had descended to me, in spite of my ironical view of life. The vision of Katherine, which had dimmed a little in my mind, because of the long break in our intimate comradeship, became bright and clear again, as I had seen her last in her Russian home.

I remember that morning I looked in my glass and wondered what change had come into my face since that day of farewell, and hoped that she wouldn't notice the first signs of middle-age, or any of that senility with which I was obviously regarded by Humphrey and Dorothy, although I felt as young as they. And Katherine? Would she have changed? Should I see a middle-aged matron, when my memory of her was of elegance and grace, hardly altered from the day when I had first seen her at Romilly Hall? I was absurdly nervous as we paced up and down the platform, waiting for the boat-train, with Puggy on my arm, and Paul striding along with his splendid-looking son.

Puggy was in one of her moods of alarming candour.

"You were in love with Aunt Kitty, weren't you, little Uncle?"

"A boyish love-affair!"

"Is that why you've never married?"

"Partly, Miss Impudence."

"Very fine and foolish of you," she said. "I shall hate the thought if all my rejected lovers refuse to take wives unto themselves. It might have a serious effect on the population."

She thought over the matter for some time, and then volunteered another remark.

"Of course I'm perfectly certain that when I meet my real lover he'll be the only man in the world for me. And it's going to be extremely awkward if he happens to love another woman. Tragedy will ensue."

"For him or you?" I enquired. "Or for the other woman?"

She stared at the electric lights down the platform, and I saw that a smile was playing about her lips.

"Talking seriously," she said, "this love business is the very devil, little Uncle. I may appear flippant at times but sometimes I'm afraid I may go off the deep end one day. I have capabilities of terrific passion, untouched as yet by boys like Hilary Dick."

"As long as you play the game," I said vaguely.

She shook her head and laughed ironically.

"I don't know the rules. What are they? Does anybody know?"

"Loyalty," I suggested. "One man, one love."

"That sounds simple," she agreed. "But supposing it's one man, two women. Or one woman, two men? Or supposing it's six tries before a certainty, and then a broken heart because the game has gone all wrong, and

the rules have got all mixed?"

"Don't play with fire, my dear," I said, with an attempt at elderly wisdom. "That's a very good rule."

"Ah, but it's so nice to warm one's hands—and one's heart," said Dorothy, "in a cold world, on a chilly night!"

I smacked her hand which was through my arm.

"You're a hussy. You scare me horribly."

"Courage," she said, "I'm not afraid of life."

My opinion was that she ought to be—but I didn't say so, as the boat-train was creeping up the platform, and there was a stampede of people waiting for their friends, whose heads were poked out of the carriage windows, whose hands were waving greetings.

We found Katherine and Michael standing by their luggage and searching the crowd for us with anxious eyes.

"Hullo, Kitty!" said Paul, as though he had seen her the day before yesterday. "Going strong?"

"Paul!" she cried, and put her arms about him and kissed him on both cheeks in a foreign way.

She was unchanged, except perhaps that she was a little thinner, a little more Russian because of the clothes she wore and a silver fox about her throat. Impossible to believe that she was the mother of Michael, that tall fellow with fair hair curling each side of his fur cap, thrust jauntily on one side of his head, and his hands in his jacket pockets, gazing with smiling, watchful eyes at the scene about him.

"Hullo, Michael!" said Dorothy.

"Hullo!"

Michael pulled off his cap, and I saw a slight colour creep into his face, and his eyes study Puggy Long-legs with a look of surprise and amusement.

She held out her cheek to him, and he laughed and kissed her.

"I'm afraid I shouldn't have recognised you," he said. "And I daresay I'm a bit changed myself!"

"For the better, if I may say so," remarked Puggy civilly.

Michael thought over this remark, and the colour slightly deepened in his face, but his answer was quite cool.

"Not a chance to tell yet, except by height! I've no manners, I'm told."

"That's all right," said Dorothy. "Mine are deplorable. We shall probably understand each other."

"I doubt it," said Michael; "but we'll have a try."

The greeting between Michael and Humphrey was reserved and slightly suspicious on both sides, as between the young male of the human species, but they shook hands.

Katherine was astounded by the appearance of her nephew and niece, a little distressed, even.

“How old you make me feel! How old!”

My turn came with her, and she let me kiss her hand in the Russian style.

“Home again!” I said. “How splendid!” I felt that absurd embarrassment of meeting that happens between friends who have been intimate in correspondence, self-revealing at long distance. Her letters and mine kept us in touch with each other’s minds, though for a little while they had been less frequent. I knew her anxieties about Michael, her change of religion—she had become a Catholic like her husband—her increasing fears of some cataclysm in Russia, her gradual reaction, as I called it, to a conservative way of thought, her political estrangement from her husband, who still believed in peaceful revolution, though she was more and more convinced that there could be no revolution without torrents of blood and frightful anarchy, her deepening sense of exile in a country which was taking possession of her son, so that sometimes he seemed to belong to a different race from herself and to have none of her blood or spirit.

As I held her hand a little moisture came into her eyes, though they were shining.

“London again!” she cried, with a glad laugh. “Rain in London, and the roar of traffic, and my own folk and speech!”

We took two taxis, and bundled the young people into one, with some of the luggage, while Paul and I shared the other with Katherine. She sat with her hand through Paul’s arm, staring out of the window, with a smile about her lips, and I saw again that the years had dug no claws into her face since I had said good-bye to her in Moscow. Her voice was joyous.

“Six months in England! I’m going to enjoy every minute of it. I’m going to make Michael English again!”

LOOKING back on that spring when Katherine and Michael were in England, I remember many pleasant hours, and some anxious moments, with that crowd of young people who had come pushing up through the years with such startling rapidity that we still thought of them as children until we realised, suddenly, with a sense of dismay, that they were old enough for passion, heartbreaks, independent action, and the full adventure of life, beyond our control.

It was Katherine to whom this revelation came with the greatest shock. Her seven years in Russia had slipped by stealthily and seemed but a brief phase, now that she was back in England again. All that time she had imagined things and people as she had left them. My sister Beatrice's children—Harold and Cuthbert, and Winifred with flaxen plaits—my mother and Paul, and Evesham and his pretty daughter. But seven years make a big difference at both ends of life. The children she had left just past babyhood—ten, eleven, twelve—were seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, and young men and women, unrecognisable, absurdly tall, like Humphrey and his cousins, like Dorothy who used to be Puggy, like Gladys Evesham, youngest of all, but past sixteen and old enough to inflame the heart of youth by her flowerlike beauty.

"It's frightening!" said Katherine. "I can't believe they're true, these elegant young grown-ups, who used to be babies—the day before yesterday. I thought it was only Michael who was shooting up so fast."

She spoke of my mother, and said, "She looks old and frail, poor dear. I was quite shocked when I saw her again."

Then she asked a laughing question, not without anxiety, I thought.

"Gilbert, tell me the honest truth. Do I look like an old woman? I see no change in the glass, and I feel none in my mind or body, but, if others have altered so much, time can't have passed me by."

"You look like Michael's sister," I told her, and it wasn't flattery or falsehood. "After all, my dear, you're still a young woman—thirty-eight, isn't it?"

"Thirty-nine," she said, with her utter truthfulness.

"Young enough to break a lot of hearts, if you wanted to be cruel," I suggested.

She explained her point of view, and I understood the truth of it with a sharp self-consciousness.

"It's not vanity, but it's the sense of youth that worries me. I don't feel old. But, with all these young people grown up, it's time I began to realise my

years.”

“Nonsense!” I protested. “We haven’t reached middle age yet. You and I have a right to be as romantic as we like and let those brats go hang. I’ve a good mind to make love to you and forget my loyalty to that venerable Russian of yours. Just to teach the kids a lesson.”

She blushed rather deeply, and laughed my words away.

“Poor old Serge! He hates me to leave him. He’s a bigger baby than Michael, and needs me more.”

I think she was wrong there. As far as I could judge, Michael regarded his mother not only as the most wonderful woman in the world, but as the one most necessary to his own life. He depended upon her for everything, from sewing on a button to reminding him that it was time to have his hair cut, from playing his accompaniments to choosing the piece he should play.

Yet he was often sulky and argumentative, and sometimes hurt her horribly by sloping off when she had made arrangements for his pleasure, and burying himself in a book somewhere out of sight, or going for long, solitary walks in the slum districts of London, from which he returned moodily. He frightened her by his revolutionary opinions, by his satirical views on life, and most of all by his quick changes from hilarious laughter to the blackest melancholy.

“He has no English balance,” she said, and agreed with me that he had the same temperament as Suvorin, that queer Russian whom I saw from time to time, and who, now that Katherine was in England, almost sat on her doorstep wherever she happened to be staying.

“It’s the Slav blood,” she explained. “They’ve all got that melancholy underneath their laughter. I suppose it’s racial memory and tragic history. Still, I don’t see why Michael should be so utterly un-English.”

“He’s not,” I told her. “He looks as English as young Cuthbert, who’s a Saxon, and he’s inherited your sense of humour as a balance to all that Slav moodiness. It simply means he hasn’t found himself yet and is bothered about the riddle of life. Wants to find the key to it, poor lad. I was just as moody at his age.”

I think that comforted her a little, and indeed I could see no reason why she should worry so much. I found the boy full of humour, keen to see and learn, ready for any kind of lark, and excellent company because of his quick intelligence and charming smile. I could see what was the matter with him. He was over-sensitive to the inevitable cruelties and pains of life, and his imagination was too highly strung. His sense of pity for the under-dog made him question his own and other people’s right to happiness. His sense of justice made him ironical because of life’s inequalities, and his passionate love of liberty, born in his blood from that father of his, and developed by all the talk that had raged round him since boyhood—those exiles in the Cromwell

Road, that experience in Russia—made him intolerant of restraint and utterly out of keeping with his gloomy sentiments.

I found out all that after a few conversations which I had with him alone, when he came to my house in Church Street and roamed about among my books upstairs, or sat back in my big arm-chair, with his hands clasped about his knees, asking queer questions, probing my own poor philosophy, raging sometimes against “the damned absurdity of life,” ridiculing England and our funny old ways, and making love to my black kitten with a childish glee in its playfulness utterly out of keeping with his gloomy sentiments.

To my mother he was always deferential and affectionate and she thought he had the manners of a young prince.

I remember some of the remarks which he fired off at me.

“The English people take everything for granted,” he said one day. “Because a thing is they seem to think it must be right! In Russia we take nothing for granted. We ask questions about it, and generally find that it’s all wrong.”

“Yes,” I answered, “but do the Russians put it right again?”

He was rather nonplussed by that, and thought out the answer for a moment.

“We’re getting ready,” he said. “When the Revolution comes we shall start from the beginning. Make a clean sweep of old absurdities.”

“Rather a big job!” I suggested.

It was after an evening with my sister Beatrice and her family that Michael decided that the English people were hopelessly unintelligent. I am bound to say he behaved rather badly, and I was sorry for that because Beatrice and her husband had put themselves out to entertain Katherine and her boy and make a merry evening for the young people, including Dorothy and Humphrey.

It was an old-fashioned family party, very English, rather suburban, no doubt, but pleasant, I thought. It began with a heavy meal of roast beef and vegetables, followed by plum pudding and dessert, with thin claret and cheap port wine, and my brother-in-law Hubert was very hearty in his hospitality, after saying, “For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful.”

It was that grace which seemed to put Michael all wrong. He was rather startled when it happened, and then looked slantwise at me and winked, as much as to say, “Humbug!” Then he asked me a question in a low voice, under cover of the family conversation.

“Is God on the side of Coutts’s Bank?”

I said, “I don’t suppose He objects to it, old lad.”

The conversation at dinner was noisy and jolly, except for Michael who sat rather silent. My brother-in-law repeated some jokes out of the latest *Punch*

which excited much laughter from the family. He also told some comic anecdotes of his fellow-officers in the Honourable Artillery Company, not unamusing, but not brilliant. Young Harold and Cuthbert, both undergraduates of Oxford, talked “rugger” and cricket, until they found that Michael knew nothing of either game. Then they tried to draw him on the subject of sport in Russia, but he answered glumly that the chief sport was trampling down mobs under Cossack horses and flogging peasants who failed to pay their taxes.

My brother-in-law overheard this remark and answered it.

“I daresay there’s a touch of tyranny in Russia. Well, we could do with some of it over here. It wouldn’t do Labour a bit of harm to have a whip at their backs now and then. All these strikes—disgraceful business! And the trade unions with their incessant demands and coercion of our weak Liberal Government. They’ll drag England down if we don’t begin to rule with a strong hand. I’d put the machine-guns on to those Labour agitators.”

Michael laughed, with an angry note in his voice.

“The middle classes are always on the side of tyranny. They hate the people who do the real jobs in life.”

“On the contrary,” said my brother-in-law, rather sharply, “we hate the people who shirk their jobs and want to live idly on what other people have earned by hard work of brain and body.”

“Hear, hear!” said his eldest son, Harold, who had inherited his father’s square-cut face and rather beefy figure, though youth and sport made him look like a young Guardsman.

Katherine, at the end of the table, was getting anxious. She expected some bitter retort from Michael, and interposed.

“Don’t let’s break up a happy party by talking politics. I hear so much of them in Russia, and get so tired! Michael is always on the side of the under-dogs, poor dears, but it’s all different in England.”

“It seems to me the same—relatively,” said Michael calmly. “I’ve been tramping round the slums a bit. They’re horrible. And the people are dirty and miserable. Directly they try to poke their heads up after a thousand years of squalor, the rich people want to jump on them or sweep them with machine-gun-fire. Why shouldn’t they get higher wages and a little fun in life?”

Dorothy, who was sitting opposite Michael, laughed ironically, and seemed to be enjoying the prospect of a family quarrel. She sang a bar of the Marseillaise:

“Allons, enfants de la patrie, le jour de gloire est arrivé!”

My sister Beatrice relieved the situation by rising from the table.

“Let’s go and have a little music, dears.”

It was the music from which Dorothy had fled that night she threw pebbles at my window. My brother-in-law sang “On the Road to Mandalay.” His

daughter Winifred played a duet with her mother, and broke down in the middle because of shyness. Cuthbert sang "John Peel" and gave full value to the "view halloo!" with his brother Hubert, a younger replica of himself, and Paul's boy, Humphrey, joining in the chorus. Even Dorothy, who was generally contemptuous of these Ealing cousins, was in an obliging mood and played a little thing of Grieg's deliciously, though she looked across at Michael before she began and said, "You can leave the room if it hurts you too much, poor sensitive plant!"

"Don't mind me," said Michael. "I'm easily pleased."

"Liar!" said Dorothy, with an amiable smile, shocking my sister Beatrice and flaxen-haired Winifred.

Then it was Michael's turn on the violin, though he tried to shirk it, until Katherine said, "Play the game, Sonny," and touched his hand in a pleading way. He chose a piece against her advice, and to her accompaniment played it with a masterly touch. It began with a savage bow-stroke, and was some sort of Russian dance, very fast and harsh, with a wild rhythm in it. My sister's boys and girls stared at each other blankly, and then smiled. There was a moment's silence when he finished, until Dorothy said, "Topping! Gipsy stuff, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Michael, looking pleased. "Jolly good guess. I learnt it from the Gipsies in Moscow. At the Ermitage."

"It appeals to my untamed soul," said Dorothy. "It stirs my lawless blood." Michael smiled at her, and his gloom vanished.

"I thought you'd understand. I played it for you. Here's another of the same sort. It's called 'The Free Life' in Russian. You can hear the stamp of Gipsy feet."

I saw the Russian in the boy as he stood there, playing that queer music which seemed utterly out of place in this house in Ealing. A Slav look, or at least something un-English, was in his face, as he drew extraordinary thrilling sounds from that fiddle of his.

"Horrible!" said my brother-in-law in a low voice, as he offered me a cigar.

The other young people were obviously of the same opinion, except Dorothy, who seemed to understand and like it. Flaxen-haired Winifred, like a German *Mädchen*, had an attack of the giggles and stuffed her handkerchief to her mouth. Young Humphrey—Paul's boy—raised his eyebrows and grinned at me, as much as to say, "Damn funny!" I noticed Harold give a slight kick to his younger brother, and then make a grimace as though suffering great pain.

My sister Beatrice, who had no ear for music at all, came to sit by my side, and started talking in a low voice.

"How nice to have the young people all together like this! I'm dreadfully proud of my two young giants. I think I shall break my heart if they marry one

day.”

“Too soon to think of that!” I said.

I, too, thought it was pleasant to see the younger generation together, and I remember them now in that room, such a good-looking group, so typical of English life in spite of Michael’s Russian blood, so careless and care-free, so unknowing of what life was hiding from them.

“Poor old Gilbert!” whispered Beatrice, in her sentimental way. “What a pity Katherine married the wrong man!”

“She doesn’t think she did,” I answered shortly.

“Michael is a curious boy,” she said, ignoring my huffiness. “He’s rather sulky sometimes, but Dorothy seems to understand him. I hope they won’t take to each other too much. First cousins, you know!”

I reassured her on that point. “Puggy has a dozen lovers already, and she and Michael chip each other without mercy.”

“She’s a dangerous little puss,” remarked Beatrice. “I wouldn’t like Winifred to see much of her.”

I thought there was not much fear of that, considering that Dorothy had a sublime contempt for her prim little cousin, who never read anything more thrilling than the *Girls’ Own Paper*, and taught in a Sunday school at Ealing. But I didn’t tell Beatrice so.

“I must get my dear man to sing another song,” she remarked presently. “He loves it so, and he does it so nicely.”

My brother-in-law sang “Our hands have met but not our hearts,” and I noticed that Michael and Dorothy exchanged ironical glances, just as the others had done when Michael played. The evening wound up with a game of cards—and Michael became vastly excited and roared with laughter when he won eighteenpence, before his mother said it was time to go home.

I went back with them by Underground to Sloane Square, which was their nearest station to Chelsea, and we became separated from Paul with his boy and girl, as the train was just starting. Katherine took the opportunity of rebuking her son for bad manners.

“It’s so ungrateful when everybody was trying to please you.”

He was contrite, and snuggled close to her, with his head against her like a small boy.

“Sorry, Mother! But it was all so stupid, and perfectly childish. Those cousins of mine—one can’t talk to them as if they were grown up. They haven’t an idea in their heads. Why, in Russia, fellows of that age would be jawing philosophy, and discussing the ethics of art, or rotting in prison as friends of liberty.”

“They’re good, healthy, English boys,” said Katherine, “fond of sport, and not worrying about the mysteries of life.”

“They ought to worry,” said Michael. “It’s because they don’t worry that they produce types like Uncle Hubert who wants to shoot down the working people when they strike for a better standard of life. What a funny old Jingo! He ought to be suppressed.”

“I like him,” said Katherine. “It’s men like that who made England great.”

“Great and grabbing, and thoroughly hypocritical!” said Michael, with an ironical laugh.

“Simple, honest, and kind-hearted,” said Katherine. “Not clever, I admit; but I’m beginning to like simplicity more than cleverness. It makes for more happiness in life.”

“Don’t you believe it, Mother o’ mine!” said Michael. “It’s the stupid, simple people who are most cruel, and make the worst mess of the world. They don’t even know how much suffering they cause. . . . That music, for instance! Lord, when Winifred played that duet with her mother I suffered the tortures of the damned!”

“I think you inflicted a little pain yourself,” I remarked, “with that Gipsy stuff of yours.”

“Did I?” he said. It seemed a revelation to him, and a great joke.

“O Lord, yes. I don’t suppose they understood a note of it! It must have driven them scranny. . . . Except Dorothy who seemed to like it. But then she’s clever, and very amusing. Don’t you think so?”

He laughed to himself, and then raised his mother’s hand to his lips and kissed it, to the surprise of the other people in the carriage, and spoke to her in Russian, as though asking forgiveness for his bad behaviour. It was easy to see that she forgave him, and that, whatever he did, she would love the baby that was behind his mask of manhood.

THERE was a conspiracy among us elder folk—who felt so young and resented the abominable approach of middle-age—to give a good time to “the children,” as we still called them, in honour of Katherine and Michael, so that their six months in England should be well filled. Even Paul knocked off work for a time as much as possible, so that he might join Katherine and the young people, and I dropped a novel I was writing, or played about with it, for the same reason. I wanted to see all I could of Katherine, and for her sake to take Michael round a bit, so that he should see as much as possible of English life before going back to Russia. We revisited some of our old haunts, like the Tower of London and the National Gallery and Windsor Castle, and I was constantly amused by the tug-of-war in Michael’s mind between the English and Russian sides of his character.

The romance of England called to him, and he thrilled to its old stones, its ancient traditions, its historical memories, which came to him through Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Harrison Ainsworth, and other novelists in whose books he had steeped himself as a small boy in London and afterwards in Moscow. Even the changing of the guard outside St. James’s Palace stirred him so much that, as I noticed, his colour deepened and his eye caught fire, while St. George’s Chapel and the flower-strewn slopes of Windsor Castle enchanted him and made him cry out with admiration. But always his father’s early teaching, and his revolutionary sympathies in Russia, made him satirical about all this “silly old feudalism,” as he called it, and he declared that there was a tyranny of tradition over the English mind that was almost as bad as the actual tyranny of government in Russia.

“The educated Russians are intellectually free,” he said, “in spite of the Czar and his Secret Police. But the English are mentally enslaved because they’re perfectly satisfied with everything that has lasted a hundred years or so. If it’s old they think it must be good. They don’t *want* to change. That’s what’s so extraordinary.”

That sort of talk did not annoy me. He was very young, and youth has a right to be rebellious and critical. But it annoyed Paul’s boy Humphrey, who came about with us sometimes, and confided to me privately that he thought Michael “perfectly poisonous,” and that a damned good hiding now and then would do him a lot of good.

“England may be a funny old place,” he said, “and I’m a bit of a rebel myself, but I don’t believe in fouling one’s own nest or crying stinking fish all the time. As for this revolutionary stuff, it makes me tired. As long as people

leave me alone and let me do what I like, I don't care a toss what sort of Government we have. I'm an individualist. 'Live and let live.' That's my motto."

"Yes," I answered, "that sounds pretty good. But of course you wouldn't be left alone to do what you like under some forms of government. Not entirely under ours, as you'll find if you don't keep off the grass, old lad. The Socialists want to rule your life for you, in the home and out of it. In Russia, if you happen to like Liberty and say so in a loud voice, they put you in the fortress of Peter and Paul."

So we argued, Humphrey and Michael and I; and sometimes the two lads quarrelled noisily, and used strong language that alarmed old ladies in their neighbourhood, especially when Michael, who looked thoroughly English, broke out into Russian swear-words.

But there was a lot of laughter too, especially when Dorothy joined us in picnics up the Thames, when it generally rained, so that we had to take shelter under dripping trees, or went to see one of those pageants which were all the rage in England that year, rather spoilt also by the weather, so that Saxon Princesses and Elizabethan ladies, and Stuart cavaliers and Plantagenet knights, had to flee for shelter, regardless of dignity and grace. We went to Oxford, and took lunch with Cuthbert in his rooms at Balliol, and with Hubert in his rooms at B.N.C.; and that night Paul stood dinner to a dozen undergraduates at the Clarendon, with Dorothy as the only unmarried female of her species, and thoroughly pleased with herself because of so many admirers.

Katherine and I went for a walk alone next morning, and watched the undergraduates on their way to lectures, with their gowns over their shoulders, some on bicycles, some tearing down the High on motor-cycles, regardless of life and limb, some lounging about in groups outside the colleges.

"How splendid they look!" said Katherine. "England's youth—all like young gods in shabby clothes."

"Their clothes are quite expensive to their parents," I said; "and some of them look like young devils."

But Katherine would have none of that.

"I'd like to mother them all," she said. "And I'm English enough, in spite of a Russian husband, to think they're the best type in the world. All those grey eyes and clean-cut faces, so fresh, and boyish, and keen, and humorous. If only Michael could go to Oxford!"

"Why not?" I asked. "It would do him a world of good. Make him more normal."

"I've written to Serge about it," said Katherine. "He's half inclined. Besides, it would keep him out of Russia—and out of danger. These handsome

boys—they're so safe in England."

It was May of 1914.

Cuthbert and Harold came swinging towards us from the Turle, in a hurry for breakfast with us at the Clarendon. They were amazed to see us out so early, and Cuthbert confessed to a "head" after the champagne which Paul had stood us at dinner the night before. Harold walked ahead with Katherine, who rather abashed him by taking his arm, and I fell into step with Cuthbert. He was half a head taller than me, and walked with a long, loose stride and a straight back.

"My last term," said Cuthbert. "I shall hate going down. Still I hope to get a Blue."

"And then?" I asked.

He coloured up, hesitated, and then blurted out his words.

"The governor wants me to go into the Bank. Coutts's you know. But I'd hate it like hell. I'd be awfully obliged if you'd put in a word for me. Against it, I mean."

"What's the alternative?" I asked. "What do you want to do?"

"It's too late for the Army," he told me. "I wanted to go to Sandhurst, but the mater was against it. Thought I might be killed in some frontier fight! You know the mater. Now I'm rather keen on going out to Canada. Anything for an open-air life and a bit of work for one's muscles."

"Your mother would hate that almost as much as the Army," I said. "She would lose you just the same."

"I know," he answered. "It would be very rough on her. That's the snag about it. But Coutts's Bank! O Lord!"

I thought of Evesham, with his Canadian estates, and said: "I know a man who might help you. In Canada, I mean. Later on I'll put in a word for you."

"Oh, I say, that's most frightfully decent of you, sir!"

That "sir" made me feel my age again.

At breakfast Dorothy and Michael chipped each other as usual, and the way they tried to score off each other reminded me of Beatrice and Benedick. Michael, startled no doubt by the enormous breakfasts eaten by Cuthbert and Harold, who started with porridge and went steadily through the menu to the marmalade stage, laid down the proposition that the reason why the English were an inartistic nation was entirely due to overeating, followed by indigestion.

"Yes, but who wants to be artistic?" asked Cuthbert. "It's rather rot, anyhow, isn't it?"

"Besides," said Dorothy, "it's quite untrue to say the English are not artistic. Look at Shakespeare, look at Gainsborough, Reynolds, Shelley, Tennyson—great eaters and great artists. Look at me! I have a hearty appetite

—another sausage, Cuthbert—but I’m sensitive to my finger-tips. Aren’t I, father?”

Paul grinned at his daughter.

“You’re a baggage!”

“You see,” said Dorothy, “even father acknowledges my artistic temperament.”

“It’s a pity to see girls eating sausages and bacon,” said Michael, making a face at Dorothy’s food. “It takes away from the poetry of womanhood. The female species ought to eat in private!”

“Hark at our delicate democrat!” said Dorothy scornfully. “Listen to our little revolutionary! He prates of liberty, and denies women the right to a square meal. Well, you watch me, Michael. I astonish the most hardened waiter by the voracity of my hunger when there’s good food about. Another sausage, Cuthbert.”

“I daresay you eat more at a meal than a family of slum children in a whole week,” said Michael in sham thoughtfulness. “And they say there’s equality in England!”

He was only teasing her, but she took umbrage, and, putting her spoon into her hot coffee, dabbed it on the back of his hand, so that he uttered a Russian word which sounded terrible.

It was unladylike behaviour, but Dorothy was pretty enough to defy the rules, and Cuthbert and Harold applauded her, and laughed hilariously.

“I’ll pay you back for that,” said Michael. “I’ll think out something devilish.”

“You won’t have to think long,” said Dorothy. “The Slav mind reeks with sinister and diabolical imaginings.”

“Apart from a few remarkable exceptions,” said Michael, “the English mind doesn’t exist as an intelligence. It’s merely an instinct.”

These remarks would have seemed ill-tempered but for the laughter hidden in the eyes of this good-looking couple. It was obvious that they were thoroughly enjoying themselves, and the more vicious their remarks the better they were pleased with each other.

That morning we took a punt and went up the Cherwell, and for once the weather was kind to us, and the sun shone. Cuthbert and Harold punted with grace and skill, and Dorothy, lying back on red silk cushions, sang little songs and looked blissful, while Michael smiled at her, and trailed his hand in the water and watched how the sun made patterns through the leaves.

“I shall try and put this into music,” he remarked. “The lapping of the water, the tinkle of those banjoes over there, Dorothy’s singing, that distant gramophone, and the effect of wind through the rushes. I take back all I’ve said about England. This is great!”

Paul punted Katherine and me, while the young people led the way up the river.

"This makes me feel young again," said Paul. "And I haven't lost my form, either. How's this for style? I used to be pretty good at Cambridge. How many years ago, Kitty?"

"Yesterday," she answered. "These young people are dream children. You and Gilbert and I are just as young as ever we were; and this evening we'll go to the old Empire before taking the Underground back to Romilly Hall."

Paul let his pole float back.

"Lord!" he said, "if that were only true! To put back the clock, eh?"

And then he glanced over at the other punt, where Dorothy was splashing Michael with the end of a boat-hook.

"I'm not sure that I want to," he added with a smile. "These kids—one couldn't do without 'em now!"

A punt-load of undergraduates came down-stream. They were singing the latest song in that spring of 1914.

Hullo! hullo! hullo!
It's a different girl again!
Different eyes, different nose,
Different hair, different clothes——

Katherine turned round and smiled at them, and one of the boys—"men" they called themselves—waved a friendly hand to her.

"What a pretty boy!" said Katherine. "Like a young Sir Galahad!"

"Young England," said Paul. "And pretty good."

It was a week or so after that, in London, when Katherine spoke to me in some distress.

"I'm afraid Michael is falling in love with Dorothy, though they seem to quarrel all the time. I don't quite like their being together so much. Last night they went to a dance somewhere in Chelsea and didn't get back till two in the morning."

"Puggy makes a habit of it," I said, thinking of that night with Hilary Dick, who seemed to have been left in the lurch by that young lady.

"After that," said Katherine, "Michael didn't go to sleep for ever so long. I heard him moving about his room. Once he laughed out loud in a queer way."

"So you were lying awake and listening," I said. "Poor mothers! Each generation of them does the same; and youth doesn't care. My mother was exactly like that when I used to be late from Romilly Hall. Do you remember, Katherine?"

She remembered, and smiled rather shyly, knowing the reason for my lateness.

“These two are first cousins,” she said. “If it became serious——”

IT became serious when Michael was abominably jealous, owing to the intervention of Hilary Dick, who reappeared at this time, looking woebegone because Dorothy had deserted him since the arrival of her Russian cousin, but joyful when she was kind to him for the sole purpose, I thought, of scoring off Michael. The absurdity of it was that Dorothy pretended to be jealous of Tamia, the daughter of Princess Miliukoff, with whom Michael was friendly in a comradely way because of their childhood together—when he had nearly strangled her that day. I had a glimpse of this game of cross purposes one night at the Miliukoffs' house in Queen's Gate.

We all went together in the same taxi from Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, and at that stage in the proceedings Michael and Dorothy were in a very good temper with each other, and chattered together as they sat opposite Katherine and myself. Dorothy, I remember, had a new frock and cloak, and wore a circlet of pearls round her hair, given to her by Katherine. I realised, not for the first time, that little Puggy, as I used to call her—and still did at times—had developed into a beauty. She still had a touch of the Gipsy about her—an untamed look in her brown eyes, or at least a kind of merry recklessness like some of Shakespeare's young women—but she was no longer a loose-limbed, half-grown schoolgirl. She was as tall as Michael, and her arms were plump and shapely, and she had the grace of a Greek wood-nymph as we like to imagine that lady in the springtime of the world. Michael, in his evening clothes, with an untidy tie which Dorothy put straight for him on the doorstep of the Miliukoffs' house, was a distinguished-looking lad, I thought like Katherine, and yet with something unmistakably foreign about him, perhaps, due to his hair, which he wore slightly longer than most English boys, but also in the expression of his eyes and mouth—ironical, sensitive, a little melancholy, despite his smile.

Princess Miliukoff received us with cries of delight, which rather disconcerted the German Ambassador to whom she had been talking, and from whom she broke away abruptly, with a rush at Katherine, whom she kissed on both cheeks. She gave her hand to Michael, and deplored her advanced years, which made it impossible—indecent, even—to fall in love with him, as otherwise, she would have done, because of his surpassing loveliness. She complained that I had no gifts of flirtation in spite of her encouragement. "Hopelessly English!" she said, making a grimace at me, but quite friendly. Dorothy she held at arm's length and said, "Now who's this beauty who's going to turn the heads of all the satyrs here, and steal my unfaithful lovers?"

"I'm Aunt Katherine's unworthy niece," said Dorothy rather overwhelmed by this greeting, and having the grace to blush, which rather surprised me. In her white frock, with the circlet of pearls round her hair, she was certainly the prettiest creature in that drawing-room, and as fresh as a wild flower compared with the little painted ladies there—an extraordinary contrast to Tamia, who was old enough now to come down to her mother's parties, a tall, black-haired, white-faced young person, utterly Russian, quite attractive, and rather alarming, because of her perfect self-composure and advanced intelligence.

She came up and gave a pale cheek to Katherine, and then stared at Michael from head to foot with cool amusement.

"Hullo, Michael!" she said. "Are you strangling any women to-night? If you want a white neck to twist, don't choose mine, because I've still got sharp nails."

"Thanks for the warning," said Michael. "Do you still cheat at cards?"

"Always!" said Tamia. "I'm rather good at bridge."

Their eyes met with a friendly challenge, and they both laughed.

"You look abominably English," said Tamia.

"And you look elaborately Russian," said Michael.

"I'm Russian in my soul and body," said Tamia. "Thank goodness we're going back to Moscow next month. I'm sick with expectation."

"Moscow!" said Michael, and then laughed, as though it held the great adventure of life.

He spoke to Tamia in Russian, and she answered him excitedly, with a rush of words in that extraordinary language, and they moved across the room together, and I did not see them again for some time. Later in the evening I noticed that Dorothy was sitting alone, looking annoyed. She was angry and hurt because Michael had deserted her, it seemed, for this black-haired girl whom he had known in Russia. I piloted her about the room, and tried to keep her amused by describing some of the people present. The young Baron von Schwarzenberg was there as usual, and Suvorin came over and sat on a low hassock by Dorothy's chair when a Russian lady played the piano to us, and then moved over to where Katherine was sitting, and bent low as he kissed her hand. After that night outside the Kremlin, when she had rescued him in the snow, he had a doglike devotion to her.

I spoke to Dorothy.

"You don't seem amused, child. Bored?"

"Not at all," she said. "But I'm not fond of Russians. That girl Tamia—did you ever see such a black-eyed minx? And so sure of herself!"

"She's quite amusing," I told her. "And terribly intelligent."

"So Michael seems to think!" said Dorothy. "One forgets that he's half Russian himself, and contemptuous of everything English."

"That's his pose. He doesn't mean it really."

"He's an egoist," said Dorothy. "It's a pity he came back to England."

"Isn't that rather cruel?" I asked. "I thought you were the best of friends. You seem to amuse each other a good deal."

"Oh, I've no doubt I amuse him!" said Dorothy. "I confess that I get a little tired of his particular form of wit."

Presently Michael came back, and I saw that Tamia was talking to Baron von Schwarzenberg.

"Sorry I've been away so long," said Michael rather breathlessly. "Tamia and I have been talking about friends in Moscow."

"Don't let us drag you away from her," said Dorothy.

"Oh, it isn't that," said Michael, unaware of her sarcasm. "But you know how time slips away when one gets gossiping."

"Yes," said Dorothy. "One forgets one's manners sometimes."

Michael thought this sentence out for a moment, and looked crestfallen.

"Meaning that I've been rude again?" he asked.

"Oh, not at all," said Dorothy. "You've been wonderfully attentive this evening. I've enjoyed myself vastly, sitting here all alone in maiden meditation. Now I'm going home, after a riotous evening."

"Isn't it rather early?" I asked, as she rose from her chair. "Your aunt seems to be enjoying herself with the little Princess."

"I have another engagement," said Dorothy calmly. "I'm meeting Hilary Dick at a dance in Chelsea. I suppose one of the servants can get me a taxi?"

"I don't think you'd better go," I suggested. "It wasn't on the programme, you know."

"Good-night, little Uncle!" she said sweetly. "I mustn't disappoint Hilary. Tell father I shall be home late."

She moved away across the polished floor, ignoring Michael completely. For a moment he stood there, looking after her, abashed and worried. Then he hurried after her and tried to take her hand, but she made an angry little gesture, and went through the open doors with her head held high. Michael came back to me with a flushed face.

"What's the matter with Dorothy!" he asked.

"Slightly peeved," I said. "Feels neglected because you stayed so long with Tamia."

Michael swore softly to himself in Russian. At least, I guessed so. Then he shrugged his shoulders and laughed with vexation, and said, "One never knows—with girls."

"Never," I agreed. "They're very difficult, old lad."

He went over to his mother, and I saw that Katherine looked up in a startled way. Afterwards she asked me about Dorothy, and I confessed that she

had gone off in a huff. Well, there was nothing to do about it.

We stayed on some time longer, and I had a talk with Suvorin. He had just come back from Berlin, and didn't seem pleased with what he had seen and heard there.

"Germany is getting hysterical," he remarked gloomily.

"What's the trouble?"

He said, "England's the trouble, and Russia, and France. They think they're being hemmed in—encircled—thwarted in their God-ordained destiny—kept out of their place in the sun—flouted by weaker peoples who are jealous of their power and genius."

"They don't like us, I'm afraid."

Suvorin's black eyes stared into mine with a moody smile, and he asked one of his conundrums:

"Are you English people blind and deaf?"

I told him I thought we could see a brick wall if it happened to be near.

"The Germans hate you like hell," he said, "and you don't seem to worry. I've heard a lot of that during the last few weeks from professors, Civil Servants, young officers from Potsdam. I have an uncle in Berlin who moves in that crowd, so I kept my tongue quiet and my ears open. It was very instructive. It's like a flame, that hate of theirs."

"I can't see why," I argued. "What has England done?"

"Insulted them," said Suvorin. "Threatened to go to war with them if they laid hands on Morocco. Grabbed all the best places of the earth. Allied yourselves with France. Jeered at them in the *Daily Mail*."

"The *Daily Mail*!" I exclaimed. "Oh, Lord!"

"Yes," said Suvorin, "I agree. Unless the Lord God proposes to work a miracle, there's going to be a nasty mess in Europe. I'm going back to Russia. I think it may be the safest place after all—comparatively."

He changed the subject abruptly, and said, "Katherine's boy is a fine-looking lad, and that girl you brought is a pretty match for him. An English wild flower."

"With thorns," I told him. "Michael pricked his finger to-night."

Suvorin smiled and sighed.

"I'd like to be young enough to fall in love with her. I missed all that, and read old books about liberty, and wrote novels about wretchedness. What waste of time! How much better to fall in love with beauty, and feel a girl's kisses on one's lips, and not worry about life or justice, or the incomprehensible God."

"They have a knack of interfering with one's love-affairs," I said, "life, and justice, and God."

"Yes, that's the devil of it!" he agreed. "One can't isolate oneself from the

stupidities and cruelties of life. One may have peace in one's heart, but what's the good if one's fellow-beings live by hatred? One may worship beauty, but it only hurts if everything is ugly."

He groaned so loudly that Albrecht von Schwarzenberg, who was standing near us, turned round and raised his blonde eyebrows.

"These young people with their little love-affairs," said Suvorin, "their little passions, quarrels, matings, I feel so sorry for them! The other day I sat outside a café in Paris, and there were a young man and girl making love together without bashfulness. I leaned towards them and spoke in my bad, fluent French. 'My dears,' I said, 'you are perfectly right! There's no time to be lost. Unless you take your kisses now, Death may step between you and rob you of life and romance. How wise of you not to mind the passers-by! Kiss again, and be quick about it, for in a little while there'll be a river of blood between you!'"

"A very charming introduction!" I exclaimed. "How did they receive it?"

"Not well," said Suvorin. "They didn't understand. The young man called me a *sacré imbécile*, and told me to clear out in words which I needn't repeat. They belong to the *argot* of Paris."

He held out his hand to me and said, "Good-bye! I'm off to Moscow tomorrow. I doubt whether I shall see you again in this funny world of ours."

I clasped his hand and said, "You've made my flesh creep, but I don't believe a word of it. And I won't say good-bye, but *au revoir*."

He put my hand to his heart with a gesture of affection.

"Thanks for your friendship," he said, "and your patience with a morbid fellow, who hears strange rumblings beneath his feet. And give my love to Katherine—my worshipful love."

He waved his hand to me, and slipped out of the drawing-room.

CLARE was liberated after her latest hunger strike, and Katherine and I went with Paul in his Vauxhall car to fetch her from Holloway Prison, where a crowd of women had assembled with purple, green, and white banners to welcome the release of their “martyrs,” of whom my sister was one. As we arrived they were cheering in shrill voices, swept from their lips by gusts of rainy wind, and singing songs of liberty with some difficulty in the top notes. They surrounded our car with their waving flags, taking us for sympathisers with their cause, though I was the only one who was at all on their side. Paul loathed the whole movement now that it had wrecked his home life, and regarded it as a “biological disease,” while Katherine, who was now a Catholic, as I think I have said, and always a little Victorian in spite of her broad-minded views, could not reconcile this anarchy of women with Christian principles or common decency.

“It’s incredible that English women should behave like that,” she said on the way down. “It doesn’t belong to our national character. Even in Russia, where there are so many women revolutionists, they’re rather shocked by our militant suffragettes. It’s one thing to murder a tyrant, they say, but ridiculous to cling on to policemen for the sake of getting arrested, or to howl down public speakers and assault them with umbrellas.”

“It’s part of the world-wide movement for democratic liberty,” I said rather ponderously. “When English women smash a plate-glass window, they’re really breaking the conventions of middle-class life and the little tyrannies of villadom which have kept their souls imprisoned—the domestic cruelties and servitude of Brixton and Balham, to say nothing of Kensington and St. John’s Wood. Think of their self-complacent husbands, those selfish swine who keep their wives as drudges without wages.”

“Bosh!” said Paul angrily. “They’re partners, aren’t they?”

“It’s a revolt against the duties of womanhood,” said Katherine. “The inevitable duties, and all loyalties. I’m afraid England’s beginning to lose some of its old virtue. Everybody is getting so restless. I’m frightened of all these strikes—one after another since I’ve been in England. Where are we all going to?”

“Moving on,” I said hopefully. “They are growing pains. The ideals of liberty are working in the human mind, everywhere, against old tyrannies and old restraints. Look at Ireland!”

“Yes,” said Paul gloomily. “Look at Ireland. We shall have civil war there as sure as fate. King Carson!”

"Precisely!" I said. "It's the Carson type of mind that has got to be broken. Prussianism. If he asks for war, he'll get it, and I hope he'll be smashed. The Irish ought to have had Home Rule ages ago, and would have done but for the intolerance and stupidity of the Tory mind. Liberty can't be denied for ever."

"Liberty!" said Paul, and he laughed quietly. "I wonder if my streptococci believe in their sacred rights to spread disease and destroy the constitution!"

"Surely there must be law?" said Katherine. "Isn't there a limit to liberty?"

Then she, too, laughed, and said, "Goodness! We talk like that in Russia for hours, and weeks, and years. I know all the arguments. . . . And oh, my dears, I'm afraid they're going to lead to frightful things. Perhaps all over the world. Something is going to break one day—perhaps this civilisation of ours. But I hoped it wouldn't happen in dear old England."

"I don't think it will," I said. "I don't believe in all these dark fears. We shall change quietly, by evolution, better education, organised common sense. There's no need of a sudden smash. The world is being made safe for liberty, in spite of Suvorin and all the pessimists."

"Cheery optimist!" said Paul, and it was then that we came to Holloway Prison and those singing women and waving banners. Clare came out with the prison doctor and a hospital nurse, very weak and white, but with an indomitable spirit and shining eyes. She insisted on making a speech from our motor-car, much to Paul's distress, though he, too, was stricken by the sight of Clare's emaciated face and figure, and too chivalrous to prevent her oratory.

"We shall win!" cried Clare. "No tyranny can break the spiritual power of our purpose. They may starve us and kill us, but the great army of women will march on to victory. The liberty of womanhood is at hand!"

"Hooray! Hooray!" screamed the shrill voices of the crowd, and their banners fluttered about us, and one of them knocked off Paul's hat, and he said "Damn" in a low voice. Then Clare fainted, and we drove home with her, and Katherine put her to bed before the doctor came. I marvelled at this sister of mine, who had been so prim in the old days, who had exasperated me so often by her conventional little mind, her little snobberies and affectations. Whether one agreed or not with the fight for women's suffrage—and I hated their methods—one had to pay homage to a courage which defied death itself for the sake of an ideal. Fanaticism, yes! But the Christian martyrs were fanatics, for Christ's sake.

Paul sent her away to a nursing-home as soon as she was strong enough to be moved, and for the sake of his boy and girl he was glad to join my mother and me in a country cottage we had taken down in Sussex for the summer months. It was only three miles from Evesham's place where Katherine and Michael were going to stay for a fortnight or so, and I looked forward to a happy time with them.

IT was the happiest time for all of us, until something happened at the end which smashed all happiness for us and the world. That June and July were graced with lovely weather, as I remember, though perhaps my recollection is coloured too brightly by the darkness that followed. Certainly there were spells of warm sunshine and blue skies, when it was pleasant to seek the shade of the woods, when we basked on the smooth mown lawns of Evesham Park, when Katherine and I wandered down tangled lanes or sat talking—or not talking—in the rose-covered porch of that funny old cottage I had taken, with its beamed ceiling and sloping floors, and when my mother sat knitting, or dozing, with bees humming in the flowers near by.

Paul used to lie on his back, with the sun on his face, and the laughter and shouts of the young people came up to the terrace of Evesham Hall from the tennis-lawn, where their white figures rushed about in the shimmering heat. After dinner sometimes, before the last red glow had left the sky, or until the stars twinkled in its pale luminance, we smoked on that stone terrace, with its crumbling statues, talking quietly, listening to the strum of Humphrey's banjo, watching the flirtations, quarrels, *gestes* of the younger crowd who came into this English pleasance.

Lady Evesham—Betty, as I knew her now—used to walk down to the cottage sometimes with Gladys, her fair Columbine, to whom Humphrey had lost his heart. She was always dressed in shabby old country clothes, with big boots and grubby gloves, until dinner-time, when she crowded her table with young people of the neighbourhood, as well as ours, and became an Irish beauty, like Lavery's portrait of her in the drawing-room, with lovely white arms that gleamed in the candlelight on the polished board. Her jolly laughter rang out, and that old grudge of hers against Katherine, who had been her husband's first love—his ideal of womanhood, which he kept secret in his heart, as she had pretended, and as I think was true—no longer rankled after the years that had passed. She and Katherine became close friends, with one tie of spiritual intimacy which I couldn't share, now that Katherine belonged to the old faith to which Betty had been born.

Paul and I, playing chess together in a little room with low ceiling and panelled walls in that cottage I had taken, heard their voices in the next room—Betty's low and rich, with a touch of Irish cream in it; Katherine's musical and more distinct, so that sometimes we could hear her words.

"Talking religion again," said Paul. "Soul stuff!"

"Does it make any difference to you?" I asked. "I can't meet Katherine on

that ground. As a hopeless heretic I have to stay outside the sanctuary.”

Paul rubbed the bowl of his pipe down his nose and polished it.

“I can’t get the hang of it quite, but I’m no longer a dogmatic unbeliever. There must be a First Cause somewhere, as my old Dad used to say, and I can find no dividing-line between matter and force. I wouldn’t be surprised if there’s some spiritual power outside our range of proof, and if one goes as far as that, I suppose one gets almost as far as God. After that—well, there’s a long way to go before one can swallow the Nicene Creed. But, anyhow, I’m convinced that some sort of religion is necessary to man. I mean, some faith in universal law and divine authority; perhaps some form of discipline beyond worldly punishment and reward—a hope beyond this ‘vale of tears.’ Otherwise life is apt to seem a poor game, without sense in it. Kitty’s Papist superstitions seem to give her something which poor Clare hasn’t got, for instance. They haven’t spoilt her sense of humour, or soured her, thank God—if there’s a God to be thanked.”

“It’s a rum business, this game of ours,” I said, and Paul said, “Damned queer, but rather good just now—this weather and this old cottage, and the smell of warm earth and wet flowers, and this corner of England, out of the hurly-burly, hardly changing through the centuries, drugged with slumberous peace, and abominably unprogressive! Very pleasant to come here, away from screaming suffragettes, and the stink of my laboratory, and the worries which one foolishly allows to jag one’s nerves. Passion, fretfulness, and the human urge don’t disturb this rustic retreat.”

“I’m not so sure about passion and the human urge,” I said. “Come to the window—quietly, old man—and have a look at those two figures in the garden there, beyond the rose-beds, by the old well.”

It was a glamorous evening, with the last colour fading from the sky, and the first star shining, and a violet twilight in the garden. Birds were saying good-night in a little copse beyond the wattle fence, and outside our casement window the dew was drawing out the honied scent of sweet-williams against the cottage wall. Two slim figures stood in the garden at the end of the winding path, beyond a cluster of Lady Godivas, creamy white, like the frock of the girl there whom I knew to be Gladys Evesham. The other was Humphrey, in grey flannel trousers and a cricket shirt, open at the neck, as I had seen him before he slipped out of the next room half an hour before. One could not distinguish their faces, and the dusk veiled them, but I knew Humphrey by his height. Gladys was in his arms, with her head on his shoulder, and as we looked out he kissed her on the lips, and the sound was audible, though a blackbird was chuckling to its mate near by.

“Good God!” said Paul, horrified.

He stepped back from the window, and looked at me with distress in his

eyes.

“Why not?” I asked.

“Evesham’s girl—and Humphrey!” said Paul. “Good heavens, old man, I had no idea!”

“Hush!” I said. “It’s all right.”

The two young figures came up the garden path and passed our window. Then they came into the room, and Humphrey pretended to be normal and jolly, but I could hear a tremolo in his voice as he asked something about our game of chess, and saw an ecstasy and a fear on his face. Gladys dared not look at him, and her eyes dropped before mine as though I might guess her secret. But a faint smile lurked about her lips, and a new loveliness emanated from the child, I fancied, because of that embrace in the garden, changing her a little like a flower unsheathed by the sun. Paul stood silent and awkward, glancing uneasily at his son, and I did the chattering to cover up our guilty knowledge, until Betty—Lady Evesham—came in from the next room and said they must rush back and dress for dinner.

That evening Humphrey went up early to bed, on the plea of sleepiness, but it was past midnight when I heard him in the room next to mine. By the sounds he made I knew that he was standing by the window, staring into the garden, now filled with a white radiance so bright from a moon at three-quarters that one could see the roses on the bushes, and the milky dew on the grass. I heard him give a deep, quivering sigh, and then stride across the room and fling himself on to his bed, so that the rotten old floor gave a creak.

I guessed his trouble, poor lad, and the fear that had spoilt the ecstasy. The son of Paul Lambert, impecunious scientist, was no match for Gladys, daughter of Viscount Evesham; and, in any case, he was still an undergraduate of Cambridge, without an idea in his head about a future career, and no special genius to give him a lead.

He was thoughtful and silent next day, but brightened up in the evening again when we went to dinner with the Eveshams, and afterwards he sat on the terrace, strumming his banjo to the tune of “Yiddle on my Fiddle,” while Gladys sat on the wall by his side, leaning a little against his shoulder. Michael and Dorothy sat on the steps together lower down, and I could hear their voices in a low murmur, with now and then a laugh from one or the other.

Betty and I were talking Irish politics like two conspirators, lest her husband should hear. She was in a flame of anger against Carson and his crowd, who were arming steadily to resist Home Rule and gun-running under the very nose of the British Government. Our officers on the Curragh had put all the fat in the fire by threatening to resign their commissions rather than lead British troops against Ulster in case of a rising.

“It’s horribly unfair!” complained Betty. “If the Catholic Irish try to

smuggle in some rifles a perfect scream goes up, and they're denounced as rebels and traitors, while Carson is allowed to arm his brave boys to the teeth, and defy the King and Constitution by threats of civil war—and all your Tory English hail him as a patriot."

"There'll be bloodshed over it as sure as fate," I said, "and England will be dragged in as usual, and cursed by both sides."

"Serve England right!" said Betty. "She's never played straight with Ireland, and old sins cast long shadows."

She put her finger to her lips as Evesham came closer to us, pacing up and down with Paul, and she smiled at me warningly.

"If Hugh hears me I shall get 'what for.' It's our one cause of quarrel. He's all for King Carson."

Evesham stopped and flicked the ash off his cigar.

"I believe you two are talking treason," he said, with a good-natured laugh.

"Guilty, my lord," said Betty.

"Not guilty," I said. "I sit on the hedge, as usual—an onlooker of the *comédie humaine*."

"He's all for liberty," said Betty. "I claim him for my side."

Evesham smiled at her, and laid his hand on her hair with a caressing touch.

"You're a wicked rebel. You ought to go to the Tower of London and have your head chopped off. I'd see about it if it weren't for your pretty neck."

He spoke more gravely for a moment.

"I've just had a call on the telephone from Freddy Barnard, of the Foreign Office. The Austrian Archduke—Ferdinand—has been murdered somewhere—at a place I can't remember. Freddy thinks it may lead to a lot of trouble in Europe. Perhaps we're exaggerating the importance of Ireland. Other things _____"

He stopped and looked for a moment across the terrace and the long sweep of lawn to a distant belt of woods on which the sun was shining, so that they were wonderfully green.

"I don't believe a word Freddy says," said Betty lightly. "Somebody must have dropped him when he was a baby. . . . And, anyhow, there goes the dinner-gong."

She clapped her hands to some young people on the tennis-lawn in the middle of a game, and called "Coo-ee!" and Dorothy ran a race to her with Michael, and beat him by a yard.

I think this country life had stirred the Gipsy in Dorothy and aroused her "untamed spirit." Ever since she had been down at the cottage she had heard the call of the wild, and answered it with gladness. She was first up in the morning, and I heard her singing in her little bedroom at the open window, or

chirping to the birds, long before I was ready to get up. She beguiled Humphrey out to bathe in a pond which adjoined an old mill-house not far from the cottage, and the miller, who was a modest man, and a Primitive Methodist on Sundays, was gravely shocked by the sight of those two young people as he observed them through the willow-trees. He came round to complain to Paul, but only received the gruff reply that if he didn't like it he needn't look, with a warning about the blindness that struck Peeping Tom of Coventry.

"This is a respectable neighbourhood," said Farmer Southcombe. "I ain't a-going to allow no pagan immoralities in my mill-pond, and so I tell you straight, sir."

To avoid shocking his sensibilities, which she thought very disgusting, Dorothy agreed to give up her morning bathe, especially, she said, as the pond was a foot deep in mud and tadpoles. There were other joys left her—the wide, wind-swept commons, with the larks singing above the heather, and a glory of gold where the gorse was in bloom, the beech-woods, and a copse of larches in which she wandered alone with Meredith's poems and a bag of acid drops; the old sand-pit, where rabbits scuttled before breakfast and after twilight; the scent of cottage flowers, which, she told me, made her feel drunk with the joy of life.

"After all," she remarked, "it's better than night-clubs in Chelsea. I don't really belong to London, though I make the best of it, and get some fun. But by blood and instinct I'm a country wench, and a child of nature."

I suspected that there was some reason for this love of country life, for her little outbursts of song and laughter, for the smile that came into her eyes sometimes when there was no obvious cause of amusement, and I wondered if Michael had anything to do with it. It was quite clear to me that he had lost his heart to this unscrupulous young lady, and that she was having a merry game with him. Since that night when he had stayed too long in the company of Tamia she played my Lady Disdain at times in a way that enraged him, and at other times, when he was sulky and savage because of her coldness, she was all smiles and playfulness until she had teased him back to good humour, and perhaps to pleadings for a kiss or two, which she then denied him. I could only guess at that then, watching them together with amusement, overhearing some of their remarks, seeing the rising passion of young Michael for this tall creature who had a witchery in her eyes and a seductive grace. He came sloping down from Evesham Hall at any hour of the day, and made the most flagrant pretexts to get Dorothy alone.

"I've just discovered a little old Norman church three miles from here. Care to come and see it? We could walk there and back before lunch."

"By all means," said Dorothy graciously, "and little Uncle will come with

us and tell us all about the architecture, and make up romantic stories which we can believe or not, as we like.”

I saw by Michael’s face that “little Uncle” was not wanted, and I made the excuse of having work to do.

“In that case,” said Dorothy, “I think I ought to write those letters to my abandoned friends who are languishing in London without me. Sorry, Michael! Ask Humphrey to go with you.”

“I wanted *you* to come,” said Michael grumpily.

After teasing him for half an hour, she agreed to go with him as a great favour—as I knew all the time she would—and they arrived back late for lunch, Michael looking hot and flushed, because of some argument in which he had had the worst of it.

When she went to dinner at Evesham Hall, looking as demure and beautiful as a lady-in-waiting to Queen Victoria, Michael was abashed by her grandeur, her elegant manners, her change from the brown-eyed Gipsy who had run a race with him and beaten him a few hours before. Evesham’s friends paid flattering homage to her—those horsey young men I had met before in this house, those cavalry subalterns, like Banstead and Mervyn, and even elderly gentlemen with weathered faces who hunted with Evesham’s hounds and exchanged gallantries with his charming wife. Michael could not get a word with her at some of those dinners in the old panelled room, hung with the portraits of honest gentlemen and good soldiers like those who sat under them, and I saw his moodiness as he looked at Dorothy from his place beside Gladys, whose blonde prettiness had no attraction for him, though young Humphrey would have given his right hand to change places with him, instead of sitting between the Vicar and an elderly lady with an aristocratic nose and thin lips, remarkably like Queen Elizabeth.

Things became a little complicated in the relations between Dorothy and Michael by the sudden appearance of Hilary Dick. That young man turned up unexpectedly one day in a charming suit of grey flannels, and announced that he was staying at the Evesham Arms in order to do some quiet reading for his law exams, free from the distractions and squalor of his rooms in London. It was, of course, the most flagrant insincerity, which made Dorothy laugh very merrily, while Humphrey greeted this statement with a loud guffaw.

“Why this amusement?” asked young Dick, with an air of bland surprise.

He was a year or two older than Humphrey and Michael, more elegant in his way of dress, with the pallid look of a young man who gets no exercise except at dances and night-clubs. Yet he disarmed criticism by his touch of shyness, and by a whimsical humour which underlay his affectation of gravity. Dorothy accused him of being born tired, but I think he had a staying-power as far as she was concerned, and later in history this pale young gentleman, who

was careful not to get his feet wet in the long grass of Evesham Park and never walked a yard if he could ride in his two-seater car, did not appear tired when he led a number of raids into a place called No Man's Land . . . which was as yet unknown in our mental geography.

It was that two-seater car which wrecked Michael's happiness on this summer holiday. Dorothy, who had a passion for speed and an adventurous desire to get to any other place than that in which she happened to be, could not resist Hilary Dick's invitations to explore the country with him—still less when he offered to let her take the wheel and learn to drive. She learnt in a couple of hours, and frightened us all by tearing along the country lanes with a look of ecstasy and exultant laughter.

I spoke to Hilary Dick about it, and warned him to be careful, but he assured me gravely that Dorothy was a born driver, and understood the soul of his machine in a way that amazed him. Most girls, he told me, frightened him considerably when he sat beside them in a car. In a moment of crisis one could never trust them to do the right thing instinctively. He trembled like an aspen-leaf, for instance, when his sister took him out. But Dorothy filled him with confidence, and her own self-assurance was superb. She had the sense of it. That was just before she made a slight error of judgment and drove straight through a garden fence into the flower-beds of a cottage down the lane. . . .

With Dorothy wafted off like this as far as Winchester on one side and Guildford on the other, Michael moped miserably, behaved with extreme rudeness to Hilary Dick when that young man brought her safely back, and sulked alone in the woods for hours together while Katherine and I went searching for him. Even Dorothy became aware of his distress, and made amends a little by being very cheery with him, and coaxing him into good humour by friendly advances. But she was playing a double game, the hussy, and took care to introduce Hilary Dick to Lady Evesham, so that he might be asked up to dinner and have the freedom of the park, where she was often to be found.

I REMEMBER most vividly one dinner in Evesham Hall, because it was the last of its kind before a shadow crept over all such pleasant life in England and these old homes, with their sense of security and ancient tradition and comfortable ease, until the shadow became a great darkness in which all our youth and manhood and wealth, and the old securities of our national life, were largely destroyed. The first coldness of this shadow did not touch that table that night, except perhaps in the mind of our host, who sat rather silent and thoughtful. Laughter rang out from Lady Evesham and her guests.

The Vicar told some of his little stories, Lord Banstead discussed the favourites for Ascot. Dorothy was flirting happily with the young gentlemen on each side of her. Katherine had shining eyes as she listened to the lively sallies of our hostess, who was chaffing Paul on the dogmatism of scientists and the “myth” of evolution. Gladys and Humphrey were exchanging amorous secrets by long-distance glances. Only young Michael sat glum, devoured with jealousy because Dorothy was making such headway with her neighbours. None of us knew that in a little while the love-affairs of youth, and the favourites for Ascot, and the flavour of Evesham’s port, and the Vicar’s views on common rights, and young Banstead’s quarrel with a Radical shoemaker about a right of way through Banstead Park, would be of no importance in a world of ruin and piled death.

After dinner that night I slipped out to the terrace and went wandering into the gardens alone, because of the beauty of their glamorous darkness and a touch of melancholy. I was a lonely fellow, and had made a mess of life on the whole. Love had passed me by, and the years were creeping on, and I should soon be a crusty old bachelor—thirty-seven now!—with fixed habits and pernicketty ways, and no particular purpose or reason why I should go on living. Second-class novels weren’t good enough! I envied Paul his boy and girl; and I would have given everything I had done or gained to be the husband of Katherine and the father of Michael.

Even now I felt the old heartache about Katherine, though I pretended that it had been healed years ago, and for a little while had forgotten it. Now this companionship again, her beauty, unchanged through the years, had awakened old desires, even a sense of passion stirring, which alarmed me sometimes, when I thrilled to the touch of her hand, and avoided the candour of her eyes. What folly in middle-age! Oh, Lord, oh, Lord! Well, there was nothing in it for me. I believed in loyalty and playing the game; and Katherine would have shrunk from me in horror if I had revealed for a second any amorous desire.

She had given me her comradeship and her absolute trust. I was grateful for that. I wouldn't spoil it by any middle-aged absurdity, the unfulfilled desires of a youth that had passed. This life—what a rum business! There was no key to the riddle that I could find, and no absolute happiness. . . .

How sweet was the smell of the new-mown grass! And how silent it was under the beech-trees, with only a little stirring in the undergrowth where some small beast or bird scuttled at my tread. Through the avenue, as I turned, I could see the lighted windows of Evesham Hall, and its low gables and tall, twisted chimneys, and the arched doorway through which Tudor Englishmen and their buxom ladies had passed when this old house had been built over older stones. England hadn't changed much through the centuries, outside the great cities, and the tradition of its life and character was strong in these old families. There was something in it—at its best—courage, discipline, and a sense of service. Hopelessly undemocratic, unfair, perhaps, when one thought of the slums and the working-folk, but very pleasant and wonderfully beautiful. I should hate to see such places pass into the hands of the jerry builders. . . . How white the terrace looked in the moonlight!

It was when I was at the end of the avenue that I heard voices speaking, and saw two young figures under the shadow of one of the beeches—the shimmer of a white frock, and the black form of a boy in evening clothes. At first I thought it was Humphrey and Gladys again, stealing another kiss, as I had seen them in the cottage garden, but I heard Dorothy's voice, speaking clearly.

"My dear Michael, do you think you can bully me into love? I'm not a Russian peasant girl."

"I'd let you tread on me," said Michael in a broken voice, "if you'd only be kind again. I want to kiss you—like the devil."

I heard Dorothy give a little laugh.

"I don't want you to kiss me like the devil. I prefer other kinds of kisses, gentle and chivalrous. Besides, it's all wrong, anyhow. We're cousins."

"Cousins be damned!" said Michael. "I love you. We were meant for each other, and you used to be kind before that ass came down and spoilt everything."

"He's a very charming young man," said Dorothy, "with much better manners than you, Michael."

She was teasing him abominably, and I felt sorry for the boy. I also felt very uneasy at being an eavesdropper of conversation not meant for middle-aged ears. I didn't want to startle them, or confess that I had overheard, and went quickly down a path which led to a summer-house, but as I moved away some words of Michael's rang out sharply.

"If I see him kissing you again I'll knock his head off. You can't play

about like that. It isn't fair!"

I think he must have tried to take hold of her, for I heard a scuffle through the beech-trees, and a little cry from Dorothy, half in anger and half in mockery, and then, suddenly, as I turned and listened a white form flitted towards me up the very path I had taken. She stopped like a startled fawn within a yard of me, and I heard her breath coming quick, and saw the laughter in her eyes. Michael stood at the end of the glade. He, too, must have run a few yards, but now, seeing Dorothy with another man, he turned sharply and disappeared behind the trees.

"Dear me!" said Dorothy, with pretended placidity. "How you startled me, little Uncle! What are you doing out here in the dark?"

"Strolling before bed. I might ask the same question."

"It's the same answer. Michael and I were trying to hear a nightingale."

"And did you?" I asked blandly. "I thought I heard a quarrel going on."

"Oh, nothing like a quarrel," said Dorothy. "Just a slight difference of opinion."

"About nightingales?"

She glanced at me slantwise, and said: "I believe you were listening! How much did you hear?"

I hesitated, and then answered frankly.

"Enough to know that you're playing with fire, my dear. I wouldn't, if I were you. It isn't fair on a boy like Michael. He's very passionate, and easily hurt."

Dorothy was silent for a few moments as we walked back to the house.

"It was beastly of you to listen," she said presently. "I call that caddish."

"My dear child, if you young people will shout your secrets in a silent glade——"

"You ought to have coughed," she said, "or sneezed decently. I hate people who spy."

She was carrying the war into my camp, but I wouldn't plead guilty, and made a counter-charge.

"If you'll take my advice, Puggy, you'll send young Hilary Dick back to town before there's trouble between him and Michael. Unless you mean to marry him one day, in which case you ought to get properly engaged and tell your father."

"I shall be very much obliged," said Dorothy in a polite voice, "if you will be good enough to mind your own business."

"I'm going to," I said, but I felt hurt with her, because it was the first time she and I had been anything but comrades. She had sat on my knee as a child, put her arms round my neck as a long-legged girl, and taken me into her confidence over many little scrapes in which I had been sometimes an

accomplice.

That night when we had gone back to the cottage, and then to bed, I heard a tap at my door, and Dorothy slipped in, with a silk dressing-gown over her nightgown, and bare feet. I was reading by candlelight, not yet undressed, and looked up from my book to see this apparition in blue silk, with uncoiled hair, beautiful as Meredith's dream of girlhood.

She came across the room and dropped down beside my chair, and put her head against my shoulder.

"Little Uncle, I was beastly rude. Sorry."

I pinched her ear and said: "All's forgiven. How can I help?"

"It's all very difficult," she confessed. "Hilary Dick is abominably in love with me! He can't do without me, he says. And now Michael is making a fuss because I let Hilary kiss me yesterday, and he happened to see."

"Very indiscreet!" I remarked.

"It was in the little church when we thought we were alone. Michael was there behind a pillar, as sulky as a bear with a sore ear because I had gone out alone with Hilary."

"Most awkward," I said. "But haven't you been flirting with Michael too much—before the arrival of Hilary Dick—if you'll excuse my saying so?"

She sank deeper into her dressing-gown, and clasped her knees.

"I didn't mean to flirt with him. Honour bright! It was only teasing and back chat. I thought that as a cousin he was beyond the pale—of the other thing, I mean. Then suddenly he became rather hectic. Dreadfully passionate. I let him kiss me once or twice—and then I became scared. I'm afraid he's rather—Russian."

"Yes," I agreed.

We sat silent for a while, and then I spoke in a judicial way.

"I think the first point to establish is whether you're in love with Hilary Dick. It would clear the situation if that could be settled one way or the other."

Dorothy smiled enigmatically.

"It's so difficult to say! Of course I like him very much, better than most boys I know. But he doesn't inspire me with that passion which seems to be necessary and advisable before one links one's life with another human creature."

"I don't believe much in passion," I said. "Sympathy, affection, comradeship—I fancy they make for the best kind of marriage."

"Perchance!" said Dorothy doubtfully, with a note of amusement in her voice. "But in that case the choice is more difficult. I have those feelings for so many nice boys, even for you, little Uncle!"

"Look here," I said abruptly, "what about Michael? It's pretty serious, you know. I don't want the boy to break his heart over you."

"I like him most frightfully," said Dorothy, "but not in that way. He's wonderfully good to quarrel with."

"You're a minx. You'd better go to bed and say your prayers."

"That's not helpful!" she protested. "I came to you for advice, not for bullying."

I gave her straight and sound advice. It was to get engaged to Hilary Dick and put Michael out of his misery. I should be delighted to come to her wedding, and would look forward apprehensively to the inevitable divorce later on.

"Oh, I'm not going to marry for ages yet," she exclaimed. "I'll keep my liberty until I feel old enough for servitude."

"One can pay too big a price for liberty," I told her.

"Life is wonderfully amusing," she remarked before leaving the room, and wafting me a kiss from her finger-tips.

The next day Katherine spoke to me about Michael. He had gone back to the house in a black mood, and in the night she had heard him pacing up and down his room, which was above her own. She had gone up to him, and he had broken down and cried. It was all because of Dorothy and that boy, Hilary Dick.

"I don't know what to do about it," said Katherine.

"There's nothing to be done," I told her. "These things have to work themselves out in their own way."

But something was happening in the world which worked out this problem, and the plot of all our lives, in a way beyond our power of control. Love was sacrificed on flaming altars. Michael's passion, Dorothy's amorous perplexities, Humphrey's adoration of Evesham's girl, Hilary Dick's loyalty of worship, the hopes, passions, follies, ambitions, dreams, anxieties in millions of hearts were of no account in the presence of terrors only vaguely guessed as yet, but soon to challenge the courage of each living soul. The world's young manhood was to be wanted for grim adventures in which love would play no part, except hurriedly, furtively, greedily, before death could pounce. The little worries of motherhood and fatherhood, wondering what their boys would do after they reached manhood, were annihilated by new and desperate fears. Not life, but death, was knocking at the door.

This England which had seemed so safe was threatened by enormous perils which might not leave us with any kind of life or liberty worth having. Liberty. . . . Where were our dreams now; the liberty of women, for which Clare had gone to prison; the liberty of democracy, with its strikes and "unrest"; the liberty of Ireland, threatening civil war; the liberty of Russia, for which Serge had suffered exile; the liberty of love, which Dorothy had proclaimed as her law of life; the liberty of nations, which had been the

foundation of my faith in human progress? They were all challenged, overwhelmed, by this monstrous horror which was advancing steadily upon us, with the threat of war between the peoples of Europe in which civilisation itself might founder.

It was the news in the papers that morning after my dinner at Evesham Hall which took me up to town by the first train I could get. Evesham came with me, summoned by telegram to the War Office.

"It's not possible!" I said to him several times. "It can't happen. The world hasn't gone mad."

"It may have done," said Evesham. "Germany——"

In the first-class carriage where I sat with him, though as a rule I travelled third, other men spoke to each other.

"It's only a newspaper scare," said one of them. "I'm going to Paris with my wife next week. I'm not altering my plans."

"Anyhow, we shan't be dragged in," said a ruddy-faced man with a bag of golf-sticks. "Thank God we're not a Continental people. We've nothing to do with their damn little quarrels."

"Quite so," said the gentleman who was going to Paris whatever happened. "I'm not worrying. The British navy's all right."

I STAYED in London during those days of nightmare, becoming more and more alarmed as telegrams poured into the newspapers from all the European capitals. Germany seemed to be stiffening the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia. Russia was threatening intervention. France was getting excited. Sir Edward Grey was working for arbitration. What did it all mean, this sudden explosiveness of racial passions, disturbing the peace of Europe in the dog days, when the sky had seemed so blue and the world was at play?

I thought of Suvorin's dark prophecies, his sense of coming disaster, at which I had scoffed, though always with a secret uneasiness of soul. By God! Was he right after all? Was this the beginning of the great smash? The inevitable clash of all those forces which had been moving under the surface of things—economic rivalries, racial hatreds, competition in armaments, greeds, fears, groupings of powers, jealousies of rulers, stupidities of statesmen, and tribal passions? I had been a student in international affairs. It had been my business; as an observer and recorder, I had had glimpses of the dangers here and there. But I had banked always on "the progress of democracy," the "common sense" of peoples, the increase of knowledge and goodwill.

In that drawing-room in the Cromwell Road, where, years ago, Serge Detloff had gathered his group of "intellectuals," we had been optimists in spite of all the forces of reaction. We had believed that liberty was winning all along the line, that the world was being made safe for humble folk, that the old tyrannies and cruelties were doomed. Was this to be the awakening from all our dreams, the downfall of all our ideals—the armed might of Germany smashing through Europe—the most civilised nations in the world hurled against each other in a struggle to the death? Was this the outcome of our conquest of ignorance, our victories in science—that science which was Paul's religion—the adventure of flight, the discovery of new elements, our mechanical mastery?

If war came, it would be inconceivable because of all this knowledge and power. There would be forces of destruction which the world had never seen before. Men would be annihilated by their own engines. . . . But it couldn't come. Humanity would revolt against its possibility. Surely to God we were not going to be stricken by such madness?

I sought out my friends in Fleet Street. They ought to know. It was their job to know, these men who had been on the inside of European politics, who were writing the leading articles in next day's papers. I found them flustered, aghast, confused, uttering opinions with a dogmatism that was plainly

insincere, and all different. "War is certain." . . . "There'll be no war, so far as England is concerned." . . . "Sir Edward Grey will arrange an international conference." . . . "Germany is bluffing. She'll climb down at the eleventh hour." . . . "England will stand out." . . . "We can't stand out!" . . . "What about our honour, our understanding with France?"

The editor of my own paper took me on one side. His hand trembled as he lit one cigarette from another. He had been a Radical idealist, a pacifist, a little leader in international understanding.

"This is the end of all things," he said. "If Germany invades Belgium, England will have to fight. I see no way out of that, unless we surrender to the devil and lose our soul. German militarism enthroned? No, by God!"

He broke down a little, and said: "Christ—after all our work for peace, our belief in democracy! I wish I were dead."

The news came that Russia was mobilising. Telegrams were passing between "Willie" and "Nickie." The rulers of Europe were trying at the last minute of the eleventh hour to hold back forces stronger than their pretence of autocracy. These little panic-stricken men, who had worn the symbols of power and were now helpless to control the passions and policies which had enslaved their souls, blinded their counsellors and betrayed their peoples.

The peoples—the poor, ignorant, duped, and deluded peoples—what did they know about all this preparation for inevitable war, the secret understandings between great powers, the ambitions and rivalries of international diplomacy? In their fields and workshops and little homes in mean streets they were stupefied by the news that perhaps in a few days they would have to leave their wives and children, their mothers and sweethearts, their ordinary ways of life, the things that meant life to them, and defend their country against some monstrous enemy which, it was said, threatened to destroy them. Germans, Russians, French. The Enemy, who would kill, burn, ravish, destroy, massacre, unless first destroyed. But why, God alone knew—apart from politicians and newspaper men who were trying to explain.

To the last I tried to delude myself that the peoples would revolt against their rulers and refuse to march; those German Socialists who had derided their own militarists; those Russians who had struggled for liberty; the French peasants, busy with their harvests in the fields; our own folk, with their decent common sense, their lack of hatred for any other folk. Democracy would bring pressure on the Governments, and say, "We will have none of this. We decline to be massacred for reasons we cannot understand, for any cause except self-defence and the liberty of life and the safeguard of civilisation. This thing, whatever it is, can be settled by conference and agreement." Word would come from Germany that their militarists had yielded to the will of the people, united for peace. . . . So I deceived myself, like millions of others, until no self-deceit

was possible.

Russia had mobilised. The Germans had sent an ultimatum. Troops were moving towards their frontiers. It was War!

And following that night in August when we knew by the lips of Sir Edward Grey that we also were involved in that struggle of nations for life or death, bound by honour, it seemed, to France and Belgium, threatened also by the German challenge to the liberties of Europe, I went down to the country again, where my mother waited for me, and where Katherine and Michael, Paul and his children, those who meant most in my life, were holiday-making. . . . Holidays were coming to an end.

It is difficult—impossible—to get back in memory to that day when England declared war on Germany and began the struggle which, as the months passed, and the years, called for all the courage we had, all our strength in suffering, our last reserves of youth, wealth, nervous energy, endurance of long-drawn agony.

Those of us who survived are not the same men and women as on that day in August of '14. We do not look on the same world. The moral foundations on which most of us built our hopes of humanity—our inherited traditions, our sense of security, our belief in the advance of education, our childlike faith in the decency and kindness of modern civilisation—were shattered, for a time at least, by the heavy hammer-blows of frightful experience, and we are only just beginning to patch up the broken bits of ourselves as we were. There is no bridge between the emotions of those early days of war—the ideals, some true and many false, which reconciled the soul of European peoples, and our own, with the need of sacrifice, steeling them to endure abominable things—and the disillusionment, spiritual emptiness, moral bankruptcy of later recent years.

I see myself on that first day of war, and know that I am not the same man who stared at the newspaper placards with that one black word in heavy type, and who took a seat in a third-class railway carriage on the way back to Evesham in Sussex with a sense of waiting for some infernal drama to begin. It is not that I have merely grown older. It is that I died, in my old self, and am now a different personality. That fellow in the third-class carriage, staring out of the window over the roofs of mean streets in London suburbs—what were they saying in those little homes?—over flower-gardens, and sun-swept fields, and villages with thatched roofs, and woods turning a little brown already, had never heard the shriek of shells on their way to smash the bodies of boys like Humphrey and Michael.

He had never walked through fields of dead and dying youth, or seen, day after day, year after year, the traffic of ambulances with their wounded, blinded, gassed, and shell-shocked men—only their muddy boots showing below their blankets—who had been the fine flower of English youth. He had

never seen mothers pushing their babies in perambulators away from burning villages which had been their homes, while shell-fire followed them up roads black with fugitives from that terror they called “the Enemy.” He had never watched towns and villages, churches and mansions and farmsteads, blown off the earth where for centuries life had been safe and kindly for the most part.

He had never stood in deep-dug trenches looking through sandbags at landscapes blasted by high explosives, across which, suddenly, thousands of mud-coloured men went very slowly, as it seemed, towards a line of barbed wire and up-heaved earth, crouching, bunching, dodging, making short, sharp rushes, while flights of shells screamed over their heads like monstrous birds of death, and among them came invisible forces, spouting up earth and smoke, blowing their bodies to bits, strewing this ravaged earth with the glory of youth. Not these, nor many other things of cruelty and horror, had been seen by that man of thirty-seven, who had once been myself, in the corner-seat of a third-class carriage. He is my ghost, haunting me sometimes by his innocence, his unspoilt faith in such words as liberty and progress and democracy. . . .

In the carriage, I remember, was a sandy-haired boy of eighteen or so, who was reading *Comic Cuts* while he smoked Woodbine cigarettes. He told me his father was a butcher at Woking, and he was going home after a job as errand-boy in London. His mother couldn’t bear him being away from home, especially in a place like London.

“What about this war?” I asked.

He stared at me a moment, as though he didn’t get my meaning, and then grinned.

“Oh, that stuff in the papers? The Germans? Well, it don’t matter to me. There won’t be no war in Woking.”

He laughed at this little joke of his, and then let down the carriage window and put his head out, to get the first glimpse of his mother, who was on the platform to meet him.

“Back safe, dearie!” she said, after he had kissed her in a shamefaced way. “I ’ated you being away so long.”

Back safe? I wondered. Already in the paper on my lap—The *Daily Mail*—there was an appeal to the young men of England. “Your King and Country Need You!” Recruiting stations were to be opened all over the country. Perhaps even a sandy-haired boy in Woking might be needed before long. . . .

Paul met me at Evesham station, and I saw Humphrey and Dorothy at the bookstall, buying papers.

Paul’s face was grave as he took my hand and held it a moment.

“So it’s war!” he said.

I nodded, and we looked into each other’s eyes.

“God help us!” said Paul, after what seemed like a long silence.

Humphrey came up with Dorothy, without a hat, the wind blowing his brown curls.

“War!” he said, and then laughed, with a catch of excitement in his breath. “It’s going to be rather thrilling, don’t you think?”

Dorothy slipped her arm in mine, and said: “Good old England, and to hell with Germany! Did you ever hear of such a thing? Invading Belgium like that!”

There were a few flags fluttering in Evesham village, and Humphrey had tied a Union Jack to a post on our cottage gate.

He grinned at it, and said: “Looks pretty good, eh?”

Before then he had jeered at “flag wagging,” and was untouched by the old jingoism which had passed with the Boer War. He belonged to the younger generation, to whom the word Empire was rather a joke, because it was used as a spell word by corpulent gentlemen in patriotic speeches which left them cold.

My mother came out of the cottage, and put her arms about me as I kissed her.

“This war!” she said. “It’s going to be rather dreadful, isn’t it?”

“Over quick,” said Paul. “That’s one comfort. With modern weapons I give it three months.”

Our eyes met again, and I saw the fear in Paul’s uneasy glance, and the horror there. I remembered old words of his to Serge Detloff. War was “old-fashioned.” Humanity had got beyond it. I knew that in the old days his faith had been stronger even than mine in the progress of the human mind, until lately doubts had crept in, and he had become uneasy about something boiling up beneath the surface of European life—the wild claims of womanhood, exemplified by Clare, symptoms of biological disturbance in the social body. And often we had talked about the power of the machine which had put into men’s hands, weapons of destruction which might destroy humanity if used in war—those new aeroplanes, guns of greater range and velocity than ever used in actual warfare.

He had hinted also at some sort of poisonous gas which might be used by some unscrupulous nation of scientific knowledge as a quick means to victory. Even microbes, he had said, might play a part in warfare if science sold itself to the devil and humanity went mad and bad.

“How are Katherine and Michael?” I asked, and there was a moment’s silence, until Humphrey gave a short laugh and winked at me.

It was Dorothy who answered, and I saw by her vivid blush that there had been more drama in my absence.

“Aunt Kitty is quite well. Michael has gone to London in a huff. His Russian temperament!”

“You’ve been teasing him again,” I said, but she didn’t answer except by a

smile, and slipped upstairs to her room under the thatched roof of our little house.

I heard later from Paul that there had been a scene in the woods of Evesham Park, when Michael had met Dorothy and Hilary Dick walking hand in hand. There had been high words, it seemed, from what Puggy—her father still called her by her baby name—had confessed to him last night. Michael had struck Hilary, who had hit back, until Dorothy had flung herself between them and stopped what she called this degrading cave-man stuff. It was all very distressing and primitive. It reminded Paul of his own assault upon a village doctor in the early days of his married life, and that reminder had checked his reproaches. Michael, it appeared, had rushed off in a rage, and, after writing a note to his mother, had gone up to town in a mood of black despair. Katherine had been very frightened, and went faint at the thought that Michael might kill himself.

“Good God!” I exclaimed, panic-stricken for a moment.

“It’s all right,” said Paul. “He seems to have wandered about all night, but finally fetched up at the Miliukoffs’, who put him to bed and wired to Kitty. She is there by now.”

Paul told me other things that had happened in my absence.

“Humphrey has had a talk with me about Gladys Evesham. He wants to chuck Cambridge and get a job. Thinks he may make enough money in a year or two to marry the little lady. Did you ever hear such nonsense? I wonder what Evesham will have to say to it? . . . Meanwhile, that boy Hilary Dick came to me this morning and desired my consent to his engagement with Puggy. There seems to have been an epidemic of erotic fever in this neighbourhood. Puggy engaged! Why, I’ve a good mind to spank her for thinking of such things. She’s a child—my Gipsy—my wild fledgeling.”

“She’s a beautiful young woman,” I said, “and we’re getting old, Paul.”

Paul stood in the little room where we had played so many games of chess together. He was staring at the threadbare carpet with a look of intense thought, and when he raised his head I saw an agony in his eyes.

“This war!” he said. “These young people. . . . Humphrey! . . . What’s going to happen to us all? I’m afraid old man.”

That evening, after supper, Paul and I walked out into the woods, through Evesham Park. Dorothy and Humphrey had gone up there to the house, to get news that might come from Evesham over the telephone. My mother stayed alone in the cottage, doing some needlework, placidly, though at that hour, in many countries, great armies of men were marching towards each other to kill or be killed. Perhaps already the carnage had begun under this pale sky flecked with white clouds, below that evening star which I could see through Evesham’s silver birches. From the village half a mile away came the sound of

cheering. The war fever was stirring even this old hamlet of Sussex. The adventure of war, the fighting instinct, some old urge in the blood of our race, was already calling to young farmers' boys and stable hands and village shopkeepers.

"The reservists have been called to the colours," said Paul quietly. "The postman has gone. He said good-bye this morning when he brought the letters, and grinned, and said: 'Back soon, I hope.' His wife is going to have a baby, poor soul."

I could see the spire of Evesham church above a clump of trees. Under the porch there, for seven centuries, English folk had passed to their prayers, to marryings, and churchings, and buryings. Among them were Evesham's ancestors, who had fought at Crécy, Agincourt, in the Low Countries, at Waterloo, in all our battles, with bowmen, or pikemen, or riflemen, from these villages of Sussex. We had been a fighting race. Peace had only been an interlude between our wars. But none of them had been on such a scale as this, where the greatest nations of Europe were being hurled against each other with enormous standing armies, with murderous weapons, and all the power and terror of modern science applied to human slaughter.

"Evesham is sleeping at the War Office," said Paul. "Betty up there in the old house is getting anxious. He may go out with the first division. She has wonderful pluck, and hides her fear."

We walked up through the avenue where I had seen young Michael making love to Dorothy. A rabbit scuttled across the path at our approach. A deer looked at us with timid eyes, and then ran a little way between the trees. The tall chimneys of Evesham Hall were dark against the evening sky, still flushed with the afterglow of sunset, and presently we saw its long, low front, with Tudor windows between creepered walls, the picture of an old English mansion which had weathered many storms of time and history.

"The old tradition!" said Paul, staring at it through the velvet dusk. "A home of privilege and caste, to be paid for at times by knight's service and the risk of death. Well, they've never shirked the fighting, those fellows like Evesham. It's his crowd, from homes like this, who'll be first in that hell over there. And the village boys will volunteer. . . . All our young manhood. They'll go if they're wanted."

He spoke his thoughts aloud like that, and then fell silent for a while, until suddenly he stood still and cried out: "God! God! . . . That boy of mine! Humphrey, my son, and all our lovely youth. To be wasted, massacred, maimed, killed!"

I said: "Steady old man. Courage! It may be over in a week."

He answered me more calmly after that moment of despair, but his words were fierce, and I saw that his face was white and strained.

"It's going to be a long war. I said 'three months,' but that was make-believe. Germany will fight to the death—with all her pride and all her power. With England by the side of France, the struggle won't be sharp and short. I doubt whether civilisation will live, as we know it, when all's done and the dead are counted. It's going to be bloody and murderous and all-destroying. It's the end of our era and the beginning of the next. And we fools didn't see it coming, we little intellectual asses, with our self-assurance, our belief in liberty and progress, our blindness to monstrous forces at work for destruction! Think of those standing armies, those piled-up armaments, that toppling 'balance of power,' all the greed for raw material, world-trade, colonies, power, Empire, to feed industrial competition and make room for growing populations. It was bound to come. We ought to have known. . . .

"I can see now the folly of statesmen and the passion of races, in deadly competition, spitting hate at each other, while the militarists everywhere were getting ready, hiding the truth from their peoples, throwing dust into the eyes of peace-loving men, poisoning human relations between the nations. It was all as clear as daylight, and we were blind."

He uttered the word "blind" again, and struck his forehead.

I said: "Curse Germany, who has destroyed our dreams."

He said: "I curse the German war-lords, but not those poor peasant numskulls who are marching to their death, duped as we were duped, as ignorant as sheep, stirred by the same loyalties to the Fatherland as we to England."

There was the sound of cheering again from Evesham village, beyond the park where we stood. Then a group of boys and girls sang "God save the King." The tune came faintly to us through the trees, whose shadows closed about us as dusk became darkness.

I said, "Good old England!" huskily, and for the first time in my life I was aware, with a kind of spiritual pain, of all that England meant in history, in beauty, in human quality. Out of old mansions like Evesham Hall, out of thatched cottages in little villages, out of squalid little houses in mean streets, the old spirit of our race was stirring to this dreadful menace against the world's liberties and all that was ours. What weakness was in us would be tested and found out, but the old courage would be there. Those village boys singing "God Save the King" out of tune, belonged to a great old stock. "*Noblesse oblige*," as my father used to say! . . .

This gush of sentiment was followed in my mind by a sense of horror which suddenly overwhelmed me so that I found myself trembling. All the nations of Europe at death-grips. I had a sudden vision of fields white in moonlight, piled with dead and dying men. A wood-owl hooted, and I remember that I clutched Paul's arm.

“Paul,” I said, “what’s going to be the end of it?”

He said: “We must steel ourselves. Only courage matters now. If that fails us, we’re lost.”

We walked up to the terrace, and Betty—Lady Evesham—came to meet us. She had been standing there in the moonlight, and saw our figures moving across the lawn.

“Hugh is going with the first drafts,” she said. “I shall say good-bye to him in town.”

She told us that young Banstead and the other men we had met so often at her house had joined their regiments. The cavalry were under orders for the front.

She spoke of Ireland, and laughed, and said: “No civil war, after all! That can wait now. England can count on Irish loyalty—to the death. The boys will march—from Donegal to Dublin—if England asks for them.”

I was amazed by her courage, until a little later, when we were alone for a moment, and she took my hand and held it tight, and wept with a sudden passion of grief.

“I’ll never see Hugh again,” she said. “I heard the banshee last night, crying at my bedroom window. It’s the death of my dear love.”

I told her it was the owl hooting, but she shook her head, and wiped her tears away.

That night Humphrey came into my room in the cottage. He stood in his pyjamas, with tousled hair, looking very young and boyish.

“I haven’t spoken to the Governor yet,” he said; “but I shall have to go, of course. The sooner the better, if I want to be of any use. Don’t you agree?”

I felt my heart give a lurch. Paul’s son! This brown-eyed lad to whom I had once told fairy-tales!

“Wait a bit, old man,” I said. “You’re very young. Let the others go first. It may be over quickly.”

He shook his head, and said: “They’ll want us all, I expect. Anyhow, I’ve made up my mind. I shall join up to-morrow.”

He raised his head, and I saw him smiling.

“It’ll be a great adventure,” he said. “The real thing.”

“What about Gladys?” I asked.

He blushed, and told me that she wanted him to go.

“‘I could not love thee, dear, so much’—that sort of thing, you know.” He laughed, covering his emotion by a mask of humour.

“Anyway, it settles the future for a while. I needn’t worry about getting a job.”

At breakfast I saw by Paul’s grave face that the boy had spoken to his father. They went to the station together, and when Paul came back he shut

himself up in his room, and when I went in quietly an hour later he was there, sitting at the table with his head on his arms. He looked up and straightened himself as I came in, and fumbled for his pipe, and hid the tears in his eyes as I put my hand on his shoulder.

"I'm glad he's joining up," he said. "One of the first. That's fine. I'm proud of him."

Hilary Dick had gone too, with Humphrey, by the same train. Dorothy had kissed them both, and flung her arms about her brother, regardless of the little crowd on the platform who raised a cheer as the train moved off, with some young farmers and reservists. It accounted for her absence at lunch that day. She had wandered off to the woods, and only came back at tea-time, with a mystical look which I had not seen on her face before. She and Paul went upstairs together, while my mother and I sat in the parlour, talking quietly.

"Only prayer can help us now," said my mother. "If you could only believe in God, Gilbert——"

I laughed bitterly, and hurt her. It seemed to me that God had not helped at all to prevent this abomination that had come upon the world, and then I went to the window and stared out moodily, and found myself trying to get some faith in a God who might give me courage and stretch out a hand to save the youth of the world. Perhaps if men had believed in God, in the love of Christ, which they professed, this thing would not have happened. "Oh, God! Oh, God!" I cried silently, and so prayed in unbelief. . . .

They all went sooner or later, those boys I had known, and my own comrades. My sister Beatrice's lads—Harold and Cuthbert, those undergraduates whom we had seen at Oxford in the summer term—were soon to go with the flower of England's youth. Paul himself went out to France as a bacteriologist, with a motor laboratory. Later, I was attached to the Intelligence, after getting my commission.

I was still in civil clothes, among a crowd of men in khaki, when I said good-bye to Katherine and Michael. They had waited in England for several weeks, distressed, bewildered, uncertain of their plans. Then a telegram had come from Serge, calling them back to Russia.

"Far better stay here," I said. "The war may be over soon."

But Katherine was loyal to Serge, as she had always been, and Michael felt the call of his Russian blood and was anxious to get back. He had decided to join the Russian cavalry. They were going up to Hull, whence they could get a boat to Riga.

Katherine and I stood on the platform of King's Cross, surrounded by soldiers and seamen and their wives and sweethearts, all very cheerful, it seemed, until some of the women began to weep as the first whistle blew.

In those last five minutes there was little to say, although we knew that it

might be the last time we met on earth. Katherine put her hand on my sleeve, and said: "I shall pray for you and all my dear ones."

Michael said: "This bloody war! I can't see any sense in it."

Later on he said: "It may give liberty to Russia. It's bound to change things. That's the only consolation I can find in it."

He looked older than when he had come to England. That unfortunate love-affair with Dorothy had changed him, I thought. He had agonised, despaired, and raged, and now, after that tragedy of first love, had recovered his sense of humour again. He even spoke of Dorothy, and sent her a message. "Tell Dorothy that I shall think of her if I get laid out by German shrapnel, or bitten by a typhus bug, which is much more likely. The dying soldier dreams of his lady-love. Very touching."

"Hush!" said Katherine, putting her arm about his shoulder.

"Let's keep smiling," said Michael lightly. "This war is a grisly joke. There's going to be a lot of humour in it."

There was a note of bitterness in his laughter.

He moved up the platform to buy a paper, and Katherine spoke to me again.

"I feel a coward when I think of Michael as a Russian soldier. Such a baby! And so much in need of love, and so hateful of pain and cruelty!"

"He'll get through," I assured her, without conviction. "It will make a man of him."

She said: "I hate to leave England. Cut off from news—not knowing the real truth. My dear England and all its people. These poor boys——"

She looked at the crowd about us on the platform, the young soldiers and sailors saying good-bye to their families. Some of them were singing "It's a long, long way to Tipperary!"

The whistle blew again, and the guard told us to take our places.

"God bless you," said Katherine, and she kissed me.

I saw her as she leaned out of the carriage window, with Michael behind her. She waved her handkerchief. . . . She looked so young, in spite of that tall lad there, so beautiful and gracious. My ideal of English womanhood, my dearest lady! When I saw her again I did not know her face.

XXVII

THOSE four and a half years of war! . . . Looking back on them now, the details are beginning to be blurred in one's mind, except when certain episodes or scenes were so sharply etched by emotion or accident that one remembers the face of a wounded man, or a particular bit of ruin, or the pallid light of some dismal dawn creeping over a line of sandbags behind which men crouched for another day of battle, or some trivial or abominable thing. The worst side of war is being forgotten already, so self-protective is the human mind. Men who hated it remember mostly the jokes, the comradeship, the adventure of it. Things that have happened afterwards make the men who survived by an odd chance of luck or a safe job look back with a kind of humourous regret to what some of them call "the jolly old war." Unemployed men—some of them—fellows without any kind of purpose now, and men who miss the drug of that old excitement, would like another. . . .

To me—an onlooker—it seemed always and every day an infernal tragedy and an unending horror. I, too, laughed at jokes, some of them incredibly brutal, in which the humour was, consciously or unconsciously, the ironical contrast between the niceties of that black-coated civilisation which had been ours before the war and the primitive savagery of this new life, where the youth of England sat in stinking trenches, with bits of bodies in the mud below them, and crept out into No Man's Land to kill an enemy or two in Red Indian warfare. I, too, like all the others, wore a mask of cheerfulness, as far as possible, in the dirtiest places; said "Good morning" very brightly to fellow-officers walking through ruin, or fields of death; grinned at the jests of cheery Generals who in '15, '16, '17, prophesied the early doom of "poor old Fritz," for whom they had an almost affectionate contempt, although he was killing us with remarkable efficiency.

But, as an intelligence officer, examining prisoners, estimating the enemy's strength—which was always underestimated by the High Command—and moving about the battle-front as my job took me to different sectors, I saw more than the battalion officer, knew more than the Divisional General, and was a spectator of all this frightful drama, as its backwash of wounded, prisoners, and all the traffic of war flowed about me on days of battle. I never became hardened into carelessness of shell-fire, though I learnt to put on a face of courage, which is all that most men do. My nerves went to pieces long before the end, and alone in my Nissen hut, waiting for the next batch of muddy, sullen, shell-stunned Germans brought down from their captured dug-outs, I used to cry out silently for the ending of all this massacre of youth, but

had no faith in any miracle, except the miracle of human courage reaching supernatural heights in some of those boys of ours—and theirs.

Perhaps my contact with the German prisoners weakened my conviction that all the right was on our side and all the wrong on theirs. I could not look on it in that way, as an abstract fight between good and evil. I saw it only as an immense human tragedy, in which youth on both sides had been involved against its will, in ignorance, by evil powers in which they had no share of responsibility.

I could find no hate at least for those German peasant boys, shop-assistants, waiters, and clerks, who believed that the Fatherland had been wantonly attacked by many enemies—they had been told that—and who stood sullen and silent when I bullied them because they refused information which might hurt their comrades and country, and burst into tears sometimes, blubbing about their mothers or their homeland, when now and again I was kind to them. Some of the German officers filled me with rage because of their arrogance and their cold-blooded obstinacy of belief in the ultimate victory of Germany and the righteousness of her purpose in the war. But even some of those, especially when they had come from civil life, were human and intelligent, and courteous, and revealed now and then a spiritual agony which made me soften to them.

I remember one young officer of a Bavarian regiment who had been a painter before the war. He would not tell me a word about his machine-gun post, and kept saying, "I am a German officer, I can say nothing, sir. Excuse me." He looked ill and weak, and when I offered him a glass of whiskey he seemed very much surprised, and drank it gravely, after thanking me; and I saw the colour of life creep back into his face, which had had the muddy look of death.

"You are chivalrous!" he said, speaking in excellent English; and then tears came into his eyes and he spoke excitedly. "This terrible war! Why do we fight each other like this? It is destroying all beauty and all civilised ideals, all morality, and the world's happiness. It is devil-worship."

I said, "Germany willed it. Germany has brought it upon the world."

He shook his head and said, "We were all guilty. All afraid of each other. It was fear that caused the war."

I said, "The wickedness of your war-lords, the pestilential philosophy with which they doped your people."

He thought over that, with his head drooping and his eyes staring at the muddy floor of my Nissen hut.

"They were only puppets," he said. "The human symbols of evil forces in Europe, and this modern civilisation of ours—based on greed and industrial rivalry and national egotism, and revolt against Christ's teaching."

“When will it end?” I asked.

“Not until the last reserves of manhood have been exhausted and the world is in ruin.”

For four years it looked like that.

England was wonderful in those days. Although I loathed the war, I thrilled to the splendour of that spirit which stirred all classes when they understood, after some months of ignorance and doubt, that an “expeditionary force” was not enough for this job, and that all the strength of the nation, and all its courage to face sacrifice and death, would be urgently wanted. I saw little of England itself, but watched the tide of youth pouring out to France, in wave after wave of splendid boyhood—our best—so gay, so gallant, so keen to get into “the real thing” after all their training, until, wave after wave, they were broken under storms of high explosives, against the sweeping scythe of machine-gun-fire, in the ditches of death.

From historic houses, like Evesham Hall, from decent homes with pleasant gardens and middle-class comfort, from farmsteads and cottages in quiet villages, from the foulest slums of our big cities, these boys of ours came as gun-fodder, touched, most of them, by some spiritual knighthood which almost annihilated distinctions of caste and class. God knows what was their inspiration. I never could find out. Those Tommies of ours were inarticulate, or ironical. They made a joke of their fears. Their favourite song was “I want to go home,” when they marched along shell-strafted roads, killed their enemy when they could, but had no grudge against him, and adopted his Song of Hate—I’ve never met a German who knew it—as their most precious hymn. They were very humorous, except in hours of extreme beastliness, or enormous war-weariness.

Privately they jeered at Generals who occasionally addressed them with heavy oratory. They had no respect for the glory of the Empire or other high-sounding phrases of self-conscious patriotism. They hated army discipline, mud, lice, gunfire, and sergeant-majors. But somewhere in some secret corner of their heart must have been a love of England, or somewhere that meant England to them, where wild flowers grew in a cottage garden, or where smuts fell over a London slum, or where the ’buses went clanging down the Mile End Road, or the birds went singing on a Sussex heath.

Some unconscious pride of race, some loyalty to their own folk, some heroic strain in them, made them suffer infernal things without revolt, face death squarely, risk wounds that might be worse than death, day after day, month after month, year after year, with astounding patience. So did the Germans, though with less humour, and a more conscious love of country. So

did the French, with the enemy on their soil and more cause for hate, and a love of France as a white flame of passion in every French soul.

One source of strength and hope to us in those early days, and afterwards, was the coming of the men from overseas, the homing birds hurrying to the rescue of old Mother England whom they had left, to build new nests in far Dominions. More than sixty in a hundred of the first Canadians were English born. Afterwards came the sons of British colonists, and the cousins of the boys from English shires, or Scottish highlands and lowlands, or Irish counties, or Welsh hills. They, too, those colonial cousins of ours, thought of England, as the old mother, and heard the call of race and history. The Canadians were a sturdy crowd, indistinguishable, physically, from our own men.

It was when the Australians came—many of them from the hell of Gallipoli—that one saw a new type of British manhood, finer than our own, handsomer, harder. Or, perhaps, they were a reversion to an older type, before industrialism stunted our growth somewhat, and before city life tamed our freshness and wildness of spirit. Those Australians had a Gipsy look at times, but many of their hatchet faces and tall, loose-limbed bodies would have made them good models for Arthur's knights—Lancelot and Galahad.

The apple-cheeked New Zealanders were more like our own country lads and had gentler manners than the Australian men, who had no use for discipline behind the lines, though wonderful in team-work when busy at the front. . . .

These men gave a new meaning to our Empire, which had seemed so widely scattered and loosely held, but was now revealed as stronger than any imperial power based on military despotism or autocratic rule. These sons of the young free nations overseas, so impatient of control, offered all they had in manhood and in wealth to the little old country from which they had sprung. And the glory of their youth went into the furnace fires, with ours.

I saw Paul sometimes. He was in charge of a bacteriological laboratory on the outskirts of Poperinghe—"Pop," as we called it—on the way to Ypres. It was an important railhead for the troops and the wounded, and there were big ammunition dumps not far from the casualty clearing stations, so that one couldn't blame the enemy for reaching out to it with their long-range guns and afterwards bombing it unmercifully from night-flying aeroplanes. In all this welter of field hospitals, trainloads of wounded, big guns, shells, ration dumps, light railways, Nissen huts, and military stores, Paul, the scientist, the hermit soul, looked to me strangely out of place, and absurd, at first, in his uniform as major.

Afterwards I saw that he was in the right place, and that all the training of

his life had been in preparation for this job. I suppose he, and men like him out there, saved more lives than the enemy killed. But for their scientific knowledge and research in the prevention of disease—typhoid, typhus, lockjaw, and dysentery—our armies would have been swept by epidemics. As it was, the health of the troops was astounding, considering the conditions of life in trench warfare and the stench of corruption in the fields of death.

Paul had thrown off his old lethargy and his absentmindedness. He was active and restless, with a kind of feverish energy and forced cheerfulness. His fellow-officers seemed to think the world of him, and told me privately that it was his high spirits, his unfailing courage and heartiness, his tremendous industry, which kept them all up to the mark in times when pressure of work and nerve-strain made them feel pretty blue.

His heartiness! Yes, I watched it and marvelled at it when I sat in his mess and listened to his jests with doctors and nurses, and walked round the casualty clearing stations with him and heard his greetings to wounded officers and men. But I saw the other side of his mind, and beneath its camouflage of cheerfulness. Alone in his laboratory one day, he revealed himself to me.

I said, "I marvel at you. This war seems to suit you wonderfully!"

He did not answer for a moment, and I saw the ironical twist of his lips.

"One adopts a pose," he said. "Mine is the hearty touch. I smile and smile. They think I'm no end of a humorist."

"They like it," I told him. "It does them good. You're splendid, old man. I envy your pluck."

He looked at me with a queer smile.

"Pluck? I'm a quaking coward. Every time one of those damn shells comes over I feel sick at the pit of the stomach. Every time I hear our guns busy round Ypres—hear them now!—I'm haunted by the thought of young Humphrey up there, and all those boys in that Tom Tiddler's ground of death and agony. Every time the ambulances come in with another load I wonder if Humphrey is among those lads with their legs blown off and their faces smashed, and shrapnel in their lungs, or blinded, or gassed, or shell-shocked. I find myself praying to God—my Unknown God—but it's mere selfishness. Why should my Humphrey be spared when other fathers' sons are maimed and slaughtered?"

I talked a little about the causes of the war, but he waved all that on one side.

"This is no time for arguing out that kind of thing. We've got to go through with it. We've got to smash the Germans, or they'll smash us. Afterwards—if there is any afterwards—we must do a bit of thinking again and try to prevent

another spasm of world madness. If this doesn't 'learn' us, then there's no hope for humanity—incurable in its folly and wickedness.”

Paul's wife and my sister—Clare—was helping to run a canteen in Abbeville, and I saw her now and again, about once in six months, when I went back to England on seven days' leave. Her suffragette fever had left her. She was no longer obsessed by that spirit of revolt on behalf of women's "liberty" which had made her bitter, scornful of men, a little mad, I think. This war, with its need of men's courage, its revelation of heroic youth, restored her mental balance, or perhaps substituted one fever for another. Anyhow, I found her a bright, energetic, restless creature, never tired of serving the men who came to her canteen, full of admiration for their humour and spirit, ready to go down on her knees and scrub the floors which they dirtied with their muddy feet. And yet I quarrelled with her every time I saw her.

In spite of her love for Humphrey, or because of it, she was one of those exalted women who would sacrifice their only son, or eight sons if they had them, so that the Germans might be utterly destroyed. Her hatred of the enemy burnt in her. She thought it ridiculous to be kind to our prisoners, and would willingly have seen their throats cut, one by one in long rows. She believed all the atrocity tales, and had no patience with me when I spoke of German patriotism and courage as not less than that of our men, and pleaded for a little charity on behalf of German youth, utterly ignorant of national politics, and duped by their leaders. She wouldn't listen when I told her of some cases of German chivalry that I had seen myself—a wounded peasant boy who had given his water-bottle to a dying man of ours, a German doctor who had stayed up in the line after having been taken prisoner, and tended our wounded under frightful fire.

Clare said, "There's no good German but a dead German. It's a nation of devils."

My other sisters were hardly less bloodthirsty. Beatrice especially was distressed if I dared to contradict one of those atrocity stories, such as the cutting off of children's hands, for which there was no evidence whatever, except the hysterical tales of refugees. The Germans had done many brutal things when they cut like a knife through Belgium, but it was unnecessary, I thought, to weaken our case against them by false and faked abominations. Every time I went home on leave I saw how much stronger was the hatred of the enemy among women and civilians than among our fighting men who were being killed and wounded by them.

Among our Tommies and young officers there was a queer, humorous sympathy—after the first few months—for "poor old Fritz," who sat in the

trenches opposite to them, waist-deep in water sometimes, as they were; plastered in stinking mud, as they were; lice-ridden, harassed with shell-fire, mined, and gassed, and sniped, fed up with the whole business, no doubt, just as they were. They had to be killed, of course, unless they surrendered quick enough in conditions which were favourable for the taking of prisoners. But that was according to the rules of the game, on both sides. Down behind the lines the prisoners were treated like pet monkeys by the very men who had captured them, as I saw many times.

But women like my sister Beatrice could not understand that. Such ideas were “pro-German” and sounded like treason. And one could not blame them, or try to make them understand. Poor Beatrice who cried out in hysterical hatred was like thousands of women whose hearts were bleeding in agony because of their boys out there. In that house in Ealing where there had been such a merry family, there was now only Beatrice and her daughter Winifred. My brother-in-law Glyn of Coutts’s Bank was town major of Ypres—the fourth or fifth in that unhealthy job. Harold, that boy who had consulted me about his career, anxious for me to put in a word against the clerkship which threatened to blight his life, was a second lieutenant with the King’s Royal Rifles. Cuthbert, his brother, was a flying officer, and had already brought down two Huns, as he called them, within a week of joining his squadron in France. So I heard on my first leave, and by my second leave, six months later, Harold had been mentioned in despatches for gallant service at Hooge—repelling a German attack—and Cuthbert was a wing-commander.

Beatrice talked of them with pride, and tried to hide the nagging fear which made her jump and get very pale every time there was a postman’s knock. She fainted one day when a telegram came, though it was the joyful news that Harold was on his way home for seven days. Then she wept and became hysterical, and clutched my hand while she revealed the agony of this strain upon her.

“I shan’t be able to bear it much longer,” she told me. “I have such frightful dreams at night—always about Harold. I see him lying wounded in a trench, and hear him crying for me, and I try to go to him, but get tangled in barbed wire which holds me back.”

But it was Cuthbert who was killed first. He was shot down during the battles of the Somme, somewhere over Thiépval, behind the German lines. There was no doubt about his death, but poor Beatrice refused to believe it and waited for him as long as six months after Armistice, when she abandoned hope.

Harold was killed in Trones Wood a month later, and after that I hardly dared go to the house in Ealing because of this double tragedy and the agony in my sister’s eyes. Her husband had come home wounded, but it was no comfort

to her. I think she hated him for a time because he had urged his boys to join up so quickly, and had a sombre pride in their heroic deaths for England's sake. She was not like Clare in that way. She resented this sacrifice. She accused God of being "unfair."

"Both my boys!" she cried. "Surely He could have saved one of them?"

Perhaps she thought it "unfair" that her middle-aged husband should have been spared by a wound in the leg, while Harold and Cuthbert had been chosen for death before life had given them a chance. But of course it was all nerves and hysteria.

Winifred told me that her mother was unkind to her father, and hurt him dreadfully by saying that the older men ought to be put into the fighting-line instead of hiding behind their boys.

"I can't understand it," said Winifred, weeping a little. "Mother used to love father so much! Now there's no happiness for any of us. I wish I'd never been born."

What could I say? I could understand my sister's passionate bitterness, her unconscious revolt against her husband's simple philosophy of patriotism, which had made him keen to see his sons in uniform, proud of their service, reconciled even to their deaths. I thought, like her, that it was all "unfair," but I didn't blame it on God any longer. I blamed it on man, and tried to dig into the causes which had led to this infernal tragedy. It wasn't all the Kaiser and his war-lords. There were other, deeper, stronger, forces that had been working for destruction in our system of civilisation. The ethics of humanity had not kept place with its desires and discoveries. Industrial competition, the pressure of population, national greed for the sources of wealth, and the need of self-preservation against new and unknown powers—the terrible unused weapons of modern science—with a thousand other conflicting strains of self-interest and racial fears, had led to this struggle between the highest—and lowest—types of national groups. . . .

Poor Beatrice, and all mothers of youth! They had been caught in a trap not laid by God, not even deliberately fashioned by wicked men, but put together bit by bit, carelessly, in ignorance, in self-defence, with high motives even, by scientists, politicians, professors, journalists, clergymen, patriotic soldiers, jolly good sportsmen, old-fashioned diplomats with charming manners, manufacturers in search of raw material, and pomposities who believed they controlled the world, but were no more than silly drunkards—drunk with self-conceit—who stumbled over the string when the trap was well baited and ready to go off, the trap in which the youth of the world was caught and torn to pieces, the trap which the Beatrices of Ealing and England, and the mothers of half the world, saw with terror in their dreams.

Winifred, aged eighteen, and as pretty as a German doll, wished she'd

never been born! Later she married a boy in the Tank Corps, and was happy until he came home shell-shocked, with melancholia and a nervous twitch. It wasn't a good war for my sister Beatrice and her family.

It was on that leave of mine that I went down to Evesham Park for a day, to see Lady Evesham—not a pleasant mission, and one I funked rather, because Hugh had been killed in the first battle of Ypres in October of '14, which seemed remote in history now. But she had written to me, asking to see me, and I found her calm and unemotional, except for a moment or two. Evesham Hall had been turned into a convalescent hospital for wounded officers, whom I saw hopping about on crutches along the terrace where, in a good summer of England, I had listened to the voices of the younger crowd, and the tinkle of Humphrey's banjo, and talked with Katherine in the afterglow of sunset. The picture gallery was a dormitory. The Italian garden was a sun-trap for the bad cases who lay out in invalid chairs. The convalescents were playing croquet on the tennis-lawn with two of the nurses, and with Gladys, who looked charming as a V.A.D. and blushed very vividly when I spoke of Humphrey.

Lady Evesham—the beautiful Betty—was merry and bright with all her invalids—too merry and bright, I thought for a morbid moment remembering that husband of hers whom as a boy I had hated for a time because he had been my rival with Katherine, and unworthy of her. He had made amends and been a faithful husband to this Irish beauty, and a good soldier who had given his life to England. Women wept a little for their men and then didn't seem to care a damn. Perhaps it was a relief to many of them when their husbands were killed. The same man all the time gets rather boring! Little quarrels, little naggings, make marriage tiresome, or squalid, or horrible. So I thought, with cynicism, when I heard Betty's laughter ring out as she ran a race with a boy on crutches and let him beat her.

Afterwards, when we sat alone, I hated myself for those thoughts. Betty was not one of those women who were marrying rather too quickly after death's liberation.

She spoke of Hugh with tenderness, and told me that she felt him close to her. The night he was killed she had known it. She heard him calling to her, and saw his figure at the side of her bed, so lifelike that at first she thought he had come back on leave, and said, "Is that you, Hugh?" It was true in a way, she said. He had come back on leave, and would never have to fight again. Now she was carrying on for his sake. He would like her to help the boys.

She spoke of Ireland. It was after that rebellion of '16, which had filled her with rage and anguish. But she blamed England for what had happened. The Irish boys, she said, had wanted to be loyal, would have fought to the death,

side by side with England, if they could have raised their own regiments, marched under their own flag, served under their own officers, and known that in helping to save the liberty of the world they were fighting also for Irish self-government. But the War Office had insulted Irish pride, gone out of their way to kill the spirit of loyalty. Now they were hanging the leaders of rebellion and making martyrs of them—misguided young men—poets and writers—whose passionate love for Ireland had led them into madness. The rebellion had been condemned by two-thirds of the Irish people. Now the executions had raised a flame of hatred against England, who was supposed to be fighting for the liberty of little nations, but denied freedom to Ireland and was not merciful.

“For every one of these hangings there’ll be bloody work in Ireland,” said Betty. “And because I love England I hate to see her cruel—and stupid—and Prussian. Yes, Prussian, though God forgive me if poor Hugh can hear my talk!”

I did not argue with her. I, too, had raged against our stupid way with Ireland at the beginning of the war, though that rebellion in Dublin was a black treachery, in England’s dark hours, which I could hardly forgive. Now I have forgiven, because the ancient grudge is surely gone at last between Irish and English, after many crimes—on both sides, God wot—and the heroism of Irish soldiers out in France who agonised and died in all our battles.

I asked how did it go between Humphrey and Gladys, and Betty looked thoughtful before she spoke.

“These war-girls,” she said, “grabbing at love. Giving themselves to the first boy who comes along! I don’t want Gladys to make a war-marriage, but the little hussy has the hearts of all these wounded boys. Their eyes goggle at her.”

“Humphrey is a faithful lover,” I said. “Out in the trenches there.”

“God save him, and all of them,” she prayed, and then rose and said, “I must go and make the boys laugh.”

I left them laughing with her over some Irish stories told in a rich brogue. The spirit of Evesham Hall had changed in the war, like that of many old homes of English history. Would the old life ever come back to them, with horses and dogs and pleasant ways of peace, in leisured wealth?

I wondered. . . .

My sister Evelyn had stopped novel-writing for a time—one of the few blessings of war—and was organising social charities on behalf of the Red Cross with indomitable energy. Her husband, the Reverend Abercrombie Smythe, was a chaplain at one of the camps outside Boulogne, and occasionally I came across him in Boulogne town, and heard stories about him

which I didn't repeat to Evelyn, who was devoted to this unpleasant little man—as I had always thought him. I met him once in one of those French restaurants which were making a fortune out of the war. It was crowded with officers putting in a good dinner—perhaps their last—before going up to the line again, and with others down at the base or “bored stuff” with routine jobs at railheads and repair shops—that devastating boredom which was the price of safety. It's no wonder that some of them were drinking too much cheap wine, and having amorous affairs with pretty little waitresses or shop-girls, with whom they learnt remarkably good French.

I didn't blame them. I blamed nobody in this war which had knocked morality edgewise, and upset all our mental foundations, and created an instinctive urge in young men and women—and older ones—to grab all they could of life in a hurry, its best and worst, but life anyhow, in a world of death and ruin. It was only the very spiritual, the deeply religious, and those of natural delicate nobility who could resist the quick temptation, the easy path of degeneration, the chance of an hour's joy at any price afterwards. It was a wonder that so many resisted, so many thousands of decent-minded lads. I could not even blame my clerical brother-in-law when I saw him obviously the worse for drink, and pouring out more of it, opposite a red-lipped French girl, who patted him on the hand and addressed him as “*mon chou*,” and later spilled her wine over the table-cloth and grabbed a handkerchief out of his sleeve to mop it up.

“*Méchante!*” said the Reverend Abercrombie Smythe, shaking his finger at her. “*Voilà du bon vin abominablement gaspillé!*”

She flicked him under the chin with the tip of a little finger, and said, “*Ça ne fait rien, mon petit Protestant. C'est toi qui va payer pour encore une bouteille. Pas?*”

I did not blame him for learning French in this way. I only cursed the war again, and was sorry for Evelyn. And I hated Humphrey to see this relative of mine—a sort of uncle of his own—making such an ass of himself in a public place, and disgracing his cloth, and letting down all those good splendid padres who were devoting themselves to the men up in the line and in casualty clearing stations, as I had seen them.

I had met Humphrey at Boulogne outside the office of the A.M.L.O., as we called that temporary tyrant who was the assistant military landing officer, as one must now explain when all those letters are forgotten. As an Intelligence officer, I had the call on a motor-car, and I offered to give Humphrey a lift as far as Amiens, where he could do a “lorry hop” as far as Albert and join his battalion somewhere up the Bapaume Road.

He winked at me as he glanced sideways at our disreputable relative, and said, “Rather a shock for Aunt Evelyn, if she happened to see! She was only

telling me yesterday what a little hero her husband was. 'One of God's Saints!' I *don't* think, as my batman says."

"Let's forget him," I answered. "Did you have a good time on leave?"

"On the whole," said Humphrey, with a moment's hesitation. "All the shows, and a hot bath every night. It was quite pleasant to lie in clean sheets again. To-morrow——"

He laughed out the end of his thought. To-morrow he would be in his dug-out again, with the same old smell of chloride of lime and wet chalk and dirty sandbags, and worse things. Perhaps it was that thought which gave him a worried look.

His mother had left the canteen on a fortnight's leave to be at home with him, and his father had wangled a leave at the same time, so that the house in Cheyne Row had been going strong. Only Dorothy was missing, which was hard luck. They couldn't spare her from ambulance work. Too many wounded.

He blushed when I asked whether he had seen Gladys Evesham.

"Once or twice," he said, and then looked thoughtful and changed the subject abruptly.

"England is pretty marvellous, don't you think? You wouldn't think there was a war on. Everybody having a darned good time, theatres in full blast, working-folk earning high wages, and spending them royally, all the girls in uniform, and doing men's jobs—jolly well—and a general air of high spirits and good temper. There's a lot of fun in war, if you look at it in the right way!"

I detected a slight note of irony in his voice, and saw it playing about his lips.

"England is hiding its heartbreak," I said. "The people at home want to give you boys a good time when you're back on leave."

"Oh, I'm not grouching!" he answered lightly. "Only things look a little different from the angle of a front-line trench. Last night I was at the Savoy. All the pretty ladies, and so forth. Lots of laughter. Nice clean tablecloths and the glitter of glass. To-morrow——"

It was the second time he had spoken that word without finishing his thought, though it was easy to guess. He had just heard, he told me, that his sergeant-major had been killed. Blown to bits by a 9.2, and very rough luck, as he was down for leave in a week's time. A first-class man, and as cold as ice when things were hot. Steadied the men wonderfully when they got the wind up. Humphrey couldn't think how the company would do without him.

At Amiens that night I stood the boy a dinner at the Godebert, crowded mostly with Scottish officers of the 15th Division, who were doing themselves extremely well. One group was having a gay time with little Marguérite, who gave the glad eye to many British officers, and inspired each one with the belief that he had made a hit with her. She was the last touch of feminine grace

in the last outpost of civilisation before they went back to the shell-ravaged fields with their riven trees, where high explosives searched for their bodies and pounded ruin into smaller dust. That night Margu rite wore a Glengarry cap which she had captured from one of the young Scots, and danced between the tables, but with a childlike merriment in which there was nothing vicious. A playful little creature who somehow seemed to have dodged the devil, with a sense of humour. She came up to Humphrey and called him a pretty boy, and thrust her fingers through his brown curls and laughed at his blushes.

“A nice kid!” he said, when she flitted to another table. “Can’t think how she keeps so fresh.”

We went out into the dark streets of Amiens to cool our heads a bit after the fume-laden atmosphere of the restaurant. Humphrey had drunk a glass of wine too much, and I noticed that his face was flushed before we went into the darkness. There was a drizzle of rain, and the pavement was muddy in the Rue des Trois Cailloux, where all the shops were shut and no gleam of light came from the shuttered windows or the street-lamps. It was as though the darkness were tangible, wet and velvety against one’s face.

“Blast this war!” said Humphrey, depressed now that he had left the hot and lighted rooms of the Godebert. We turned down the street called Admiral Courbet, and at the corner a girl’s dark figure fluttered up to Humphrey, and she flashed a little torch-light in his face, and then took hold of his belt and spoke to him enticingly.

“O  vas-tu, mon p’tit lieutenant? Chez moi, eh? Pourquoi pas? Cette guerre est triste, mon Dieu! Un peu d’amour, un peu de joie—”

“Rien   faire!” said Humphrey in his English accent.

He pulled her hand from his belt, almost roughly, and strode on a pace or two ahead of me.

Outside the cathedral he stood and waited for me to catch him up, and then gave a short laugh and said, “If you hadn’t been with me I might have been tempted. Why not, after all? *Pourquoi pas?* as the lady said.”

I said, “No, old man! Think of Dorothy—and Gladys.”

He was silent for a moment, and then blurted out words which made me very sorry for him.

“You may as well know. Gladys has chucked me. She’s going to marry that Banstead fellow. He’s been hanging round her a lot—after getting a Blighty wound. His luck.”

I put a hand on his arm and said, “Sorry, old boy.”

He was silent for a moment, and then spoke with a break in his voice, and attempted cheerfulness.

“Not that it makes much difference. I’m sure to get pipped before long—on the law of averages. The sooner the better now.”

We walked round the cathedral, and I tried to comfort him, but it was rather futile, and, anyhow, he interrupted me and spoke with a forced philosophy.

“You needn’t worry, uncle! This war makes love and all that sort of thing rather trivial, don’t you think? I mean, it’s all the same when a shell comes and finishes the game, to-morrow or the next day. *Dulce et decorum est*——”

He finished the old tag with an ironical laugh, as though he saw a lot of humour in it. Then he said something which rather startled me, because in the early days I had read his letters to Paul and marvelled at the spiritual exaltation of this boy who had regarded death as nothing so that he might serve England and give his life to save her liberties. They were letters which Paul read with tears and pride.

“To die for one’s country! It’s all right, of course. It’s got to be done if need be. But I wonder if one’s country cares a damn! They take it all for granted. They’re all so bloody cheerful about it. Business as usual, and keep the home fires burning. Charity matinées for the poor dear wounded, and lots of fun for pretty girls with half a dozen lovers or three husbands in a fighting year. . . . Our gallant generals and brilliant staff—they’re pretty cheerful too, with flower-borders on their breasts and charming châteaux behind the lines. They’re keeping up the spirit of the troops by attacks which mean the murder of one’s pals. . . . Night raids for the sacrifice of second lieutenants. . . . Nice little salients to hold against hell fire without any rhyme or reason.

“Oh, a wonderful war, for young gentlemen with a sense of duty and a lump of steel in their stomachs! Sometimes, when they lie in shell-holes, they can’t help wondering why they are ordered to hold a trench which wasn’t there, or advance against machine-gun posts which weren’t on the map, with no artillery in support. Your King and country need you. Dilly, dilly, come and be killed. Well, why not? *Pourquoi pas?*—as the lady said. It’s all in the day’s work, and gentlemen in England should think themselves accursed they were not here upon St. Crispin’s Day!”

He was a little drunk. I could see that now. I hadn’t noticed that he was drinking too much of that sweet champagne.

That night we slept in the same room in the Hôtel du Rhin, and next morning, waking early, I watched him as he lay with tousled hair and one arm flung over the bedclothes, breathing quietly with a smile about his lips. He looked so young and boyish, such a charming portrait of English youth. I cursed the war again, with its bloody sacrifice of boys like this.

He woke, after a long-drawn sigh, and started up with a puzzled look.

“Where am I?”

Then he laughed, and said, “I was dreaming of that cottage we had near Evesham Park. Do you remember its low ceilings and the black old beams? I

thought Puggy was calling me to come out and bathe.”

When he put on his uniform again and tightened his belt, he spoke to me in a shamefaced way.

“I must have been pretty drunk last night. And I talked an awful lot of rot. Forget it, sir.”

He was wounded up in Flanders, at the beginning of '17. It was a machine-gun bullet through the lung, and for ten days Paul despaired of him as he lay in hospital at Etaples. I went down to see him, and found Paul at his boy's bedside, looking strangely happy.

“I think they'll pull him through,” he told me. “And I'm selfishly glad. The strain was always nagging at me while Humphrey was in the line. Now he'll be laid up for six months at least. A Blighty wound, thank goodness.”

It was in Dorothy's hospital, which she served as an ambulance driver. Hilary Dick's lessons in driving had come in useful, just in time. She looked a gallant creature in her uniform, with long gauntlet gloves, but rather thin and worn, I thought, as if the strain of war had told upon her. She was a married woman now, having gone to church with young Dick at the end of the Somme battles, when he had won his D.S.O. I had slipped over for their wedding at St. Mary Abbots, Kensington, and she whispered some laughing words to me before going on her honeymoon for six short days—the rest of Hilary's leave.

“I had to disappoint a lot of boys, poor dears! But Hilary insisted.”

I said, “Half the British Army is in love with you, you wanton. As for Michael, out in Russia——”

She blushed at that, and said, “Poor old Michael! He'll want to strangle me!”

We held up the carriages, and Hilary Dick said, “my wife, I think?” very humorously, before leading her out and getting the cheers of the crowd.

He certainly deserved them, for great valour. This elegant young fop, as I had known him first, still looked rather delicate and languid, but he seemed to have a certain oldness of courage and whimsical audacity in war beyond that of men of average pluck, though the standard was high. He specialised, I was told, in night raids, and had very comical ways of surprising the enemy. It was he who first bought ladies' nightgowns in the town of Bruay behind the lines, when the snow lay thick in No Man's Land. He cut off the pink bows before he led his white raiders to a German dug-out where they captured forty prisoners after rapid bombing-work.

When I congratulated him on this exploit he shrugged his shoulders and said, “A dirty business, this war—but amusing at times. I used to write sonnets and worship beauty. Now I'm a first-class assassin of blue-eyed Boches.

Rather comic isn't it? It reveals unexpected qualities in human nature. I surprise myself."

So he, too, was finding irony the only philosophy of life in time of war. Quite a lot of them were beginning to talk like that.

Dorothy had not seen him for five months when I met her at Etaples. When I asked after him she laughed a little and looked at her wedding-ring.

"Sometimes I forget my married state. Such a brief experience!"

"I should keep it in mind," I remarked.

"I've tied a knot in my handkerchief," she told me.

She spoke flippantly, as though she didn't care, but I noticed that she wiped some tears from her eyes furtively.

"You must be proud of him," I said. "He seems to have extraordinary pluck. Heroic stuff in him."

Dorothy smiled, with her chin on her clasped hands and her elbows on the table of the little canteen where we dined together, after the other girls had finished their meal.

"Wonderfully heroic—especially as he's always in a blue funk. He hates the sound of a shell, but doesn't show it. That's what I call courage. The best!"

She asked me a sudden question.

"When's it going to finish, Uncle?"

"Not yet awhile," I said gloomily. "The enemy's reserves are terribly strong. We haven't begun to wear them out, in spite of optimism at G.H.Q."

I saw a sudden pallor come into Dorothy's face, a little darkness under her eyes.

"It's frightful," she said presently. "All these poor boys who like life so much, and don't want to die a little bit—I'm sorry for them. They're all greedy for love. Because I'm a woman and not as ugly as sin they try to touch my hand, and want me to kiss them, if I go into the wards at night. It's not because they're wicked. It's because they want something feminine and pretty after all that beastliness at the front. Some of them are just kids who ought to be tucked up by their mummies. They cry sometimes, under the bedclothes! They're afraid of going to sleep because of bad dreams. . . . Why should they be sent out to die in this rotten old war? I can't see any sense in it. Why can't we make peace? Any sort of peace would be better than all this slaughter and bloodiness."

I said, "I suppose it's got to be a fight to the finish. We can't let down France and Belgium, or let the Germans get away with their wickedness."

I was conscious of my insincerity, even as I spoke. I too yearned for peace, any kind of patched-up peace which would stop all this blood and agony.

"I fail to see it!" said Dorothy impatiently. "France is being bled to death. If it goes on much longer there won't be any Frenchmen left. That's a jolly

kind of victory!—if it comes to victory. As for the Germans, I bet they'd be only too glad to cry quits, on any decent terms. Their men are being killed, just like ours. What are we going to gain by it? Who's going to be any better for it? What argument does it settle?"

This girl who, not long ago, had sat on my knee with her arms round my neck, listening while I told her fairy-tales, was asking the very questions which tortured me in wakeful nights.

I said, "I agonise like you, my dear, for all those boys of ours. But I don't see the chance of peace. England won't let go until Germany is down and out. Germany won't let go until she sees that victory is impossible."

"Then it will go on for ever and ever," said Dorothy, "until there's no youth left in the world. Only old men and broken-hearted women, and dirty cowards behind the lines, and pretty little sluts without a boy among them, unless he's blind or maimed."

Two years at a base hospital had taken the laughter out of this girl's heart. Or, at least, behind her laughter there was this awful bitterness, this sense of world-tragedy spoiling the joy of youth with endless lists of death.

"Don't think I'm funkng," she said presently. "I'm going to see it through."

She admitted also that it was not all tragedy. The lightly wounded men were a cheery crowd. They made a joke of everything, except in moods of depression now and then. Some of them seemed to like the war! She had even known a few who were keen to get back to the line—but not many. It was good to hear them yelling out choruses. Some of them were wonderful actors. There was one boy who made up as a girl—as pretty as Gladys Evesham and frightfully comic. . . .

So Dorothy modified her outburst of spiritual revolt against the abomination of war. "I'm not funkng," she had said! No, I saw her pluck that night during an air raid which wasn't pleasant, even to those who, like myself, had had plenty of experience.

We were sitting in the canteen with some nurses and two young doctors when there was the unmistakable sound of a Gotha, with its double fusilage and low whirring note, like a monstrous bee. Anti-aircraft guns opened fire, and at the same time the first bomb fell with a rending explosion. One of the young doctors turned pale and said, "Hell!" Dorothy took a cigarette from his case and lit it and laughed. "Dirty dog!" she said. "Firing on hospitals isn't quite the game, even for a Hun."

"He's after our railhead and dumps," I said. "It's an outrage having them so near. Asking for it!"

Dorothy said, "I'm going into the wards. Those poor boys won't like it a little bit."

"I wouldn't cross the open yard if I were you," said the young doctor who had gone pale. "That devil is machine-gunning. And there's another coming. Listen!"

Dorothy looked up at the wooden roof of the hut.

"Not much protection here!" she remarked, and opened the door as another shell burst abominably near.

I went with her across the yard, glancing up at the searchlights moving slowly across the sky like long white fingers feeling for something. Our Archies were firing wildly, and bits of metal were falling. There was a rush over our heads of a monstrous black dragon, and as it passed there was a swish of bullets. The Gotha was flying as low as fifty feet, I guessed, and the machine-gun was at work.

Dorothy turned for a moment, and I saw her shake a clenched fist at this winged death above us.

In the ward she went to Humphrey's bed first, but he was still unconscious, and breathing painfully, with a tube in his lung. The ward sister—a little creature with red hair and freckles—smiled at Dorothy and said, "I'm glad you've come. Some of the boys are rather nervous!" She didn't seem at all nervous herself, I noticed. Some of the wounded were sitting up in bed, listening intently to the sounds of bombing and gunning—terrific crashes which shook this wooden hospital though the drone of the Gothas—four now—was still audible above all that racket. A young officer spoke to Dorothy.

"This sort of thing gives me the jim-jams. Most unpleasant, don't you think? Of course one expects it at the front, but it's bad manners at the base."

He spoke jestingly, but there was a quiver in his voice.

"Would you like me to hold your hand?" said Dorothy.

"It would help my nerves a bit," said the boy. "Silly things—nerves!"

Dorothy knelt down by his bed and held his hand, and then put her arm round his body, which began to shake with a kind of ague. It was a case of shell-shock.

I heard her say, "Hush, it's all right!"

There were other boys in the ward who would have liked to hold her hand. One of them protested that his nerves were bad too, and he didn't see why one fellow should get all the petting. That was a joke and received with laughter by some of the others. But one boy put his head under the bedclothes, and another whimpered with his face hidden by his arm, until the freckled nurse went to his bedside and whispered to him.

That night some of the wounded were wounded again, and a nurse was killed, but not in Humphrey's ward. . . .

At the beginning of 1917 we had an utterly unexpected visit from Michael. I was in my Nissen hut on the other side of Arras when I received a telephone-call direct from the Chief of Intelligence, saying that a Russian general was being shown round the front and was going to be brought up to see our method of examining prisoners. He had an A.D.C. with him who knew English, but, anyhow, the old bird spoke good French and perfect German. His name was General Sergiev. Would I be specially civil to him? He was on a mission from the Grand Duke Nicholas. And, by the by—oh, yes, to be sure!—the A.D.C. was a relative of mine, so he said—Michael Detloff, lieutenant in a Russian cavalry regiment.

“Good heavens!” I exclaimed, forgetting my official manner with the Chief of Intelligence, “Young Michael . . . here in France!”

Since the war began we had heard only at rare intervals from Katherine. She could not tell us much, owing to the censorship of private correspondence, and the danger, anyhow, of mails falling into the hands of the enemy. Some of her letters had certainly gone astray, probably being lost in ships that were mined or torpedoed. Michael had been at the front with his cavalry regiment. He had been lightly wounded in East Prussia, and badly wounded in the Pripet Marshes. For a time they had despaired of his life, and Katherine had prayed her heart out for him. His recovery was miraculous, so the doctors had said. After that, Serge had used his influence to get him on the Staff, as an Interpreter to British liaison officers. Russia, we gathered by reading between the lines, was in a bad way. Enormous casualties, many disasters, and shortage of ammunition had disheartened the troops. They were longing for peace.

And Katherine was desperate for news. Why didn't we write more often? Or were all our letters sunk by German submarines? It was terrible being cut off from England and not knowing who was alive or dead. . . . Serge was working for the Red Cross, day and night, agonised by the state of the wounded and the frightful inefficiency everywhere. Katherine herself was in a Moscow hospital, nursing the worst cases. The Russian soldiers were so brave and patient and simple—like big babies. But it was all terrible, the awful slaughter, the endless casualties. When Michael was at the front Katherine had never known a moment's peace. In her dreams she had seen him dying a thousand times. “Will this ghastly war never end?” she asked in a letter that took four months to reach us. We knew no more of Katherine and Michael than I have written in these few lines, except trivial details of no account, and I was astonished beyond words, and very glad, when I had that message that he was on his way with that Russian general to my Nissen hut.

A young officer, wearing the G.H.Q. arm-band and looking very bored with his job, brought them in, and I saluted General Sergiev, who filled my narrow doorway with his big figure and square shoulders with heavy epaulets

—a bear of a man, with cold, expressionless eyes, and a square beard getting grey. Behind him stood Michael, in Russian uniform, not as I remembered him, but a young man with a tanned face, harder, thinner, older, than the boy who had made passionate love to Dorothy in Evesham woods. His eyes seemed to have sunk a little in their sockets, and he looked, I thought, extremely ill. He stood there for a moment—when the General gave him standing-room inside the hut—with his hand at the salute and a smile playing at the corners of his lips. Then he took three steps forward, with his arms outstretched, and clasped me about the shoulders with his thin hands, and kissed me on both cheeks. The young officer from G.H.Q. was very much embarrassed, as though that sort of thing were contrary to military discipline and good form.

“Oh, I say!” he exclaimed, blushing very deeply.

“Nephew and uncle,” said the Russian General, with just a flicker of humanity in his steely eyes. “Excellent!” He spoke in French.

“This is a wonderful surprise!” I said to Michael, hiding my emotion under commonplace phrases.

“I’ve a thousand messages from mother,” said Michael, speaking for the first time, and I noticed that his voice had altered to a deeper tone.

“Hadn’t we better get on with the programme?” asked the young gentleman from G.H.Q., with a touch of impatience. “The General is due to see the C.-in-C. at one o’clock.”

I had no chance of conversation then with Michael. He sat at the back of the hut while I examined a batch of Bavarians who had been captured the night before in a raid near Monchy. They were all plastered with white clay and looked exhausted and sullen. I put them through the usual questions and once or twice I heard Michael give a deep sigh, as though bored with all this, or pitiful of those poor devils who told me they had been cut off from their rations for two days owing to our shell-fire. General Sergiev dozed off, with his beard on his chest, before I had finished the examination of the first batch, and I was relieved when the young officer from G.H.Q. rose and said, “Thanks very much. I think that will do. We ought to be moving on.”

I spoke to Michael.

“Is there any chance of seeing you? We must have a talk at all costs!”

He spoke in Russian to the General, and then turned to me.

“If you could get down to Amiens to-night, I could dine with you somewhere. The General is feeding with your Fourth Army and doesn’t think he’ll need me.”

So it happened, and I took him to the Hôtel du Rhin, crowded with officers as usual, but with a table in the corner where we could have a quiet talk. I found him rather silent and subdued, though I saw that his eyes were busy with

the scene about him and studied the faces of the young officers, with no sign about them of war's hardships, except muddy boots and a certain look about the eyes which I could always read in the faces of men who had just come down from the front line.

"They all look very cheerful," said Michael. "As if they liked this jolly old war."

I said, "Tell me about your mother."

He did not tell me very much, except that Katherine was wearing herself out with hospital work. While he was fighting—retreating mostly—she had almost worried herself to death about him. It had been a relief to her when he was badly wounded and safe in hospital with a hole in his stomach.

"Yes," I said. "It's the best that can happen for mothers of men. A queer world when women rejoice if their sons get an arm blown off or a bullet in their lungs!"

"I find the whole thing humorous," said Michael. "I had no idea that civilisation could reveal so many jests. Extremely funny, don't you think, after the Cromwell Road and Kensington Gardens and my father's pacifist ideals?"

His tone of voice reminded me a little of Hilary Dick when he had referred to his worship of beauty before he became an assassin of blue-eyed Boches. Youth was developing a queer sense of humour.

"How does your father square all this with his pacifist principles?" I asked. "The talks we used to have!"

Michael laughed sombrely.

"Father still talks. It's the only thing that keeps him from going mad. His latest idea is that humanity had to be stricken for its sinfulness. A scourge of God, he calls it. After we've worked out our punishment we shall reshape the foundations of society. Russia will get liberty, and the world will advance to democratic ideals and international brotherhood. It's a beautiful thought!"

Again I detected the savage irony beneath his words.

"Tell me about your soldiering," I said. "All your adventures. What's war like in Russia?"

I saw his moody smile before he stared across the room, as though seeing, beyond its walls, his own country.

"You've seen it here," he said. "I daresay it's much the same thing, with local differences—more open country, longer marches, less food. Quite pleasant in spots. It was like a picnic at first—bivouacs in the forests, with the birds singing, and nature not caring a damn for what men are doing. Rather jolly to see the glint of spring in the bushes, and to watch the stars at night, and to hear the stories told by one's men about their village life—love-making with peasant girls and the way the old cow died. That was a good life. A most excellent war. After that it became less pleasant. I've never got really fond of

shell-fire or machine-gun bullets.

"I was in a battle where I had to hold a trench with a regiment of dismounted cavalry. Unfortunately, we hadn't got any water, and it was as hot as blazes. The wounded—and we had a lot—cried out until their tongues swelled. They turned black when they died. My adjutant went mad, and tore his throat open with his finger-nails. My sergeant had both his legs blown off, but wouldn't die as quick as he ought to have done. He kept talking about his wife and kids until we got rather bored with him. You see, three of us were lying in the same shell-crater with him, and we had our own little worries. We lay there for three days and nights, too weak to crawl away, because we were all wounded. The infantry advanced over us, mostly unarmed until they picked up the rifles of the men who had fallen in the first waves. Rifles are scarce in Russia. I could hear the sweep of the enemy's machine-gun fire and the moaning of a newly wounded man whose head fell over the edge of our shell-hole. He was a funny-looking fellow, with long hair. A boy of sixteen, I should say. A bullet had broken his spine or something. Anyhow, he couldn't move, and kept crying like a dying lamb.

"It was moonlight when night came, and the enemy's fire ceased. I wondered why, and crawled out of the hole to see. Perhaps we had gained a glorious victory. You never can tell. But what had happened was the usual slaughter of our men, only more so. As far as I could see across the flat fields, through a kind of milky light, they lay in rows where they had been shot down by machine-gun bullets, like hay under a scythe, very neat—do you remember how it was in Evesham Park that summer? Others were alive. Out of the shell-holes men were crawling like maggots. They crawled for a few yards and then lay still, or writhed a little, and moaned. One of them crawled close to me, and I saw that half his face had been shot away. But he was able to speak. He said, 'Christ Jesu!' and then laughed in a mad kind of way."

Michael stopped, and I saw that a little shudder shook him. But he smiled at me and said, "That's how war is in Russia, when it isn't a picnic. Like that—with bad food, and lice, and typhus, and every kind of misery for the men, while high officers get drunk with their women behind the lines, and grow rich out of contracts they don't fulfil."

"Bad!" I said. "Bad!"

"Is war like that over here?" asked Michael.

"It's not good in the trenches," I told him. "Dead men look the same everywhere, and fields of wounded. I've seen them crawling out of holes like that. I've seen three thousand wounded outside one dressing-station. Perhaps it's worse on the Western Front when the guns get going. More concentrated."

"And yet," said Michael, "those officers look cheerful enough. How nicely their belts shine, and how clean they are! It's an elegant war on the Western

Front.”

“Behind the lines,” I told him. “For a week or two between the battles.”

He seemed to doubt whether our soldiers suffered as much as the fighting men in Russia. I don’t think he believed it.

That night he scared me by something he said almost at the end, before he joined his General. It was after he had asked a question and heard my answer.

“How long is the war going to last on this side?”

“Another year at least.”

He repeated my words, “Another year!” as though I had stunned him. Then he leaned against the wall where we were walking in a narrow street behind Amiens Cathedral, whose pinnacles gleamed in the moonlight above old roofs.

“Another year? Well, it will be your war, not Russia’s. We can’t hold out for three months more.”

I drew a quick breath, and stared at him through the gloom.

“What do you mean, Michael?”

“Russia’s breaking,” he said. “It’s broken in body and spirit. The men won’t fight any more. Why should they, without arms or ammunition, with fat-pig Generals drinking themselves to death behind the lines, and black treachery at headquarters, and contractors getting rich out of all this death? Shall I tell you what Russian soldiers say, the peasants from the Volga and all those whom I’ve heard talking in the line? They say, ‘Our enemy is not in front of us, but behind. It is not the Germans—peasants like ourselves, who hate this war just as much as we do—but the great men in Petrograd and Moscow who send us like sheep to the slaughter-house, and the officers who flog us when they’ve drunk too much, and send us to attack without arms, without rations, without boots, while they fondle painted women at the base.’ The Russian soldiers are tired of all this. They’ve had enough. They want peace. If they can’t get it with England and France they’ll get it alone by way of revolution, and by laying down their arms.”

I listened to his words with a sense of doom. If Russia made a separate peace——

As an Intelligence officer I knew the number of German divisions on the Russian front. If the German High Command could throw the weight of them on to the Western Front, we could hardly stand the shock. It might mean victory for Germany after all, defeat for England and France—after all our effort and sacrifice.

I laughed in the silence of the cathedral square, but my voice did not ring true.

“You’re a pessimist, Michael, and very young. I don’t think Russia will let us down as badly as all that.”

“A nation must save its own life,” he said. “Russia has lost four million

dead. It's enough. I'm all for peace."

I said, "Peace for Russia means death for England and France. Your own people, Michael! Your mother's country!"

I spoke angrily because of that fear ahead.

"Yes," he said. "Good old England! But why not make peace too? Haven't you enough dead over here? Can't we stop all this bloody business? Why not sound the 'Cease fire' on all sides, and save the rest of the world's manhood, and something out of ruin?"

"England wouldn't stand for such a peace. Nor France. Nor the men who are going to die."

He cried out harshly.

"It's madness! It's world madness! There's no sense in it. To hell with this war!"

"Hush!" I said. "Don't shout so much, for God's sake."

There were footsteps behind us, and a young officer came alongside in the darkness. Dimly I could see his clean-shaven face under the shadow of his tin hat, and thought I knew him.

"I quite agree," he said. "To hell with the war! But meanwhile can you tell me the way to Charlie's Bar? It may be my last drink this side of—unpleasantness. We go into the line to-morrow. A pity to miss the last little cocktail."

It was Hilary Dick, as I knew by his voice.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Young Dick! . . . And here's an unexpected friend of yours. You remember Michael?"

The last time they met was in Evesham Park, where they had knocked each other about, with Dorothy intervening.

They both stared at each other in the twilight of the cathedral square, under the half moon visible through scudding clouds, and both of them laughed uneasily.

Michael was the first to hold out his hand.

"How's Dorothy?" he asked. "I'm dying to see her."

Young Dick shook hands, and I think he was touched by Michael's friendliness.

"She's going strong at Etaples. I've just been down to have a look at her—for the first time in six months. . . . How on earth did you get here?"

He laughed again, and said, "Most surprising! Won't you come and have a drink, and tell me all about?"

"Shall I be in the way?" I asked.

They were good enough to say no, and I joined them in Charlie's Bar, and drank egg-nogs with them, and listened to the conversation of these two young men who had been rivals in love and now seemed to forget all about that.

Michael was less gloomy, and the conversation was mostly about Dorothy, and Humphrey, and Evesham Park, and some far-distant dance in Chelsea. Then Michael had to rush off to meet his General, and I strolled as far as the Hôtel de l'Univers with Hilary Dick.

On the doorstep of that building Hilary hesitated before saying good-night, and seemed to want to linger a bit, though he was getting up at five next morning.

"Exquisite night!" he said, looking up at the moon.

"Good for a bombing raid, I'm afraid."

Hilary Dick laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"I hope they won't disturb my sleep. To-morrow——"

"Anything doing?" I asked.

"A bit of an attack," he told me. "My battalion——"

We shook hands, and I noticed that his touch was cold. But he spoke cheerfully.

"Give my love to Dorothy when you see her next."

They were his last words as far as I heard the sound of his voice. He was killed next night by a shell-splinter while consolidating some captured ground after that "bit of an attack." Another good-looking boy had gone very gallantly to the shambles. One by one all my young friends were going, while I remained alive in the comparative safety of "Intelligence," adding up the enemy's strength, estimating his losses, bullying German prisoners for information. Germany still had great reserves. If Russia backed out there would be fresh divisions for the Western Front, and we could hardly hope to hold our lines.

Michael went down to Etaples to see Dorothy. It was on the day following Hilary's death, so that there was not much joy in this meeting for either of them, especially as Humphrey still lay in hospital with a tube in his lung, speechless, though his brown eyes gave a friendly greeting to his cousin. Paul told me afterwards that Michael had seemed more stricken by Hilary's death—coming immediately after that chance meeting in Amiens—than Dorothy herself, and for her sake he put his arms about her, and she wept a little on his shoulder, but after that momentary breakdown she pulled herself together marvellously, said Paul, and told Michael that she was getting "used to death," and it was silly to make a fuss about it, anyhow. "I knew he'd be killed," she said. "He hated it all so much that he had to take as many risks as possible—just to show he wouldn't let fear get the better of him.

"Now I'm a widow," she said, and laughed a little through her tears, as though she, too, must be defiant of death and see the joke of it somehow.

Michael was shy with her, as though this widowhood invested her with a kind of sanctity. Paul thought his nerves were in a bad state because he was so restless in his movements and so utterly gloomy. He had to leave that night with the Russian General, and at the last moment Paul took him on one side and asked for the truth about Russia, and was staggered by his prophecy of a quick *débâcle*. He left in a motor-car that had been put at his service by G.H.Q., and, before the driver started, stood for a moment with his cap off, looking very tall and grave and handsome, while we sent messages of love to his mother.

“God save England!” he said, with a melancholy smile on his face.

For a moment he looked as though emotion might overmaster him, and I saw his face turn pale and a little moisture shine in his eyes. Suddenly he turned and took Dorothy’s hands, and kissed them hurriedly, and then jumped into his car and spoke to the driver, who started off.

It was the last we saw of him until after the war and Russian Revolution.

That smash in Russia came as quickly as he had prophesied—though after the first Revolution it was some time before Russia gave up all attempt to fight. Kerensky and others were trying to rally the soldiers with loyalty to the Allies. So it seemed in secret despatches I saw from our liaison officers out there, and in one precious letter from Katherine, who was heart-broken at the thought that Russia might betray England by a separate peace which would enable the Germans to transfer their storm troops to our front.

“Serge,” she wrote, “is on the side of the Revolution, and we quarrel a little. He sees the great fulfilment of his dreams, and believes that Russia will lead the world to a new liberty and universal peace. Poor dear, poor dear! I cannot blame him for his idealism, and yet I am terror-stricken at what may happen. There are evil forces at work here in Russia, and very cruel. There is a man named Lenin who is coming into power, more ruthless than Kerensky, with some strange spell over the working classes. He is a Communist, and wishes to destroy the *bourgeoisie*. I think of him as Marat in Carlyle’s *French Revolution*. If he gets the upper hand in the Soldiers’ and Workmen’s Councils I think dreadful things will happen. At present there is only a tragic lethargy, and indiscipline. Soldiers wander back from the front and refuse to salute their officers. Michael had his shoulder-straps torn off yesterday, but only shrugged his shoulders and said, ‘I’m all for the men and don’t blame them. They’ve had the worst time, and many officers were rotters.’ He is torn and tormented between loyalty to England and hatred of war, by his father’s hope of liberty and

the fear he shares with me that this Revolution may bring, not liberty, but anarchy and bloodshed worse than that of war. Since his visit to France he never stops talking of you all, and that comforts me a little, and makes you all seem closer. How much you have suffered, and are suffering! Russia is not alone in tragic history, though we are sometimes tempted to think so. Princess Miliukoff and Tamia send their love. They are very brave, but, like me, think that the Revolution will not be accomplished without worse things happening. We are wondering if it is time to escape, but Serge and Prince Miliukoff and many other Liberals are confident that moderate men like Kerensky will be supported by the will of the people. I pray God it may be so, but oh! for a great victory for England and France, and general peace, and perhaps a little house again in the Cromwell Road, with Michael safe, and forgetfulness of all this tragedy, except the heroism of our poor boys who died. Well, I will write again soon. . . .”

It was the last letter we had from her before a silence closed down on Russia, cut off from the world, after Lenin’s peace at Brest Litovsk, except for the frightful tales of refugees escaping from the Red Terror which had followed Lenin’s rise to power. It was impossible to know the real truth of what was happening in Russia, and the lure of Communism—“Bolshevism,” as we learnt to call it—had a secret attraction for many minds in many countries—Italy, Germany, here and there in France, even, perhaps, among the working-folk of England—as a new gospel which might lead the world to peace, and overthrow militarism, and establish the liberty and equality of the working millions who had been betrayed or forced into this war while the profiteers grew fat on the slaughter of humanity. So I heard some of the German prisoners speak in the beginning of 1918, though I heard no whisper of such thoughts among our own men. Italy was rotten with them, I was told by officers of ours who went out after the disaster at Caporetto, and undoubtedly that man Lenin, whose name I had first heard in one of Katherine’s letters, was preaching a new religion, fanatical and bloody in its effect upon brutal minds, which might lead to universal revolution, after the despair and agony of war.

Paul and I discussed it in ignorance of its real meaning, and Paul, with his philosophical mind, wondered whether there might not be some new hope for humanity in this gospel of international liberty and brotherhood, based upon equality of reward for service to the State, and the destruction of our capitalistic system and its distinctions of caste and wealth.

“This war,” he said, “was caused by the curse of capitalism. It’s the poisonous fruit of the industrial era, with its greeds and cruelties and rivalries. Perhaps Russia, with its queer mysticism, may bring a new light to the world,

and show a way of escape from the materialism which dragged us down.”

I said, “If the Red Terror is true——”

“How can we know the truth?” he asked. “The refugees of the old régime tell unbelievable stories. Those Chinese torturers! No. We know what happened about German atrocities. Those corpse-boiling factories!”

I said, “I shudder when I think of Katherine and Michael.”

“Yes,” said Paul. “Revolution isn’t a parlour game, whatever its ideals.”

But for a time he dallied with the idea that Lenin might be a master mind who would lead the world to a new era of liberty and peace. It was before we knew the facts.

One result of revolution in Russia struck us hard in March of 1918—nearly smashed us and France, and made vain all the sacrifice of French and British youth. It was after the frightful slaughter of our troops in Flanders, fighting up to Passchendaele through the bogs and swamps under devastating fire, during half a year when the French had almost ceased fighting for a while after the failure of Nivelle’s offensive, when there was a sullen spirit among the French troops. At a time when our armies were weakest owing to the colossal casualties, and when we took over a longer line to relieve the French, the Germans brought over their fresh divisions from Russia, and hurled their full strength against our front in a last bid for victory. They had one hundred and fourteen divisions to our forty-eight—unequal odds, and irresistible in weight. I had seen the danger creeping nearer week by week as the German divisions from the Eastern Front were massed behind our lines, as new German batteries “registered,” as their ammunition dumps multiplied under the eyes of our airmen.

England knew nothing of this menace, or did not realise. When the shock came and our line was broken, and the whole of our armies fell back in a fighting retreat—losing all the ground we had captured through years of fighting, and with enormous losses of men and material—to the very outskirts of Amiens, the heart of England might well have stopped beating for a moment because of the spectre of defeat envisaged for the first time—very close. Yet there was no panic, I am told, in England. The spirit of the nation steadied under this new shock, and did not falter. There was something uncanny, sublime, and heroic in this utter refusal to admit the possibility of defeat. At the time it filled me with a sense of rage—my nerves had gone to pieces—because I thought England failed to understand, and was careless of the desperate position of our men, fighting rearguard actions day after day without relief or reserves, until out of each battalion there was only a little remnant of weary, sleep-drugged men, still hard pressed, trying to hold some kind of line.

"What does England think?" I asked an officer, out again after his third wound.

"England doesn't turn a hair," he said.

"Then it damn well ought to!" I remember saying fiercely, as I stood with him on the Pozières Ridge, with the enemy in front of us—and behind—at Mametz, and the Naval Division with just one hour perhaps to get through a loophole of escape.

Perhaps England did not know how near we were to irretrievable disaster, but I think now that it knew enough for fear, and yet refused to get afraid, and showed a stoic courage, in those most dreadful days, of very noble quality, in which there was nothing mean or weak. We are best when things are worst.

The rest is history. . . . I saw the tide of boys rushed over to support our lines—three hundred thousand of them—and our last reserve of youth; boys of eighteen; the youngest brothers of those elder brothers who had marched along those roads four years before and joined the ghost army of our dead. I saw another army of youth come to France, fresh, untouched, magnificent in spirit and physique, the army of the United States, utterly raw, completely ignorant of modern warfare, but irresistible in sheer weight of numbers, if ever their weight were used.

I saw the turning of the tide when, at the last minute of the eleventh hour, after falling back all along the line until the sound of German guns could be heard again near Paris, Foch gathered together an Army of Reserve—French, British, American—and struck his blow, and achieved the second "miracle" of the Marne, when the Crown Prince's army reeled back in a retreat which never stopped. I saw the British armies attack again, and for three wonderful months fight new battles every day, capturing vast numbers of guns and men, advancing again over the old battle-fields, driving the enemy before them in an irresistible sweep, until they had no more reserves, and could not hold a line, and could hardly delay us by rearguard actions, in spite of machine-gun units, who fought with stubborn and heroic courage, as all our men acknowledged.

I saw the break-up of the German war machine, its disintegration, its wreckage. And on November 11th of 1918 I stood in a field by Mons and heard a bugle blowing faintly across a misty field. It was the "Cease fire." The war was over at last. The guns were silent after four and a half years. There was to be no more death. The last of the world's youth was saved. Out of the ruins humanity would rise to a new birth, a nobler civilisation, after dreadful lessons. Surely we had learnt something! . . . How beautiful was the silence, with the birds singing, startled by it, round Mons, where the old Contemptibles had fought their first battle at the beginning of the war! How great had been

the sacrifice since then!

I thought of the ghost army of our young dead, and was conscience-stricken because I was alive. Had they heard that "Cease fire," bringing rest to their younger brothers? . . . Peace! What could it mean in this new world which was coming? How could we ever get back and readjust our minds to peaceful purposes? How should we repair all this ruin, and salve its wreckage of lives and hearts? How should we pay back to the dead, the blinded, the maimed, the shell-shocked, the nerve-broken, and those fellows slogging on through the mud, as I saw them now, without joy in their eyes, though it was the day of Armistice, with sweaty faces under their old "tin hats," with guns and transport waggons going forward to the journey's end? They had stuck it out to the last. They looked dog-weary of it all. I took off my own steel hat, and said "God! God!" in a whisper, and all the drama of the war passed before my vision, as I had seen it in bombarded towns, and death-strewn fields, and prisoners' cages, and field hospitals, and in the eyes of boys who had loved life and now were dead.

I wanted to go down on my knees there in the mud and thank God for this peace at last. But instead I lit a cigarette and spoke to the young officer who was standing by my side. It was Humphrey, who had come out for the last three months.

I said, "Peace, old man! Peace!"

He laughed, and answered with a queer break in his voice:

"Well, we've done the job!"

XXVIII

BECAUSE of my knowledge of German and my work as an Intelligence Officer I was appointed to the Army of Occupation in Cologne, and did not get demobilised until more than a year after the Armistice. It was an extraordinary experience—living on peaceful and even friendly terms with a people who for four and a half years had been “the enemy,” exerting all their prodigious strength and will-power to destroy us, as we had used ours to slaughter and break them. What a colossal smash of all their pride! What humiliation of surrender! I think it stunned them for a time, so that they were almost incapable of emotion.

Defeat, which had seemed impossible after all their victories, had left them without their old foundations of belief, without a philosophy to explain their downfall or give them hope. Their old gods had fallen to the dust. The Kaiser and his war-lords had taken flight. The army which they had believed invincible had disintegrated. The lies with which they had been duped until the very end were horribly exposed. All their sacrifice of blood had been in vain. Their only consolation—and I think it overwhelmed all other emotions among these Rhineland folk—was the natural human relief that came to them because the flow of blood had at last been stopped, because the burden of an iron discipline had at last been lifted from them, and because they regained the ordinary liberties of life. For soldiers to get home again, for girls to have their lovers reprieved from the shambles, for a knowledge that normal life could be resumed without a ceaseless call to sacrifice in which the individual had counted for nothing under a ruthless tyranny over body and soul, defeat itself lost part of its sting, and the downfall of national pride was made less agonising to those who had suffered most in its service—the fighting men, the mothers of the dead and maimed, the half-starved work-girls, the gaunt fellows in the factories, sweating for long hours as machine-driven slaves.

This sense of relief from the strain of war accounted, I am sure, for the quietude of the German people when the knowledge of defeat and all its consequences was revealed to them. That, and the stunning shock, and perhaps a bodily weakness due to *ersatz* food—filthy substitutes without the necessary fats—which made them incapable of rage, or any wildness of revolutionary passion, or any intensity of resistance to the dictates of the Allied victors. On the Rhine they obeyed our orders meekly, like sheep, and were friendly to our men, whose behaviour was good-natured, and even chivalrous, apart from the bullying of old dug-outs who came out later and played at Prussianism now and then.

Humphrey was with me in Cologne for the first three months, as his division had advanced to the Rhine, and I shall never forget his ironical laughter at the immediate fraternising which, in spite of orders, took place between our soldiers and the German population. I remember one night when we sat for the first time in a big café called the “Germania,” in the Hohestrasse, crowded with German civilians and our non-commissioned officers and men, with a few officers, like ourselves, in the gallery upstairs. A German band was playing old English and Scottish airs—“The Bailiff’s Daughter of Islington” and “Annie Laurie”—and Humphrey stared at them and said, “Good Lord, haven’t these people got any pride?”

“They want to keep us in a good temper,” I said, “and very wise too.”

Down below our men were standing liquid refreshment to blue-eyed German girls, and even their mothers and little sisters—family parties from the houses in which they were billeted—and clinking beer-mugs with men who still wore field-grey tunics, but without shoulder-straps and badges. Only a few weeks ago they had been fighting against our advancing troops—now drinking with them in the friendliest style!

Humphrey spoke to me with amazement.

“If my aunts could see this—Aunt Beatrice and Aunt Evelyn—I think they’d go mad. It makes rather a mockery of all the hate stuff that’s being talked in England. My sergeant told me this morning that he thinks we fought the wrong people! The old lady where he’s billeted brings him an early cup of tea in the mornings, and puts a hot-water bottle in his bed at night. She had three sons killed in the war, but doesn’t seem to bear a grudge against us. She says it was the capitalists who made the war, and that God will punish them. She also told him that the Germans wanted peace long ago, but they were deceived by their war-lords, who had no pity on German youth. . . . I’m inclined to think the old lady’s right.”

He stared at the scene below us as he sipped some Rhine wine and listened to the band. I could see a smile about his lips as he watched a big sergeant of ours ordering another bottle of wine for a pretty German girl sitting with a woman who looked like her mother. Presently he turned to me again, and asked some questions which were hard to answer.

“Doesn’t this knock the sense out of war? Why couldn’t we have made peace years ago, before all our pals died? These people don’t hate us. We don’t hate them. At least, we don’t when we get talking to them.”

“No,” I said, “but we couldn’t talk to them across the trenches. That’s the trouble when war starts. Besides, they weren’t ready for peace until they knew they couldn’t win. If they had won they would have skinned us alive. They would have knocked the old Empire to bits and made us pay tribute till the end of time.”

"Not the common people," argued Humphrey. "It's only their leaders who preach such poisonous ideas."

"The common people listen and believe," I said. "That's the curse of it. This war wasn't made only by politicians and statesmen. The peoples were involved in it."

"Weren't they duped?" asked Humphrey. "These German women thought their sons were dying in a war of self-defence, just like ours. Each side believed in the justice of its cause, until things became too complicated, and we forgot why the devil we were fighting, and just went on because there was no way out. Well, I shall be jolly glad when I get demobbed, and take off this uniform and forget the whole show."

I touched him on the sleeve and said, "We mustn't forget too soon, old boy! Out of all this agony and ruin we must try to build a better kind of world, so that our pals won't have died in vain, and youth won't be called upon again for all that you have suffered."

"I was lucky," said Humphrey. "That is, if it's luck to keep one's life when the best were knocked out. I'm not at all sure."

I tried to inspire him with faith in the future.

"You fellows who came through the war must take the lead in peace. It's up to you to see that all these ghastly lessons aren't wasted. It's for you and your crowd to fulfil the hopes of stricken humanity for some security of life and a better way of argument than the kind of thing we've seen. There's great work to do!"

Humphrey smiled at my outburst of emotion, and raised his eyebrows.

"It sounds good," he said quietly. "But what kind of work for fellows like me? Before I deal with stricken humanity I'd like to know what sort of job I'm going to do."

The boy worried me a little. After the healing of his wound he had come out again for the last hundred days, looking perfectly fit and fighting with great gallantry, as his Colonel had told me. But now, after that series of attacks which had smashed the German lines and harried their retreat, something seemed to have snapped in him. His nerves were on edge. He was restless and moody, and craved to get home. I noticed that after a while he shunned my company a little. At least, he gave up the habit of spending his evenings with me, and generally pleaded that he wanted to write some letters or do a bit of reading when I invited him to spend an hour at some cabaret with me, or to have a game of billiards at the officers' club. Then one evening he came round to the house where I was billeted and, when I chaffed him a little for his desertion of his uncle, he blurted out a secret which startled me considerably.

"The fact is, I'm engaged to be married. I meant to tell you before, but hadn't got the pluck."

He coloured up uneasily when I looked at him searchingly, and asked whether it needed pluck.

“Oh, I’m not funkng it,” he said rather sharply, as though I had accused him of cowardice. “But it’ll mean a row in the family—and my nerves are rather frayed.”

“Who’s the lady?” I asked, and I had a sudden sinking at the heart. I thought perhaps he had become entangled with some little slut whom he might have met behind the lines in France. But the truth was more astonishing.

“She happens to be the daughter of General von Nostitz, who was Governor of Bruges for a time. Her name is Rita. Strange as it may seem, we’ve fallen in love with each other—tremendously.”

He laughed, as though it were an excellent joke, though surprising to himself.

I was silent for a moment or two, and then put a hand on his shoulder and spoke some warning words.

“Aren’t you asking for trouble, old lad? A German girl won’t be popular in England.”

Humphrey shrugged his shoulders.

“She’s popular with me,” he answered.

“How did it happen?” I asked. “Where did you meet her?”

He told me that he was billeted at the general’s house. At first he had seen nothing of the family, except when they bowed very stiffly if they met in the passages. Rita’s brother had been the first to speak. He had been blinded in the war, and groped his way about the house. One day he had stopped on the stairs and spoken in a friendly way, hoping that Humphrey was quite comfortable. Then he had said something about the war, and hoped that a peace would be made which would prevent all such misery again. After that he had made excuses to come into Humphrey’s room, and had talked—sometimes for hours—about the causes of the war and the hope of the future. He was an anti-militarist and a Republican—unlike his father, who believed in the old traditions. He thought the only hope of the world was in President Wilson’s scheme of a League of Nations, and in a brotherhood of the world’s youth—those who had known the war—united against the old men with the old ideas who had put this curse upon humanity.

“That’s all right,” I said, “but what about this Fräulein Rita?”

Humphrey smiled at some secret thoughts, and then answered quietly and rather shyly.

“She’s frightfully pretty—gold spun hair and blue eyes. Rather like Gladys Evesham, you know, but—well, not such a kid. More loyal, I think. She’s devoted to that blind brother of hers—leads him about, and reads to him, and all that. Shares his views, too. That’s what made me like her. I mean, the way

she looks after that poor blind chap.”

“But, my dear lad,” I protested, “you haven’t known her more than a month or two. And she’s German, anyhow. Rather rapid work, isn’t it, this engagement of yours?”

“One learns to be rapid in war,” said Humphrey. “She speaks English perfectly which made it easier. She was brought up in a convent school at Eastbourne, while her brother was at Oxford. Anyhow——”

He was silent for a moment, and then spoke with a boyish simplicity and candour which rather touched me.

“It was physical at first, I suppose. I wanted to kiss her just because she was a pretty girl, and because I’ve been starved of love. . . . One evening I made an excuse to get her into my room. Something about a broken lamp-shade. As a matter of fact, I smashed it to make the excuse. Rather caddish in a way. While she was looking at it, and wondering how it had got broken, I saw her white neck, and I felt most frightfully keen to kiss it. She looked so sweet, after all the dirtiness of trench life—that filth. She turned round suddenly and looked into my eyes, and I went close to her and said, ‘I want to kiss you!’ She was rather scared, I think, though she smiled a little. She said, ‘I’m German and you’re English.’ I said, ‘I don’t care a damn. Human nature is stronger than war.’ She said, ‘I’d like you to kiss me, but it’s very dangerous.’ I told her I’d risk it, and took hold of her in my arms and kissed her, until suddenly I saw that she was fainting, and hung as limp as a rag doll, with all the colour out of her cheeks.”

“Very awkward,” I remarked gravely. “What happened?”

“She was all right after a bit. But she told me she was frightened because her father would hate her if he knew that she had kissed an Englishman—one of the enemies of her country. She slipped away, but every night after that I met her on the stairs, and sometimes she came into my room—it was all my doing—and sat in the dark with me while we talked in whispers. It wasn’t all love talk. We talked of war and peace and the meaning of life.”

“Yes,” I said. “The world’s lovers have often talked like that. Since Romeo and Juliet! And it generally led to tragedy.”

Humphrey shrugged his shoulders again and told me more.

“Things reached a crisis one night, when the blind man came into the room. It was Rita’s room this time, to be quite honest. It was dark, and the family and servants had gone to bed. But Otto—that’s his name—must have suspected something. He had come down in his dressing-gown, and perhaps heard our laughter.”

“And your kisses,” I said.

Humphrey ignored that addition, and said that the blind man must have opened the door very softly and stood there motionless. They were only aware

of him when he spoke. He was angry with Humphrey. He said, "I trusted you. I thought you were an English gentleman, and honourable. Now you are behaving like a blackguard to my sister. I'm blind, but I'm going to kill you."

"Extremely unpleasant!" I said, drawing a deep breath. Certainly the boy had behaved very rashly. It wasn't a safe thing to make love to a German girl in the house of the enemy.

"He made a rush at me," said Humphrey, "and in the darkness of that room he could make his way about better than I could. It was a game of blind man's buff for a minute or two, until he crashed over a footstool. It was Rita who saved the situation. She spoke a lot of German to him which I couldn't understand, except the word *Liebe*. Anyhow, it had the right effect. The blind man became reasonable after a bit. When I told him that I hoped to have the honour of marrying his sister, he took hold of my hand and pressed it against his heart and said, 'Then you will be my brother. Forgive me for doubting your honour.' . . . But, to tell the honest truth, he had every reason to doubt my honour. . . . I hadn't the faintest idea of marrying Rita until I said so to save her reputation. Then suddenly I knew what a skunk I'd been, and I knew that I loved her for more than her prettiness—I mean her pluck and her sweetness. . . . So now we're engaged, and I'm going to marry her as soon as I'm demobbed."

"And take her back to England?" I asked.

He nodded and said, "Why not? . . . She will have to slip away from her people. The old General is a rasper from what I hear. He'll never consent."

"How are you going to keep her?" I enquired.

He answered lightly.

"Oh, I'll get a job all right. Meanwhile I've got a bit of pay."

I wasn't inclined to be angry with him, or to utter moral platitudes, or to call him traitor because he had fallen in love with a German girl. Those words of his, "I was starved of love," were explanation enough from the point of view of human nature, and I could not quarrel even with the philosophy with which he defended his pledge of marriage—the folly of keeping up the "hate stuff." If the world were to be made safe for the youth that survived, it wouldn't be by maintaining a blood feud between Germans and English. But I realised more than this boy did the hazard of the whole thing, the certainty that it would lead to grave trouble for him if he took her as his wife to England. English folk who had lost their sons couldn't forgive or forget as easily as turning over a page in a history-book.

Indeed, before a week had passed I had a hysterical letter from his mother—Clare. She implored me "for God's sake" to stop her boy from marrying a German woman.

“I’ll never speak to him again,” she wrote, “if he does this dreadful and outrageous thing. I cannot believe that a son of mine who fought for England should fall in love with a woman belonging to a race which should be exterminated for all the agony it has caused the world. Doesn’t he remember that it was her people who killed his own flesh and blood—those two poor boys, Harold and Cuthbert—and all his dead comrades who died to save the world from German cruelty? Has he gone mad? . . .”

She blamed me for what had happened.

“It’s your poisonous ideas,” she said. “You have been infecting him with your pro-German spirit, your peace-at-any-price treason. You were a traitor to England all through the war—admiring German courage, speaking well of German prisoners, pleading for chivalry against a nation of brutes. Now you have let Humphrey be seduced by one of those horrible creatures who spat at our wounded and incited their men to commit atrocities.”

Poor Clare! I dared not show the letter to Humphrey, because of its violence of passion, but told him enough to make him understand his mother’s implacable hostility to this German love-affair. His own letter from her had made that clear, but did not alter his decision.

“The mater always goes off the deep end,” he said. “Do you remember her suffragette adventures? Now it’s Hun-hating? Well, I’m not going to spoil my chance of happiness—and Rita’s life—because of racial prejudice. We’ve had enough of that.”

I said, “I know your mother, old man. She has the spirit of fanaticism—very splendid in its way, but devilish awkward to come up against. If you take your lady-love to England she’s going to have a very thin time.”

“The Governor’s all right,” said Humphrey.

He flicked over a letter from his father, and I read it with a little moisture in my eyes, because of its tenderness and wisdom.

He said that after all Humphrey’s service to England there could be no charge of disloyalty against him. And he had earned the right to what joy he could find in life, after those years of suffering and self-denial. Love, anyhow, was beyond argument from old age to youth, provided it were based on honour, and loyalty to its own code. Humphrey might count on his help to ease things with his mother, and upon his sympathy with ideals which might annihilate the frontiers of hate and build a better and safer world.

“But, my dear lad,” he wrote, “you haven’t yet found a job in civil life,

and I'm afraid it's not going to be easy. It's going to take a long time to readjust ourselves to peace conditions—to build up our trade again in a stricken world, and to find employment for all our demobilised officers and men, untrained except in the discipline of war. A German wife will be a handicap—perhaps any wife, for you must remember that I'm a poor man, and can't keep you with wife and bairns. I point out these things, not to make you break any pledge of honour, or cast a shadow over young love, but as a warning that you will need courage and grit to face the future, which is terribly uncertain. And, having said that, I send you my love, longing for your home-coming, proud of you—enormously proud, old son! ready to welcome any dear girl, if she is in any way worthy of you and likely to make you happy. . . .”

I had one meeting with Humphrey's German girl and her blind brother. We had dinner together in a quiet little restaurant at the bottom of the Hohestrasse, and I was favourably impressed, though I still regarded the affair as a tragedy, likely to cast a blight over Humphrey's life. The girl Rita was not only pretty—exquisite even, with her gold spun hair and fair skin—but intelligent and charming, though very shy of me at first. Her brother filled me with pity because of those sightless eyes of his, and his fumbling at table, and the deep melancholy on his face. He was no older than Humphrey, and must have been a good-looking lad.

After dinner our conversation drifted inevitably to the sufferings of the war and the prospects of peace, and I asked this young blind man, Otto, what terms Germany expected.

He groaned a little and said, “We shall have to pay the price of defeat through many years of poverty and toil. That we expect. It is just. Perhaps also it will be good for us, and kill the dreadful materialism which overtook us—England also, perhaps—because of great prosperity.”

Then he said, “We hope for justice, and a little generosity—in the spirit of Wilson's Fourteen Points.”

“England will be generous,” said Rita warmly. “England is always generous and fair-minded.”

I remember that Humphrey laughed quietly and said, “I'm not so sure.”

“If England will be a little generous,” said the blind man, “and if Republican France will hold out a friendly hand to our new democracy, forgetting hate, perhaps the world will rise to a new plane of civilisation and liberty above all this ruin. It is our greatest hope—our only hope.”

“France is drunk with victory,” said the German girl. “The French people want vengeance. . . . It is very natural, but I am—afraid. We have suffered so much. We cannot bear any more. After all their agony, their undernourishment,

the people are hysterical. They would rise to great heights of sacrifice for some new ideal of brotherhood—oh, I am certain of that!—but not if they are thrust back into new despair!”

The blind man stared across the little restaurant as though he saw visions beyond our sight.

“The papers say there is to be a great victory march in Paris,” he said. “The victorious Generals and the men who survived will march down the Champs Elysées. The bands will play gay tunes. The soul of France will thrill at the sight of their flags and the music of war. All its horror will be forgotten. . . . I would like to see a different kind of victory march, with all the wounded of the world, French and German and English, with the army of the blind—my sightless brothers—and the cripples without arms and legs, and the young men without jaws and noses, inhuman and dreadful. The sightseers would shudder and shed tears. They would cry out and groan. “There must be no more war!” they would shout. “Never again!” They would have pity. There would be a peace, not of vengeance, but of mercy and justice. It would help us to build a new world. Youth—the young men who knew the worst of war—would take the leadership of life from the old men with the old ideas. The army of the dead—that great ghost army—would march ahead of them to greater victories than those of hate and blood.”

Big tears fell for a moment from his blind eyes, and he was unconscious of them. His sister put her hand on his, as if to check his emotion.

“Whatever the peace,” said Humphrey, “the world’s in an awful mess. Personally, I’m out for a little human happiness, if there’s any to be found. I’ve had enough of hate. I want——”

He did not finish his sentence, but looked at the pretty German girl, and the word he did not speak was in his eyes. She understood, and I saw the blush rise beneath her fair skin.

“I have faith in President Wilson,” said the blind man. “The whole German people put their hope in his nobility. He cannot betray us.”

“The Peace of Paris,” he said a little later, “will be the beginning of a new era, making the world safe for the common people, and leading us out of the jungle haunted by old hatreds and cruelties and ape-like beastliness.”

I said, “What about your war-lords and your militarists and your traditions? They are only in hiding.”

Otto von Nostitz made an impatient gesture, as though thrusting them on one side.

“Youth must lead,” he said. “Young men with new ideas. Like our dear friend here.”

Humphrey smiled, and doubted his ability in the way of leadership. What he wanted first was a living wage for a decent job, and it didn’t seem easy in

England from what he had heard.

It wasn't easy. After he had obtained his demobilisation papers he went home, without Rita von Nostitz, to find that job of his before he married her, and later on, when I was alone in Cologne, I had despairing letters from him. He was wearing his boots and his heart out searching for work. It seemed that there was a prejudice, among those who had a job to give, against ex-officers who had been in the fighting ranks. Of course, they had helped to save England, and they had done their duty very nicely, but hadn't they learnt rather disorderly habits in time of war? And what did they know, anyhow, about office work and business methods? In any case, business was bad, and there was nothing doing.

"It's hell," wrote Humphrey, "seeing such crowds of unemployed, and thousands of ex-officers among them, who don't seem to have a dog's chance now that they're back in civil life. One of my pals is touting round for orders with safety razors, and six shillings down on his expenses last week! Last night a fellow slunk up to me in Cheyne Walk and begged for a few coppers. It was a man in my battalion, wounded on the Somme, where he won his D.C.M. Some of them are playing bands on the kerbstones and shaking collecting-boxes in the faces of the passers-by. And meanwhile the people with money are spending it like mad, and not caring a damn because the world is in ruin.

"The hatred of Germany is scorching hot among those who saw least of the war. The women make me sick with their ferocity. They want to starve all the German babies, hang the Kaiser, and make the German people pay until the crack of doom. My mother is frightening. I daren't mention Rita, and when a letter comes from her the mater turns pale with rage and won't speak to me all day. Dorothy is mildly sympathetic, but restless and moody, poor dear. Peace doesn't agree with her, and there are lots like her. I'm beginning to think it would have been better on the whole if that machine-gun bullet had finished me on the Somme that day.

"What do you think of the Peace Treaty? Good God! In my humble judgment it puts the lid on all our beautiful idealism, and makes another war certain as soon as the world has recovered from the last little spasm. The Germans will never stick it for ever and ever. I don't see how they can pay all that tribute to the victors. My future brother-in-law, Otto von Nostitz, writes letters full of despair, and says that Wilson, Lloyd George, and Co. have betrayed the world. Even Rita is very sad about England's share in this 'peace of vengeance,' as she calls it. Well, I see the other side as well, and that's the devil of it. France ought to be paid back for all her ruin. Germany isn't a blameless innocent, after all. But my intellect isn't strong enough to worry it out to a right conclusion. All I know is that I'm very fond of Rita, and dead up against this hate stuff, and sick to death of searching for a job.

“The Governor is groping for God—poor dear!—and seems to be worried on the subject, which I don’t discuss with him, because I don’t feel very spiritual after interviews with bland old blighters who made a lot of money out of the war and advise me to go out to the colonies to find a man’s job. Damn them! I want to stay in England.

“The Governor is worried also about Aunt Katherine and young Michael, who seem lost in the blue of Bolshevism, which, by the by, is creeping into England—and no wonder! I’m becoming a bit of a Bolshevik myself, when I see the men who fought for England reduced to begging at street corners, or slouching back to filthy slums where there’s no decent house-room for them, and not a chance of work.

“Hell, my dear Uncle, and excuse this grouching! . . .”

That was the last letter I had from Humphrey before I, too, became demobilised and went back to England, to see with sinking heart the army of unemployed; to watch the rapid degradation from all that noble spirit which, in the years of war, had united us in loyalty and self-sacrifice; to find everywhere the disillusion that had followed vague and visionary hopes of a brighter and better world when peace should come; to read day by day the vulgar and uninspired words of little men who had the destiny of civilisation in their hands and made a woeful mess of it, dragging down all the spiritual emotion which among all peoples had followed the agony of war and made them ready for noble leadership; to see that beneath the feverish gaiety of the middle classes, their restless quest of pleasure and forgetfulness, there was a black melancholy, because of remembered wounds—all that death of youth, and failing trade, and the rising tide of unemployment, and no fulfilment of those promises and hopes which had been held out to them as the reward of victory.

We had taken over the mandates of many new territories. Our Empire was greater than before the war. Our Imperialists were advancing to new adventures, reckless of cost. We were bombing Arab tribes in Mesopotamia, forgetful of our hatred of German militarism, our ideals of liberty for the small nations, and our denunciation of German air raids over defenceless cities. We were fighting a kind of war in Ireland, with Black-and-Tan reprisals for Sinn Fein murders. A dirty business on both sides, and a mockery of all idealism on behalf of liberty. We were financing White Russians to invade their own country and re-establish Czardom. We were spending vast sums of money in a thousand wasteful ways, as though this victory had made us rich and restored all the wealth we had spent in the war. Our politicians were duping the people with the lie that Germany would pay for all our losses in an endless stream of gold. But at the heart of the Empire, in England, which had fought most,

suffered most, lost most, among the sister nations, there was a growing anxiety, a creeping of sadness, in some classes a bitterness, which I saw reflected on the faces in the streets, worried, nervous, tired, worn. It was the end of all dreams.

SINCE silence had closed down on Russia, except for frightful stories of Red Terror, and stories no less dreadful of White Terror—hangings and butcheries and burnings by Koltchak and Deniken, financed by England and France—the thought of Katherine and Michael was always in the background of my mind and a cause of poignant anxiety. Whether they were alive or dead we had no means of knowing, though we made enquiries from Russian refugee committees in Berlin, Constantinople, and other cities to which the exiles drifted in a tragic state. Gradually the idea took possession of my mind that I must go to Russia at all costs. If Katherine were alive, some kind of rescue might be possible. If dead, then to know would be better than this haunting vision of her need of help. And yet I didn't believe that Katherine was dead. I was certain that somehow I should have known.

I spoke to Paul about it, and he said "If anybody goes, I must go."

But I argued that as a single man I was less wanted at home. And that was true, because poor old Paul, back at his laboratory, trying to pick up the threads of his old research work, had many anxieties, with Humphrey at home, unemployed and desperately moody, and with Dorothy brooding over Hilary's death, it seemed, and weeping in her room for hours together.

Paul at that time was engaged in what Humphrey called "groping for God." I found him surrounded by books of mystical devotion, with lives of St. Francis of Assisi, *The Imitation of Christ*, the *Letters of St. François de Sales*, and—what made me laugh a little—a penny *Catechism*, which he was analysing like a problem by Euclid.

"It's more difficult than bacteriology," he said, with his dry humour. "One can't get at God through a microscope. At least, I can't, although I find a certain law. But I'm trying to get the hang of it, to worry my way through to some kind of faith. It's perfectly clear to me that without religion the human race is doomed. We've lost all our bearings. We've nothing to hold on to. There's no explanation of life, and all this agony we've suffered and are suffering, unless there's another world in which all those boys of ours who died will get some reward for their sacrifice. If I could believe that, I'd be more reconciled to this mess on earth. This awful Europe! If I could believe in God I'd have more faith in man. Christianity, for instance, would be rather comforting if one could have a childlike faith in its gospel of redemption from sin and its promise of eternal life and its explanation of suffering and pain. . . .

"If we could become Christians again—actual Christians, ready to put our faith into practice—we might find a cure for some of the evils of our present

state, and begin to build up again. We might put the devil—I have no difficulty in believing in the spirit of evil—in his right place, which is hell. Otherwise, I can't see any way out for humanity. The Peace Treaty isn't as good as the Sermon on the Mount. Perhaps one of these days I'll become a converted bacteriologist, and a source of pride to the Salvation Army. Or maybe I'll make a pilgrimage to Rome with pebbles in my shoes. Anyhow, I'm not satisfied with scepticism—or science."

He spoke humorously, but I could see that he was passing through a mental conflict in trying to find a glimmer of reason in the insanity of our state.

I said: "If you find out, let me know, old man! I'm desperately in need of spiritual comfort. Meanwhile, I want to find Katherine. I shan't rest until I get into Russia."

Paul was worried by temporal as well as eternal problems. It was not a happy home-life in that house in Cheyne Walk, though during time of war the promise of peace—then incredible—had seemed to hold out every hope of joy if Humphrey should come through alive and they should all be together again. Paul was lonely after that home-coming. Many times when I was round in the evenings I found him sitting up stairs in his study, looking sad and tired.

He did not see much of Clare. She was running a canteen for ex-service men somewhere in the slums off Vauxhall Bridge. She had a bee in her bonnet that it was a bulwark against Bolshevism.

"We've got to show the men that we haven't forgotten," she told me. "It's disgraceful the way in which all our women have abandoned the spirit of service as though there were no further need of it in time of peace."

"Poor dears!" I said. "They had a long inning, and did jolly well. They want some relaxation."

"They're all jazzing and dancing and making love to other people's husbands," said Clare bitterly. "One day, if they're not careful, they'll find that Red Terror has caught them by their pretty little necks. It's creeping up like a tide."

She was angry with me when I pooh-poohed the danger of Bolshevism in England and marvelled at the patience of the unemployed.

"You're blind!" she said impatiently, and tried to make my flesh creep by stories of "Red" propaganda among the working classes. She even believed that many of our politicians had been bought by Russian money. Otherwise they wouldn't let down France so badly, and play into the hands of the "poor dear Germans."

Well, it was impossible to argue with Clare, and I was sorry for poor old Paul, who tried to do so, and had his head snapped off by that fanatical sister of mine.

He confided some of his troubles to me one night when I found him alone

again in that study of his, littered with theological works and scientific textbooks and dismantled microscopes. The extreme melancholy of his face startled me, and when I asked him what was wrong he thrust his fingers through his hair—thin and grizzled now, after the years of war—and gave a distressful groan.

“That boy and girl of mine! They scare me to death. . . . Sometimes I could almost wish that Humphrey had not been cured of that bullet in his lung.”

I said: “Steady, old man! for heaven’s sake!”

I was shocked by those last words of his. I could hardly believe they had come from the lips of old Paul, who had been such a comrade to his children, whose love for Humphrey had been a torture when his boy was in the trenches.

“I can’t bear to see him so unhappy,” said Paul. “So utterly wretched. It’s partly from lack of work, and partly that unfortunate love-affair. The thwarted sex-impulse, poor lad! . . . And Dorothy is just as bad.”

“In what way?” I asked.

“Restless, feverish, and bitter with life,” said Paul. “Neither of them can sit at home for more than an hour or two. They seem possessed by the seven devils of boredom, from which they try to escape by way of theatres, cinemas, dances, and night clubs. Next morning they say they were ‘bored stiff.’ It seems to be the disease of post-war youth. ‘Bored stiff!’ All their friends are like it. What’s going to happen to the world, old man, if youth is bored with life after so much death?”

“It’s the effect of nerve-strain,” I said. “Can we wonder at it—after those terrific years? Give youth a chance of recovery. Two years, three years.”

We stayed up late that night, talking of the state of Europe, the decline in British trade, the military fears of France, the financial chaos of Germany, the failure of the world’s leaders to rise above the interests of national egotism, their degraded appeals to brutality and hate. Not cheerful talk!

Paul cut it short at last, and rose with a yawn, and laughed with something of his old humour.

“We two old ghouls! What does it matter to us? We belong to the past. The future must be shaped by the younger generation. . . . And youth is dancing in the night-clubs. Those two gadabouts are losing their beauty-sleep again. . . . Well, to bed!”

It was two o’clock, and Paul took me up to the room which was reserved for me whenever I liked to have it. It was half-past two before I heard a taxicab draw up outside the house and the click of the latchkey, and, ten minutes later, a conversation outside my bedroom door.

It was Humphrey’s voice speaking first.

“Well, old girl, sleep well! You look worried. . . . I’m not so drunk as all that!”

He laughed quietly, and lurched against my door.

"This rotten life!" said Dorothy, "can't we chuck it? What's the sense of it, Bumps?"

There was a moment's silence, which ended with a yawn and another laugh from Humphrey. Not a pleasant laugh.

"Hell! . . . What's the sense of anything, old girl?"

He sloped down the passage with a queer, shuffling step, and I heard him slam his bedroom door. There was no sound from Dorothy for a moment, until I thought I heard her give a kind of sob. I went to my door and opened it, and said:

"Is that you, Dorothy?"

She was leaning up against the wall, with her forehead pressed against it and her hands clasped above her head, and I saw that she was weeping. At the sound of my voice she turned quickly, and tried to hide her tears, but suddenly put her arms about my neck and wept bitterly, so that I was afraid Paul would hear.

"Hush!" I said. "Hush! Come into my room."

She sat on the edge of my bed, with my arms about her, and her head on my shoulder—this girl who had been so gay and gallant in time of war.

"How can I help?" I asked her; and as I spoke the words I remembered how she had come into my room in that Sussex cottage, before the war, in the beauty of her young girlhood, when she was perplexed about love, humorously, audaciously. I had said then: "How can I help?" But the war had come, and fate had caught up young life and used it for its tragic plot. My pretty niece was one of war's victims.

"It's Humphrey," she said, when she had recovered a little. "He worries me to death."

"What's wrong with him?" I asked.

"He's all wrong," she told me. "He's drinking too much, and he threatens to shoot himself if he can't get a job. I try to keep him merry and bright. I drag myself round to this horrible night life, and pretend to be gay while I hate it all. But it's no use. He hates it really as much as I do. . . . They all hate it, though they keep dancing and drinking and pretending to be jolly. . . . Jazz and cocktails to forget the war and this putrid kind of peace! What's the use when their nerves are all on edge, and half the boys can't get a job—after saving England—and the girls can't get a thrill out of life because they've worn out all emotion years ago and are bored stiff with the whole show?"

I talked to her like a Dutch uncle, though I was only an English one, and I think my bullying, my call to her pluck, my promise of help for Humphrey's sake, steadied her nerves a little, and made her think that the purpose had not gone out of life, in spite of peace and its miserable problems.

"The first thing," I said, "is to get Humphrey a job. Without work a man is undone."

"But how?" she asked. "How? He's tried everything, poor dear. There are thousands like him, and no jobs."

"Fudge!" I said. "A fellow with grit makes his own job. England wants workers. There's a lot to be done."

"Not without capital," said Dorothy.

I said: "I have a bit put by. A little nest-egg from a pre-war novel. Humphrey can have it—to give him a start."

I think it was that promise which gave Dorothy new hope, and made her patient with me when I reproached her for losing heart and nerve, after all her courage in the war.

"You must get a job too," I told her. "Some new purpose in life, my dear. Perhaps love will come to you again. Some nice boy——"

She coloured deeply, and said: "I'm Hilary's widow."

I did not pursue that subject, but took up a new line of argument.

"It's up to you young people. If you don't get a move on, then the war was fought in vain, and the sacrifice of boys like Hilary counts for nothing."

"My job is to save Humphrey," she said. "Nothing else matters."

We talked for an hour or more, until she fell asleep in my chair like a drooping rose.

It was a few weeks later that I found my way of getting into Russia at last. It came when England, under Lloyd George, agreed to send out a trade mission to Moscow, with a watching brief. All Conservative thought in England, all those who regarded Bolshevism as the greatest danger to the world—I felt I knew too little of it then to be dogmatic—denounced this partial recognition of the Soviet State as treachery to civilisation. I was not one of them. It seemed to me the only means of letting a little light into that infernal darkness of Russia. At least we should get to know the truth. In any case, it gave me my chance at last of finding Katherine.

By using all the influence I could pull in certain quarters, I succeeded in being sent out to the British Trade Mission in Moscow as a special courier, and I started on that journey in the autumn of 1920, after a painful scene with my mother, who believed that she would never see me again, and that I should certainly be shot by the Bolsheviks.

Humphrey came to my house the night before I left, with a letter for Rita von Nostitz, who was living now in Berlin, where I should have to stay for a night or two on my way to the Russian frontier. I had promised to deliver it, but now he asked me to do something else for him, more difficult. It was to

bring Rita back with me when I returned from Russia.

"I can't wait any longer," he said. "I want a wife and babies. Besides, it isn't fair on Rita—all this damned delay. Now, with your help——"

"Have you decided what to do?" I asked.

He had his plans all cut and dried, he told me. He was going to start a pig-farm in Sussex, not enormously far from Evesham Hall. . . . Pedigree pigs! There was money in them, and Dorothy would help him for a time, until Rita came. It was a sound idea.

"Better than the motor agency?" I asked.

I had paid a hundred pounds for him as a guarantee to a motoring firm, but it hadn't worked out well. He hadn't the gift of salesmanship, it seemed, and had been deliberately rude to a fat profiteer who had offered him a tip of half a crown after a trial drive. He preferred pigs to profiteers. Nice beasts, and easy to rear. There was a little old house he could get—Tudor in every beam—with fifteen acres of ground, going cheap. It would suit him marvellously, and, with Rita there, it would be idyllic. He hoped to pay me back one day, but never for all my help had meant to him. I had saved him from going bad.

I was repaid then by the new light in his eyes. The prospect of work, with that hope ahead, had lifted the darkness from his soul, I thought. The boy was like his old self again, keen and humorous; and I thanked God for the success of a bad novel which had been the cause of his rescue from black despair.

"What about your mother?" I asked. "Is she reconciled to a German daughter-in-law?"

Humphrey said: "Poor old mater! Nothing on earth will ever do that. I've given up arguing. It only leads to painful scenes."

Dorothy came to see me off on my way to Russia. She, too, had brighter eyes, now that Humphrey seemed to be pulling himself out of the slough of despond. And her words of gratitude and love sent me on my journey with a sense of hopefulness for this boy and girl.

She slipped a note into my hand; and I saw that it was addressed to Michael.

"If you find him," she said; and I saw the colour deepen in her cheeks, and a smile playing in her eyes, at the thought of his passionate wooing.

"Do you want him to come back?" I asked rather teasingly.

"We amused each other," she said, shirking a straight answer.

So I went, stopping two days in Berlin on the way to Riga, where I should have to wait again for a train to Moscow.

I managed to get half an hour with Rita von Nostitz, to whom I sent a letter by hand to the address on Humphrey's envelope. She came alone, looking very timid in the hall of the Adlon Hotel, crowded with American business men, Jews of all nations, and German *Schieber*, speculating in the downfall of the

mark and the fluctuation of foreign exchanges.

It was before the madness of inflation had reached its ultimate delirium; but at something like ten thousand marks to the pound the bottom was dropping out of German credit, and I could see less hope than ever of getting those fantastic reparations with which France—and to some extent England—were deluding themselves. All that may seem to have nothing to do with Rita von Nostitz; yet even the life of a girl like that was touched and, indeed, bludgeoned, by the state of Europe after war, as all our lives were, and as she told me.

She took my hand shyly, and said; "I hope you are very well," and blushed when I gave her Humphrey's letter, and touched it with her lips before hiding it in her muff.

"We have to wait for such a long time!" she said. "It seems so strange that he cannot find work to do. England is so rich, compared with Germany, and yet here everyone is working."

That was true, as one could guess even by a casual walk through the city of Berlin. There were no processions of unemployed, no groups of idle men hanging round the street corners, not many beggars. One blind man—an ex-soldier, still in his field-grey—sitting with a tin mug on his lap a hundred yards from the Adlon Hotel, was the only reminder of the wounds of war. Somehow Germany was hiding her poverty, as she hid her cripples.

But it was there, it seemed. When I ordered tea for Rita von Nostitz she looked round the hotel lounge, where the American business men were drinking "highballs" at four o'clock in the afternoon, and where international financiers were eating rich cakes with their little ladies.

"This is terrible!" she said in a low voice.

I asked her what was terrible, and she said: "These rich and ugly people who seem to have so much money to spend when so many are starving."

"Here in Berlin?" I asked doubtfully, and she looked surprised at my question.

"The working-folk do not get enough to eat," she told me. "I know, you see, because I work among them. It is very bad even in the middle classes. They get enough to eat—that is true—but only if they stint and scrape. It is clothes that cost so much money."

She blushed a little, and then spoke with candour.

"I have to go to bed when my clothes are being washed. There are many of my friends like that."

She laughed, and touched her skirt.

"This poor frock of mine! It has been turned already twice. I am ashamed to wear it in this great hotel."

"But surely," I exclaimed, "the daughter of a General——"

She told me that her father was a poor man. He had lost his estates in Russia, from which he had had most of his money. It was only the new rich and the business people who were getting prosperous again, on paper money which only kept its value for a day or two.

“But we cannot complain,” she said. “In Austria it is worse. In Vienna there is nothing but hunger and despair. They are without hope.”

She looked at me with reproachful eyes, as though I were responsible for the state of Europe, and said; “Why did England let France make such a bad peace?”

“It might have been better,” I said. “But any peace would have left the ruin of war.”

“It is cruel and terrible,” she said. “It is impossible for Germany to pay all that money. Now France talks of invading the Ruhr. Otto says if that happens Germany will be utterly ruined. Surely England will not drive us to despair like Austria?”

I groaned a little at the insoluble problems which the war had left us.

“The English people believe in fair play,” I said. “They want to be just—to France as well as to Germany. One can’t forget the agony of France, or our own great losses.”

I saw that tears were dropping down her cheeks.

“I do not understand these things,” she cried. “It seems as though God had forsaken the world. I have nothing but my love for Humphrey, and sometimes I think he does not wish me to come to England.”

I could reassure her about that. Humphrey longed for her coming. I had promised to take her back with me on my return from Russia, if she would come. Surely he had told her so in his letter?

She admitted that, but said he wrote sometimes as though he were afraid of her coming. His mother hated her already. Perhaps she would only bring unhappiness if she left her people and went to England, where everyone would hate her.

I said: “Hate will die. The English people do not cherish it. Already there are some of us who will welcome you. His father is very kind.”

She smiled at my mention of Humphrey’s father, and said: “Yes, he must be a very noble gentleman. I have had some letters from him, which I treasure very much.”

I asked after her blind brother, and she told me that he was happy, in spite of everything, helping to organise a youth movement in Germany which was spreading very fast among the young men and women. They had declared war on the old traditions of force and materialism. Some of them called themselves the “*Wandervögel*,” and wandered about the country singing the old songs and performing folk-dances for anything the people might give them. They did not

wear many clothes, and lived simply—on milk and cheese and fruit. They wanted to get back to nature and spiritualise modern civilisation. It made old-fashioned people very angry. Otto did not live at home now because his father hated these ideas and thought they were full of treason and would bring Germany to ruin.

I told her that I gave my blessing to anything that would bring peace to the world and encourage youth to new ideals.

“I am afraid!” she said, with a little gesture of despair. “We are beginning to hate again. It is dreadful. Not Otto and me, and some of our friends, but many others. They say that only force can break the Peace Treaty which has made us slaves.”

She was a girl of twenty, delicate and pretty; and it was strange—and rather dreadful—to hear her talking like a politician or an old woman worried with the affairs of State. But all over Europe, at that time, and even in England, such conversation was to be heard in drawing-rooms and tea-rooms. The war, and this peace that had followed, and the agony and disillusion of simple minds, had forced everyone to think of the great problems of international relations, perhaps for the first time in the history of the world. I wondered what would come out of all such talk. Surely something better than a harking back to old ideas and old systems and old hatreds! If the world’s youth was beginning to think like Rita von Nostitz and her brother—and those *Wandervögel* she talked about—there might be some hope for a forward movement, beyond the jungle of race-hatreds. There might even be an escape from the materialism of our machine-made age, defended by high explosives.

When she rose to go I took her hand, and said: “When I come back from Russia, will you let me take you to England with me? Humphrey will have a home ready.”

She blushed very deeply for a moment, and then all the colour faded from her face and left her pale.

“If my love makes me brave,” she said simply. “I long to go to him. But it will be very hard to live always among people who hate my dear Fatherland, and who think it would be good if all of us were killed. Do you not think so?”

I did think so, but for Humphrey’s sake I did not say so. I told her that Humphrey would give her courage, and try to make her happy.

She did not answer, but the look in her eyes made me think that for love’s sake she would take the risk.

XXX

IT was on an autumn afternoon that I reached Moscow, and the first snow had fallen, as when I had been there on my brief visit before the war. The outward aspect of the city was the same, with its glittering cupolas under a steel-blue sky, the fan-shaped battlements of the inner and outer walls outlined by frozen snow, and the crowded churches and palaces within the Kremlin making a vision of fantastic beauty as I saw it again from the riverside.

Revolution and Red Terror had not destroyed it. It was only here and there that I saw signs of civil war. Some of the houses were empty shells, as though burnt out, or blown out by high explosives, and I noticed that some of the walls were pitted and scarred by rifle- or machine-gun-fire. But there was no ruin such as I had seen for four and a half years along the Western Front. There was only a sense that life had died here, or that the city was plague-stricken, or haunted in some way by fear or famine.

I walked down a long street which I knew had been the Bond Street of Moscow, though I had forgotten its name. The houses which had once been shops were all boarded up, as though for a siege, and above the boards the plaster was crumbling, and the windows were broken and stuffed up with rags. There was something dead about the people I saw—a dead look in their eyes, as though the spirit had left their bodies or was frozen by the cold.

Here and there people were in the roadways shovelling away the snow, but not speaking to each other, or laughing or showing any sign of human interest. They looked to me like middle-class folk, in spite of their shabby clothes and bits of sacking tied about their legs. One man wore a bowler hat, broken round the rim, but there was something about his face, with its little pointed beard and sharp cheek-bones, which gave him an air of gentility. He raised his head, and our eyes met, and in his eyes I saw a look of amazement, as if I had come down from Mars. It must have been because of my decent clothes and my foreign appearance.

Some women stared at me in the same way as I passed, carrying my hand-bag, and I looked back at them, wondering if by any miracle I should find Katherine among them. They were haggard and hollow-eyed, and I did not see Katherine's beauty. I noticed that their skirts were ragged and mud-stained, and that they had dirty hands, but they were different from the Russian peasant type. They had once been ladies, before Communism had abolished all differences of class, and I needed no guide to tell me so. They were shovelling the snow away with heavy spades.

A lonely *droschke* with a lean horse followed me down the street, and I

noded to the driver, and made him understand with great difficulty that I wanted to go to the British Mission.

It was from Agnew of the Mission that I made my first enquiries about Katherine and Michael. He knew nothing of either of them, but assured me that if they were still alive it would be easy to find them. He was going to make a register of English-born people, and two or three had already reported themselves. There was an old Irish governess who had been caught by the Revolution and was more than half starved, but wonderfully full of pluck. She wanted to live long enough to die in “dear old dirty Dublin!” She hadn’t heard about the civil war in Ireland. And there was an old colonel who had lived in Moscow for thirty years, and had held some minor post at the Imperial Court. He had been in prison for a year or more, but now was free and half dotty, said Agnew. There were others in about the same state.

“They’ve had a hell of a time,” said Agnew, twisting his little fair moustache. “Russia under Lenin is not Utopia. I should say it’s the nearest thing on earth to what all our civilisation will be like after another bright little war. Industry gone phut, widespread disease, famine creeping near, and a kind of melancholy fatalism in the spirit of the people.”

“What about liberty?” I asked. And I thought of Serge Detloff’s “dream,” and of the long struggle for liberty by Russian idealists in the prisons of the Czar, in exile, in untold sacrifice.

Agnew laughed. He was a humorous young man, who had kept his nerve in many adventures of war, mostly in Palestine, and was now studying the situation in Russia at the request of the Foreign Office, to which he was attached.

“I’ve been looking for liberty! The dictatorship of the proletariat and all that, eh? It would be rather interesting to see, as an experiment in human progress. So far, however, it has eluded my observation. I’ve only seen a nation under the tyranny of fear—fear of police spies, fear of arrest without trial, fear of free speech, fear of each other. The prisons are crowded with people who have uttered incautious words about the Soviet State; not aristocrats or counter-revolutionaries—most of those are in Berlin, Paris, and Constantinople—but poor devils of working men who fail to get their rations in the factories, and old professors who were Liberals in time of Czardom, and young students betrayed by Communist comrades for reactionary ideas. The only ideas allowed in Russia are the gospel according to Karl Marx and the truth according to Lenin.”

“A homicidal maniac?” I asked. “Or a man of intellect?”

“A little of both,” said Agnew, “as far as I can make out. Ruthless of life, like all Orientals, and all fanatics. Utterly indifferent to immediate suffering, so that ultimate good may prevail—his idea of “good.” Perfectly sincere, I fancy,

in his belief that the capitalist system is the curse of humanity. I'm not sure that he isn't right, theoretically speaking! But in practice it seems to be a necessary evil. That's what Lenin has just found out. He sees that the whole of his experiment has been the most ghastly, devastating failure. The astonishing thing is that he has the honesty to say so. You've just come in time to see the end of Communism in Russia."

He saw my look of surprise and incredulity, and it seemed to amuse him.

"Oh, they'll try to save their face a bit with the outside world. But the game's up, and they know it. Lenin has announced a new economic policy. A noble phrase? It's the great confession of failure. They're re-establishing money wages instead of rations for service. They're going to allow private trading instead of jailing anybody who tries to barter secretly—a pair of old boots for a bit of food. The first market was opened to-day. Come and have a look at it."

It was with young Agnew of the Mission that I went into the Trubnaya Market. We passed down long lines of wooden booths, laden with goods that looked like rubbish from old curiosity shops, and here and there with vegetables and chunks of evil-looking meat.

"That's the fellow who smashed Lenin," said Agnew, pointing to a straw-bearded peasant in his sheepskin coat and fur cap.

"Who is he?" I asked, startled for a moment.

Agnew laughed.

"I don't mean this particular individual, but his class. The *moujik*. The Russian peasant, of whom there are ninety-nine million or thereabouts. He didn't like to see his produce requisitioned by Red soldiers to feed the city workers. He didn't care a curse about the cities. He hid his grain when the Red soldiers came, or burnt it, or under-sowed his fields. Now there's a drought on the Volga, and Famine is creeping over Russia—Famine with a big F. There's not enough food to go round, even in Moscow. Lenin and Co. are getting frightened."

Down the narrow lanes between the booths wandered young soldiers of the Red Army—pale-faced, under-nourished, under-sized, in heavy overcoats too long in the sleeves, and with queer hoods of cloth, rising to a peak behind like Assyrian helmets, with the red star of the Soviet Republic over their foreheads. On the outskirts of the market some of them stood on guard with fixed bayonets, but the others were unarmed, and fingered the wares on the stalls with sullen eyes.

"Trotsky's tigers!" said Agnew. "Hungry and degenerate. They would run like rabbits before well-led troops."

On the south side of the market square, beyond the last row of booths, stood a long line of men and women, like hawkers, with little trays on which

they were holding a few trinkets or odds and ends, such as field-glasses, woollen gloves, pairs of knitted socks, leather gaiters, bits of lace or embroidery, woollen vests, fountain pens, gilt crosses, old shoes. Some of the women carried their goods over their arms—fur tippets, shawls, petticoats, blankets—which peasant women fingered with curious, greedy eyes.

I looked at the faces of these people standing there in the snow, which had melted about their feet, so that they were ankle deep in brown slush. They looked numb with cold and pinched with hunger, and they had frightened eyes, as though not sure they had the right to stand there and offer their wares. So I thought, and Agnew expressed the same idea.

“They look scared, poor wretches. They think this new liberty may be some kind of trap. They’re afraid of the Cheka—the Soviet police.”

I was silent, and felt sick. These hawkers in the market were men and women who once in history had known the comforts of life, its luxuries, its beauty. Not even misery like this could disguise them. I looked into the eyes of men who had a dignity even in this wretchedness, and at the faces of women whose refinement—some touch of quality and grace—was not concealed even by clothes that a poor drab in London would have regarded with disgust. At least, most of them were in shabby old skirts, frayed and stained, with shawls about their heads like peasant women, but here and there one of the younger women was neatly dressed, and wore a hat that might have passed without notice in a civilised city.

Agnew spoke to one or two in Russian, but they shrank from him as though such conversation were dangerous, or as though he were a spy among them. One girl at whom I glanced for a moment blushed painfully, and turned her head aside, and then became as pale as death, and moved very quickly away from me. She was selling a pair of baby shoes, as I noticed before she went. Perhaps her baby had died!

“Good God!” I exclaimed to Agnew. “Those poor creatures!”

“The last of the old middle-class,” he said, “and some of them aristocrats. What they’ve suffered couldn’t be written. It would sear one’s soul.”

Suddenly, at the sound of this English speech, a woman near me uttered a startled cry, and then a thin hand grasped my wrist as I was walking by, and she spoke my name.

“Gilbert! . . . Is it you? . . . Here in Moscow?”

I turned, and felt myself trembling, and my heart beat so that it made a loud knocking in my ears.

I looked into the face of the woman who held me by the wrist with her skinny hand. It was the face of a woman I did not know at first, because of her white hair, and thin cheek-bones, and deep-sunk eyes, in which there was a bright light burning like fever. There was a smudge of dirt down her right

cheek, and a strand of white hair had come unloosened under the ragged fur of her cap. I seemed to know her. There was something in her eyes that I had known. Some ghost had spoken to me. . . . I knew that it was Katherine!

I took her hands and put them to my lips, and said, "Oh, my dear, my dear!"—and some weakness took possession of me, so that tears streamed down my face. Katherine had lost her beauty. She was a woman made old and ugly by agony and misery beyond my guessing.

She did not weep. She spoke joyful words.

"I knew you'd come. I was waiting for you. I prayed I might live till you came."

It was Katherine's voice as I had always known it, quiet and kind.

The people about us in the market-place were staring at us curiously. One of the Red Soldiers elbowed his way nearer to us and gazed suspiciously. A young man in civil clothes, better dressed than all the others, with a leather jacket and astrachan cap, was listening to our words as though he understood them.

Agnew told us rather nervously that we had better move on.

We walked away from the market, and Katherine put her hand on my arm and said, "I can hardly speak for gladness. It's a miracle, finding you here. But I knew it would happen."

She stopped suddenly, and asked an anxious question, and seemed afraid of my answer.

"Who is alive among my dear ones? . . . Paul? . . . Humphrey?"

She thanked God when I said "Both alive."

I told her of the two boys who had been killed—Harold and Cuthbert—and some of the friends we had known.

She gave a little cry and said, "Poor mothers of men!"

I wanted to ask after Michael and Serge, but hadn't the courage. I was almost certain they were dead.

Agnew called an *isvostchik* who was asleep in his *droschke*.

"You had better drive the lady home," he suggested. "I'll see you later at the Mission."

Katherine demurred for a moment.

"It will cost a dreadful lot of money. Enough for six meals."

Then she smiled and said, "I suppose Russian money doesn't mean much to you. Here we think only in food values, and the peasants are very greedy. It cost me my best pair of boots for a small piece of meat. Only please don't tell anyone, because I might be sent to prison again."

"Again?" I exclaimed. "Prison?"

"For six weeks," said Katherine. "I nearly broke poor Michael's heart. He suffered much more than I did, though it wasn't nice. He's very sensitive, poor

dear, especially when he thinks that I'm suffering."

"Then Michael is alive!" I cried, with a sense of gladness.

"Alive and well," she told me, "though it's a hard struggle sometimes to make him eat enough. You see, we share our rations, which are never enough, and he quarrels if I don't divide them fairly, though of course I don't need so much."

"All that's finished," I said. "I'll see that you have enough to eat."

"It's better now," said Katherine. "Michael is teaching at the University, and gets extra food sometimes, which he brings home. If it weren't for his worry about Tamia——"

She broke off her sentence and said, "God has been good to us, Gilbert."

Those last words startled me. They were spoken with a quiet thankfulness, as though for many blessings, whereas I knew already that Katherine had been in prison, that she had starved, that she was in abject poverty, that she was in Moscow under Lenin, with famine creeping near.

"What about Tamia?" I asked. "Why does Michael worry about her?"

Katherine seemed amused by my impatience to know everything, and I was glad to see her smile.

"There are so many things to tell you! Michael married Tamia. I think it saved him from going mad after poor Serge died."

So Michael had married Tamia, and Serge was dead! What a lot I had to learn about this little family since silence had closed down on Russia.

"Tell me from the beginning," I said. "What happened to you when the Revolution broke out? When did Serge die? Why did Michael marry Tamia? I know nothing. I want to know everything."

"It would take a year to tell you everything," said Katherine, and when she smiled again I saw my dear friend once more, as though something of her beauty came back through her eyes.

She could not tell me everything in that *droschke* as we drove through the streets of Moscow, with their boarded shops, and here and there past a ruined house, and a shell-broken wall, in this snowbound city which seemed deserted of life, except for a few people dragging sledges, and some peasants shuffling by, and, across the Red Square, a group of prisoners with their hands tied, marching between some Red soldiers—those pale-faced boys in long overcoats, with fixed bayonets. Sometimes the *droschke*, with its starved horse, lurched over deep holes in the roadways, so that Katherine and I were flung together. Once the poor beast fell to its knees, and the *isvostchik* cursed. But meanwhile Katherine told me some of her story—the outline of it, the skeleton of its misery, making my heart sink because of its cruelty to this woman I had loved.

It was strange that she did not seem to realise her own suffering. She

laughed even when she told me how Michael and she had been turned out of their big house in the Sophieskaya and trudged across that Red Square pushing a hand-cart, on which she had loaded some of her household goods. She had managed to persuade the commissar to let her take a little spinet—perhaps I remembered it, she thought—because Michael loved music so much, and she thought it might be a joy to them. The commissar—he was only a boy—had turned a blind eye to this and some other things which were very useful. . . .

That was after the Bolsheviks had come into power and established Communism, and after the fighting, when the cadets had thrown up barricades and held out in some of the houses with machine-gun-fire. Katherine and Michael had heard the firing and seen the sky red with flames. The cadets were all killed or captured. After that the Terror began, and all the houses were searched for counter-revolutionaries and people of the old régime. The prisons were crowded, and there were executions, it was impossible to say how many, said Katherine, because one could only tell by the disappearance of one's friends.

Most of the rich people had escaped during the Kerensky régime. It was only the poor intellectuals and the ordinary middle-class who stayed on, hoping for liberty to begin. That was why Serge had stayed.

For a long time he believed that after the bloodshed there would be peace and liberty. Towards the end he spent his days in weeping because of so much cruelty and the tyranny of the Soviet leaders. It was fear that made them cruel, he said. They were afraid of counter-revolution, and they hated the *bourgeoisie* and the old intellectual as their worst enemies.

Serge was arrested and examined by the Cheka. He was very brave, and fellow-prisoners told Katherine of his wonderful dignity when he made a plea to the Cheka on behalf of the liberty for which he had devoted all his life. He told them they were behaving like mad beasts, and that they would drag down Russia to ruin, and make a mockery of all those centuries of struggle against the tyranny of Czardom by idealists who had suffered for freedom of speech, and who hated cruelty.

The officers of the Cheka listened to him in silence. Only one man was impatient, and said that he had sentenced himself to death and was wasting the time of the court. But they didn't shoot him. He was liberated after six months, and died in Katherine's arms.

"His last word was 'Liberty,' " said Katherine. "My dear, faithful husband had liberty at last."

Michael had wept very much, and cursed the Bolsheviks, though at first he had been in favour of them.

"After that?" I asked. "How did you live? What did Michael do?"

Katherine was silent for a moment before she answered, and a slight

shudder shook her, though she spoke calmly.

"It was difficult to live. You see, there was never enough food. One had to line up in a queue with one's ticket for rations—millet seed and black bread, and dried fish sometimes, and little packets of tea. But everyone was hungry. I saw Michael was getting so weak that he could hardly drag himself to the factory where he was learning to make boots."

He was also very melancholy, she said, and she used to hear him crying at night, and groaning as though in pain. But he used to hide this from her, and pretend to be cheerful for her sake. Sometimes they laughed quite a lot. It was strange to think how much they laughed. They used to pretend they were having English meals, beginning with porridge and fried fish and going on to eggs and bacon, with hot rolls and plenty of butter and marmalade. Michael used to remember the breakfast he had at the Clarendon with Dorothy, when he chaffed her for her appetite. They made a joke of these remembrances, until they were conscious of hunger again, or until they quarrelled because Michael slipped some of his food on to his mother's plate. One morning he fainted with hunger.

"That frightened me," said Katherine. "It was after his fainting that I began to barter things for food. It was against the law, of course, but everybody was doing it. Even Soviet officials! Michael hated me to do it, because of the risk, but I was very lucky for a time. It was Suvorin—do you remember him?—who used to go out into the country and sell things for me to the peasants. He lives in the same house with us, and is very kind. I don't know what we should do without him. He has nothing in the world himself, but keeps us cheerful by his humour."

I thought of my last meeting with Suvorin—that strange, melancholy, attractive creature—in Princess Miliukoff's drawing-room. He didn't believe that we should meet again in this world—after the war that was going to happen. Yet he and I were still alive after so much death. Now he was a humorist in this Moscow of misery and famine!

"It was our house commissar who betrayed us," said Katherine. "He hated us because we belonged to the old class, and because we laughed and tried to be brave. I think he was made more sullen against us by his wife, who was jealous of us because we weren't coarse like she was, poor thing. She was furious when we tried to be polite and kind to her. . . . Isn't that strange? . . . Well, it was when dear Suvorin brought back a big cheese and a bag of potatoes that I fell into trouble. He had got them in return for my last set of chemises, which he sold to a peasant woman. We arranged to have a little feast that night with Olga—Princess Miliukoff—and Tamia, and Michael, and Suvorin, and me. Suvorin gave me the things in the hall, and then went down into the cellar to tell Tamia, where she and Olga were living—with the rats. . . .

But perhaps I am boring you, my dear?"

She had heard me draw a deep breath which was half a groan.

"I'm not bored," I said. "I'm only shocked at all you have suffered. . . . What happened?"

"The house commissar stopped me in the passage, and asked what I had got in the bag. I lied to him for Michael's sake—and I'm ashamed of that now. I said, 'Some sticks of wood, *Tavarish!*' . . . *Tavarish* means comrade! . . . He caught hold of the bag and said, 'Let me see.' I struggled with him a little—it was very foolish, because I had no strength. When he saw the big cheese and the potatoes he said, 'You're a liar, like all women of your class.' I offered him half the potatoes, and he was tempted. But his wife came down the passage. She had been watching and listening. She said, 'The police will have something to say about this. This house stinks of *bourjoi*. It's time some of them were cleared out.' . . . I was very frightened at what she said about the police. I offered her the cheese. I said, 'Here is a fine present for you.' My hands were trembling so much I could hardly hold the cheese."

Katherine laughed at this remembrance of her fear.

"The woman eyed it greedily. She was hungry like the rest of us, poor thing. But hate was stronger even than hunger. She said, 'Keep your dirty cheese. The police will be here before you can eat it.' . . . They let me go upstairs, dragging the bag. It was terribly heavy, and I was weak. Then Michael came home and saw how white I was. He put his arms round me and asked if I were ill, and I hadn't the courage to tell him what had happened. Just then there was a bang at the door, and two men came in without waiting for an answer. They were the Soviet police, and told me to go with them. One of them kicked the bag, so that some of the potatoes rolled out. He said, 'Six weeks prison, and you'll meet a lot of friends.' He seemed to think it rather a joke, and wasn't very rude—or rough, until Michael became excited. He told the men that he would kill them if they tried to take me away.

"They laughed at that, and one of them touched me on the arm and said, 'Tell this young man not to be foolish.' I called out to Michael, because of the look in his eyes. But he didn't listen to me, and flung himself on the man who held me by the arm. It was the other man who knocked him down with a dreadful blow in the face. Then I was taken away to prison. . . . I wept for Michael. I knew that he would suffer agony until I came back again."

"What was the prison like?" I asked, and the thought of it sickened me.

"It wasn't a pleasant place," said Katherine. "We were overcrowded. The vermin was the worst of all—and the dreadful smell of unwashed women. Some of my friends were there for this crime of secret trading, and there were peasant women and young student-girls. One of the women went mad and tried to beat her brains out against the wall. Then typhus broke out, and one poor

girl raved in her fever and died. Then six others, who were taken away. . . . All this time I thought of Michael, and prayed for him. When I came back he was very ill. I found him lying on the floor, with Tamia on her knees by his side. He hadn't eaten anything for days, and had cried his eyes out because I was in prison. He suffered a thousand times more than I did, poor dear."

"You've been through hell," I said, "you and Michael."

Katherine clasped my hand beneath the fur cover of the *droschke*.

"It hasn't been as bad as all that. The human mind adapts itself—wonderfully. Michael was happy when he married Tamia. They quarrelled a lot, but were good comrades. They used to walk through the snow to the Opera, and come back laughing and quarrelling about art and music, and forget their hunger for a time. I waited up to make the tea. I used to pull a petticoat across the broken window and pretend we were in the Cromwell Road! . . . Then Tamia had to escape, and that made Michael miserable again. You see, we don't know whether she is still alive, or where she is. Suvorin could only take her part of the way on the journey to Tsaritsin. She was going to get a boat, if possible, across the Black Sea to Constantinople. It's the easiest way of escape, they say."

"But why should she have to escape?" I asked. "Wasn't it better to stay with Michael?"

"She was foolish," said Katherine. "She used to denounce Communism among the students of the University, and one of them betrayed her. It was Suvorin who was warned by a friend in the Cheka. He managed to get a pass for her as a Red Cross nurse. Suvorin can do all sorts of things!"

Katherine reproached herself for talking such a lot, and explained that I could hardly understand the joy of speaking freely without fear of spies, and the still greater joy of finding me alive, sitting beside her, as once. Was it a thousand years ago?—she and I had sat together in a hansom cab in dear old London before the war—dear Lord! before the war in South Africa!—when we were boy and girl, not dreaming of the history we should see, and this ruin of the world.

"Tell me more!" I pleaded. But she smiled, and said:

"It's my turn to ask questions—thousands of them—and, anyhow, here we are at the journey's end, goodness knows how many millions of roubles it will cost you! In another minute you will see Michael—his joyous surprise."

In another minute I saw Michael.

It was in a room at the top of a flight of wooden stairs—a small room, barely furnished with a deal table and some chairs, with a torn petticoat pinned up as a curtain at the broken window-panes, and some photographs of Paul and Dorothy and Humphrey and me tacked to the walls, and an elegant little spinet in the corner of the room, looking strangely out of place—as the last relic of

Katherine's former life when she had been a great lady.

Michael was sitting at the deal table reading a book, with his head propped in his hands. He had grown a little beard and moustache, and his face was thin, and his eyes were deeply sunk. He looked ten years older than when I had last seen him in time of war. His throat was bare, without a collar, and he wore a Russian blouse of some coarse brown stuff, fastened by a belt over corduroy trousers.

As we entered he said, "Hello, mother!" and then saw me, and stood up slowly, staring at me with a look of amazement, as though not believing his eyes.

"Michael!" cried Katherine. "It's Gilbert. He has come to us. At last!"

"Great God!" said Michael.

He thrust a thin hand through his tousled hair, as though waking from a dream.

"Michael!" I said. "My dear lad!"—and again some weakness overwhelmed me, a great pity, so that there were tears in my eyes.

He overturned the chair by his side as he made his way towards me.

"Unbelievable!" he said, in a low voice. "People don't come to Russia now!"

Then he gave a weak kind of laugh, and put his arms about me and suddenly began to weep, as though at the sight of me all that he and Katherine had suffered since we last met surged up in dreadful remembrance.

Katherine put her arms about us both and said, "My dears, my dears!"

IT was a kind of communal lodging-house where Katherine and Michael lived in two rooms. Most of the houses in Moscow were like it, shared up by an odd assortment of people, according to the dictates of some Soviet house committee. Suvorin had a room on the ground floor, about as big as a bathroom in a London suburb, in which he had a truckle bed and one chair, and a table he had made out of packing-cases. Princess Miliukoff had an underground room which I suppose had been a wine-cellar, or perhaps a servant's room, in the old days when this house belonged to a Moscow merchant.

Upstairs the big apartments had been divided by partitions, giving living and sleeping room to some boy and girl students of the University, two opera singers, an old professor, a clerk in a Soviet office, and a bed-ridden invalid who had been a lady-in-waiting to the Empress, and now, after the execution of her husband and son, lay waiting for death very patiently, paralysed down one side, and relying on the charity of her neighbours for any comfort in life. It was Katherine who nursed her, fed her, and washed her.

It was the difficulty of washing which was their greatest discomfort, next to the scarcity of food. The pipes had broken, and there was only one tap at the end of a long passage where they could get a drop of water. There was no soap. They had hardly seen a bit of soap since the Revolution, and then it was only to be bought at great prices of barter. Fuel was also hard to get, unless they had the strength and time to drag back wood from the country outside Moscow, which Suvorin did now and then to keep Katherine's stove alight. As a rule they sat in unheated rooms, numb with cold on winter evenings, so cold that sometimes Katherine's fingers could not play the little spinet, which had been a joy to all of them.

I learnt all these things by degrees, and saw deeper into their way of life and its abominable squalor. Under Communism, following war and revolution, the whole machinery of civilised life had broken down. Because of the flight from the factories by workers, who had deserted to the country to scrape a bare existence out of the soil—their only chance of decent food—the wear and tear of city life could not be repaired, or anything replaced. The drains were in a dreadful state. The commonest things needed for household use, like pails, and brooms, and plates, and cups, could not be procured when once they were worn out or broken.

It was a kind of Gipsy way of life, or as though all these people had been shipwrecked on a desert island, with the salvage of a former civilised state to

which they looked back hopelessly. The plaster was crumbling on the fronts of the houses. In some of them banisters and doors had been burnt for fuel in the early days of revolution. Tiles fell off and were not replaced, so that rain came through the ceilings, and the walls were stained with damp patches.

In Katherine's house there was a foul, sickly smell, as though there were dead rats behind the boarding. When I thought of her home-life in England—those dear old days at Romilly Hall, and her pretty drawing-room in the Cromwell Road, and remembered also the elegance and beauty in which Princess Miliukoff had passed her days, flirting and chattering and laughing—it seemed to me incredible that they could bear this misery with any kind of courage. And yet the strange truth is that, in spite of it all, they laughed as well as wept, and had hours of happiness as well as of despair, and were marvellously brave. It is not easy to kill the spirit of gallant souls.

It was Princess Miliukoff who revealed this philosophy to me. Katherine took me down to her cellar, and she gave a little cry of amazement when she saw me, and then held out her hand for me to kiss, just in the same way as when I used to meet her in her London house.

"It's a grubby hand—water is precious here!—but there's good blood beneath the skin. Those Bolshevik wretches can't rob me of that, till they kill me against a white wall."

"Hush!" said Katherine. "Walls have ears."

"Pooh! Let them listen," said Olga Miliukoff. "They'll get the truth from me."

She held me at arm's length, and said: "You look older. The war has put its imprint on you, dear man. But I love the sight of you in those good clothes. How clean you look! How beautiful! Do people like you still live in the world? . . . If I weren't old, and ugly, and dirty, I'd make love to you again."

I told her she was beautiful, more beautiful than ever, and I meant it, because, though she was in a shabby old frock, and had dirty hands, and a thin, worn face in which her black eyes burned, I did homage to her fine spirit, which could still be gay in this rat-haunted room, in this dreadful Russia.

"How can you be so brave?" I asked. "You and Katherine—in this Bolshevik Moscow?"

"Dear, lying flatterer!" she cried, with laughter in her eyes because of my praise of her beauty, and she answered my question about her courage.

"Sheer pride. Tradition. A refusal to show the white feather, however afraid one is. That's my way of courage; though Katherine here is a saint, and gets hers from God."

I looked round her dark little room, and she saw the pity in my eyes, and smiled, with a careless shrug of her shoulders.

"It's not too good! But shall I tell you a secret? I am quite happy here when

I'm not too cold and not too hungry, and not too angry with those murderers who killed my man and tried to catch Tamia. There are many like me in this Moscow of ours—the people of the old caste who have lost everything. It's because there's nothing more to lose, I suppose—a sense of liberation from the cares of life. Even death loses its fear. Death? *Je m'en fiche!* It is trivial, this ridiculous death, after the ruin of the world! We laugh sometimes, don't we, Katherine, my saint? We make a joke of our misery—it is the only way. We talk and talk. Not even Communism can cure us of that. Upstairs in Katherine's room, where we sit on the bare boards, with a petticoat drawn across the window, we have a little music sometimes, and forget Mr. Lenin and his friend Mr. Trotsky, and somebody brings a packet of tea for Katherine's samovar, and it seems like a banquet. Then we discuss the future of the world, and find it wonderfully amusing. Liberty? Peace? A new Russian Imperialism? World Revolution? The downfall of civilisation? The second coming of Christ? . . . Wonderful subjects for sprightly conversation!"

"You Russians are marvellous," I told her, but she put her hand through Katherine's arm, and said: "Here is an Englishwoman who is much more marvellous. Our courage is mostly mockery, but hers is the serenity of a Christian martyr, glad to suffer for God's sake."

"Hush!" said Katherine. "Hush!" And her poor, wan face blushed deeply, so that for a moment her old colour returned, giving back something of her youth.

"I won't be hushed!" said Olga Miliukoff. "I want this friend of ours to know that we all cling to you, that you have been our guardian angel because of your lovely spirit and your dear charity."

She turned to me again.

"It is this lady of yours who nurses us when we get sick, who gives us enough 'pluck'—as you say—to hide our fear when we're most frightened, who pretends that she is not hungry so that others may eat her food. When she was in prison the women worshipped her, even the poor, lousy peasant women, with minds like beasts—some of them."

"Please!" said Katherine. "You are talking nonsense, Olga."

"Hark at her!" laughed Princess Miliukoff. "She hates to hear a word of praise. Well, ask this boy of hers—our melancholy Jacques here. Michael, husband of Tamia—whom God help, poor child—haven't I told the truth?"

Michael looked at his mother and smiled, and I saw the tenderness in his sunken eyes.

"She doesn't spare herself," he said.

That night I took some food round to this house—wrapped up in clean table-napkins from the British Mission. Agnew helped me pack it up, and said: "The British Government pays, but they needn't know, and it's in the cause of

charity? What about this cheese, and those pats of butter? And now I come to think of it, we might put in a tin of honey. Nourishing stuff, honey.”

It was pitiable to see the pleasure, the surprise, the awe, even, with which this food was unpacked by Katherine and Michael and Olga Miliukoff. They were almost frightened of it. Katherine said she hadn’t seen so much wonderful food for years. Did I think it was quite right to bring so much at once? And didn’t it seem rather wicked to share it among so few when millions of people were hungry in Russia?

She was most delighted with the table-napkins, and they seemed to her beautiful beyond words—so beautiful that, when she spread them out and glanced for a moment at her dirty hands, I saw there were tears in her eyes.

“So dazzling white!” she exclaimed. “And starched! It’s all too wonderful.”

Michael stood by; and, as I unpacked biscuits and pats of butter and cream cheese, he said: “Good God! Good God!” as though miracles were happening.

“If only we could carry down the poor old Countess!” said Katherine.

It seemed that the Countess was the bedridden lady upstairs, but, as it was impossible to carry her down, Katherine took up some of the food in one of the table-napkins and came down with shining eyes.

“She can’t believe it,” she told us. “Her poor fingers are stroking the table-napkin as though it were some holy relic of her past life.”

We waited supper for Suvorin. He had been out all day, fetching wood, and had not heard of my coming. When he came into the room he did not see me at first. His eyes were fixed on the meal spread out on the white linen, and I saw them widen with a look of utter amazement. He spoke some words in Russian which I couldn’t understand, and Katherine and Olga laughed.

As he stood there I watched him curiously.

This bearded man in peasant clothes did not look like the untidy, whimsical, excitable fellow I had seen first at Princess Miliukoff’s country house when he had kept me up all night, and afterwards in London. His black hair was streaked with white, and his hands—delicate once—were coarse, with broken finger-nails, and his skin was grey, and drawn tightly over the cheek-bones, so that he had the look of a living skeleton. After he had spoken he coughed, with a hollow, consumptive sound.

Katherine spoke to him in English.

“A friend has come to see us. It is he who has brought us these fairy gifts.”

Suvorin turned round, and saw me where I stood by the spinet. For several moments he was speechless, and then he came towards me slowly.

“Do you come from heaven?” he asked. “Or across the ruin of the world?”

He put his hands on my shoulders and felt me, as though to make sure I was real. Then he flung his arms round me and kissed me on both cheeks.

I said: "You were right in your prophecies—which I wouldn't believe. The worst has happened."

"They were inevitable," he said carelessly. "But is the worst over? Or is it just the beginning of general dissolution which will reduce all civilisation to the state of Russia? Another war like the last—a world revolution—and humanity will lose its victories over barbarism, never more than outposts in the jungle."

I grabbed his arm, half in jest, but not quite.

"Look here!" I cried. "Don't you go prophesying again! My nerves aren't strong enough to stand it."

That evening, after our little meal—a banquet to them—the old professor came down to drink tea with us. He was a great biologist, I was told by Michael, but he looked like an old tramp who had been sleeping on the Embankment in rainy weather, and his boots were like those one sees behind wayside hedges abandoned by their owners. Then several young students crowded into Katherine's little room, three young men with pale faces and long hair, two young women with short hair and snow-boots below their skirts. They kissed Olga Miliukoff's hand as though she were still a great lady of Russia, and Katherine's hand with a kind of worshipful reverence, as though she were a saint.

Then they sat on the bare boards in a half-circle, when Suvorin asked me to tell them what was happening in the outside world. They knew nothing of the truth. They knew no more of actual conditions in England, or the rest of Europe, than if they had actually been wrecked on a desert island. The only news they had was what was told them in the two Soviet newspapers—*Pravda* and *Isvestia*—which was simply propaganda, full of lies. But they believed that England was seething with revolution, and that there had been frightful riots in which the troops had shot down the working classes. They believed that Germany was famine-stricken, and that Red Terror was stalking through its streets. They believed that even in the United States the economic conditions were so bad that a social cataclysm was inevitable! They were convinced, in spite of their incredulity of official news, that the British Empire was breaking up, and that India and the Mohammadan world was rising against the white races.

They listened to me in profound silence when I told them the truth of things as far as I knew it—not a very rosy truth, but not so bad as all that. I heard their breathing, an occasional whisper from one to another, little exclamations of surprise. It was as though they were listening to a divine revelation. Then they began to ask me questions.

"Why did England support those damnable expeditions for the invasion of Russia?" asked Suvorin.

I said, "They were directed against Bolshevism, not against the people of Russia."

"They played into the hands of the Soviet State," said Suvorin grimly. "Every Russian peasant swallowed his hatred of Bolshevism in order to defend his land and life against those murderous Whites. Those invasions—hangings, burnings, butcheries—made Trotsky a hero. They gave Lenin his best reason for ruthless Terror against counter-revolution. They fastened the chain round our necks, because it was better to submit to Soviet tyranny than let ourselves be over-run by foreign-paid armies, with all the horrors of another civil war—bloody and murderous."

"It is true," said Olga Miliukoff. "Little as I love Lenin"—she laughed with a tragic irony—"I like Koltchak less. Our poor Russia cannot stand new butcheries, more agonies, fresh rivers of blood. We must have peace now, or die. Perhaps, in any case, Russia will die. That famine on the Volga——"

She gave a little shudder, and there was a dreadful silence in the room.

"Russia cannot die," said Suvorin quietly. "Our soul has survived a thousand years of brutal history. This is only another phase. We have an infinite capacity for suffering. It is our gift."

"What is coming out of all this?" I asked, with a groan. "What's the meaning of this experiment—Communism? What does it lead to? Does it give any hope to the world? I see an equality of misery, but no liberty, or human happiness."

Suvorin repeated the word "Liberty!" and laughed quietly.

Princess Miliukoff said "Equality!" and gave a laughing ripple down the scale which I had liked to hear in happier days.

It was the old professor of biology who answered my questions.

"There is no liberty, sir, in Russia, and what human happiness we have comes from the natural instinct of life to resist the worst calamities. It was in the sacred name of Liberty, by the dictatorship of the proletariat—foolish phrase!—that Lenin and his comrades obtained their power. But those who preach the gospel of Karl Marx care nothing for liberty. The workers become slaves of the State. They are taught what the State desires them to know; and in this case it is false philosophy, false economics, false history, and false morality, based on godlessness. Free speech is forbidden, because it would lead to criticism of the Soviet system, and that is punished by imprisonment or death. Freedom of labour cannot exist, because it is against the law of the system which is conscripted service. There cannot be freedom of conscience, because the Soviet State has declared war against religion. The tyranny of Czardom in its worst days was bad. We cannot deny history. But the tyranny of Lenin is more severe, because it reaches deeper down into the life of the people and poisons the very soul of the nation."

"How long is it going to last?" I asked.

It was Suvorin who answered.

"It is breaking," he said. "It doesn't work. To-day was the first sign of its surrender. That trading in the market-place means the beginning of the same old circle. Soon there will be capitalists again in Russia, and a new middle-class rising out of the ashes of the old. The shops will open. There will be restaurants for rich people. We shall become a capitalist State once more, and Lenin the Communist will become Lenin the Imperialist—or some little Lenin after him. Presently we shall begin to fight wars again, threaten the world, make military alliances, prepare for another massacre of the world's youth. It will be called 'coming back to civilisation'—'rejoining the family of nations'—by all who hate Bolshevism, as I hate it. . . .

"And that is human life—this human wisdom of ours, this progress of humanity! Round the same old circle. The puppy chasing its tail—from one tyranny to another, from one form of folly to another form of folly—from monarchy to revolution—from revolution to monarchy—out of ruin into ruin—while always the dreamers talk of liberty, peace, happiness, progress, and the brotherhood of man. What a joke it is, for those of us both with a sense of humour! What food for laughter, as I laugh now when I think of my passion for the liberty which was to be won by revolution—when I remember all those men and women who suffered imprisonment, floggings, torture, and death, so that Mr. Lenin might be Dictator in Russia and reveal the blessings of Bolshevism. *Comme c'est drôle, tout ça! La comédie humaine!*"

He laughed with a harsh note of irony, and then coughed his lungs out, with tears in his eyes.

So we talked and talked until the small hours of the morning, when the old professor shuffled off to bed, and the young students went whispering up the wooden stairs, and Olga Miliukoff waved her hand to us and slipped down to her rat-haunted room, and Katherine and Michael made me stay a little longer so that I could tell them more about Paul and Dorothy and Humphrey, and all their friends in England.

"To be in England again, out of this awful country!" said Katherine. "Oh, Michael, my dear—you and I in England again, in a little old cottage with Tamia!"

Michael said: "God knows where Tamia is!"

"I must get you out of Russia," I told them. "Then we'll find Tamia—and happiness."

Katherine shook her head.

"They won't let Michael go. He's a Russian."

Michael turned away for a moment from his mother, and I saw a look of anguish on his face.

Then he spoke to me with a tremor in his voice.

"You must take mother back with you. They'd let her go—as an Englishwoman. She'd give her heart to go."

"No!" cried Katherine. "My heart is here with you, Michael. Do you think I would ever leave you, you foolish boy?"

She put her hand on his head and caressed his hair.

"You must go, Mother," he said. "It's got to be arranged. And I'll find some other way. If Tamia has escaped——"

He did not finish his words, but said it was too late to talk any more. . . . Katherine held a lamp for me so that I could see my way down the rickety stairs. It shone on her face, and as she stood there I saw her again as I had known her in her beauty, as though the unhappy years had never passed. It was the effect of light in darkness, or memory, or some spiritual glamour that shone upon her face.

"Good-night!" she called, and I kissed my hand to her before going out into the streets of Moscow and walking through a city so quiet that it seemed dead. The only living soul I saw was a Red sentry under one of the Kremlin gates, stamping his feet in the snow.

Through my friend Agnew of the British Mission I found that there would not be much difficulty in arranging for Katherine to come back with me to England. He went round to see Tchicherin, the Foreign Minister, who raised no objection as far as Katherine was concerned. But he refused to let Michael go, and answered all Agnew's arguments with a cold courtesy.

"The boy is a Russian," he said. "We want to keep our young men; and I find that he is a very good teacher."

He waved the subject on one side, said Agnew, and preferred to denounce Lord Curzon as a reactionary diplomat of the old school.

It was a great blow to me. I knew that I could never persuade Katherine to leave Russia without Michael. She told me so again, and I could not plead with her, because I knew she was right.

Michael said very little when I told him the result of this interview with Tchicherin. He seemed to take it for granted, and shrugged his shoulders. He spoke of Tamia, and said that if he stayed in Russia he would never see her again or know whether she was alive or dead. She might be in a prison down south. The Cheka had a long arm, and spies everywhere. Or she might be starving with other exiles in Constantinople. In that case we might hear from her. She had Paul's address, and mine, and would certainly send a message somehow.

"Wasn't it rather rash of you to marry her?" I asked, thinking of their desperate poverty.

Michael was amused by this question.

“Are the birds of the air rash when they mate? Or animals in the jungle? There’s only one thing Communism doesn’t ration, and that’s love. Perhaps that’s why so many boys and girls are living together as man and wife when they ought to be at school or in the nursery. They kept each other warm at night. It saves fuel—the flame of love!”

He laughed, and told me that Tamia and he were properly married by a black-bearded priest, to please his mother, who would have been shocked otherwise. Love had been quite amusing for a while, though Tamia and he were always quarrelling.

“Why?” I asked. “That doesn’t sound idyllic!”

Michael smiled, with a touch of melancholy.

“She and I look at things in a different way. To me life is a tragic farce. To her it is a passionate adventure, worth all the risks. When I saw Lenin once I laughed. It seemed so ridiculous that that little squint-eyed man in a bowler hat should dictate the lives of a hundred million people. When Tamia saw him she wanted to kill him. She made plans to do so—like Charlotte Corday—and thought I was a coward because I told her not to be a little ass. What’s the good of killing Lenin? Some other tin-pot fellow will take his place and make the same mess of things, or a different kind of mess. Royalist or Republican? What does it matter? The peasant goes toiling in his fields, and women bear new babies to be killed in new wars—or to be led by the nose by another ‘Great Man.’ Do you think we could form a ‘Society for the Suppression of Great Men’? Is there any means by which the poor, bloody people might get a chance of peace?”

I saw the pain in his eyes, and pitied him. This boy, who had so hated cruelty that he couldn’t bear to see a rabbit killed, had waded through war and revolution and seen the infernal cruelties of both. Brought up to love liberty as the most priceless gift of humanity, he had given his allegiance to men who had betrayed their people and established a new system of tyranny. He had lost faith in human nature, and, like Suvorin, could only see mockery in man’s struggle for happiness.

I said, “Courage, old man! We’re living in a black time, but there’s a glimmer of light ahead, and we must follow that or perish. Something good will come out of all this agony. It’s been a frightful lesson to the world, and somehow—I’m certain of that—we shall learn wisdom by it and get forward to better ways of life. We must cling to that hope.”

Michael smiled at my platitudes.

“Man is incapable of learning,” he said. “He was born a blithering idiot, with the instincts of the ape.”

“If that were so,” I told him, “you wouldn’t be talking like this. You wouldn’t feel the pain of things. You wouldn’t hate cruelty.”

"I'm a freak," he asserted calmly. "The product of highly specialised conditions—hot-house trained—and utterly useless in the game of brutality which is life."

"How about your mother?" I asked. "A delicate woman, brought up in comfort, sheltered from the cruel winds. Yet look at her courage in adversity—her beautiful serenity and faith!"

"She believes in God," he said. "Some compensation in the next world for all the misery in this. Eternal happiness, surrounded by those she loves. It's a comforting creed."

"Why not believe?" I suggested. "Perhaps it's the only answer to the riddle. I'm beginning to think so. . . . 'Lord, I believe. Help Thou mine unbelief!'"

"No," said Michael bitterly. "I've called out to God a thousand times, but get no answer. If there's a God, He doesn't care a damn."

His body was shaken by a kind of sob, and he turned his face away.

"How can I believe in God," he asked, "when these devils have it all their own way? These liars and fakers who rule Russia, and all those swine who made the war, and all this cruelty everywhere? We're all caught in a trap. There's no escape, except by death. Death is best."

"There's lots to live for," I urged.

"What?" he asked.

"Love," I said. "Tamia. Your wonderful mother. Knowledge. The answer to the riddle. Service to men."

"I'll never see Tamia again," he answered, and he put his hands to his face, with a cry of anguish.

It was a week later that Michael disappeared. Katherine and I had gone round to tea at the British Mission while Michael was away at the University, where he taught half starved students, huddled together for warmth, without a scrap of paper on which to make their notes, but eager for knowledge as the one gift of life—apart from love—which had not been destroyed by war and revolution, although even that was controlled by the Cheka, and had to be adapted to the gospel of Karl Marx.

Those little tea-parties at the British Mission remain in my memory as a source of comfort and happiness to many poor ladies like Katherine and Olga, who had been so long deprived of social amenities. It was a joy to them to sit again in pretty rooms, well furnished, with silver tea-things and white tablecloths. They were shy of their shabby clothes, and I noticed how they tried to hide their broken boots and shoes as they sat on Agnew's gilded chairs. There were some pretty girls there who had been engaged as typists and

secretaries, and it was charming to see how they revived like flowers, and chattered again freely and gaily in the company of Agnew and his colleagues in this house where, after years of squalor and misery, they had a glimpse again of the civilisation they had known before the ruin of Russia. They ate very sparingly and daintily of the biscuits and bread-and-butter, to hide their hunger, while Olga Miliukoff, who was charmed with Agnew, flirted with him in her amusing way, as though she were back again in her drawing-room in London before the time of Terror. . . .

Yet outside this house, as I knew from Agnew and others, famine was creeping up to Moscow, and away down the Volga, twenty-five million people were starving to death, abandoning their children, trekking in masses from famine-stricken villages, to search for food in other districts where barns were empty and the cupboards bare, stricken with typhus, falling by roadsides, starving in railway trucks, swarming into refugee camps, where they died in heaps, while the cry of the children wailed across the frozen snow.

Katherine whispered to me that she wanted to go home.

"Michael will be back," she said, and I saw her impatience to be in her little bare room again so that he should not be alone.

I hired a *droschke* and drove her home, and at the top of the stairs she called out to the boy:

"Here we are, Michael!"

There was no answer, and Michael was not in the room when we entered. There was a lamp on the deal table, turned down to save the oil.

"Michael!" cried Katherine sharply, and I could hear the fear in her voice.

"He has been kept late," I said, but I saw the whiteness of Katherine's face. In Moscow, when people were late, it might mean that they never came home again because they had fallen into the hands of the Cheka, for some crime against the State, or some political opinion, betrayed by unknown spies. So it had been in time of Terror, though lately it was better.

I saw a gleam of white under the oil-lamp.

"He has written a message," I said, and drew out a bit of paper on which some words were scribbled, and turned up the lamp.

"Tell me," said Katherine.

I read out the words in Michael's writing—or some of them.

"DEAREST MOTHER,—I am going to escape from Russia. I can't let you stay here for my sake, and I must find Tamia. I will meet you in England, if I have any luck. If not, I hope to meet you in that beautiful heaven of yours, and to be with you always. I'm trying to believe in it. Now that I'm leaving you I think I believe, because it is impossible that your love should end and that you and I should not belong to each other.

“A million kisses, mother o’ mine.

“P.S. Ask Uncle Gilbert to get you out before my absence is reported. Say I’m ill. . . .”

Before I had read out all those words Katherine swayed, and swooned across the table before I could hold her. The oil-lamp fell and smashed, and we were left in darkness until I shouted for Suvorin, and he came up with a candle, while I knelt beside Katherine until she revived.

I was very angry at first with young Michael. It seemed to me wicked of him to make a mad attempt to escape from Russia, inflicting so much pain upon Katherine, who was in terror about him. But it was Suvorin who changed my mind.

“Michael has done the right thing,” he said. “That dear mother of his yearns to get back to England out of this madhouse of ours. As she wouldn’t go without him the boy has taken the risk for her sake. Besides, he wants to find his wife—our wild little Tamia. Who can blame him?”

“Is there any love between him and Tamia?” I asked. “He told me they quarrelled all the time.”

Suvorin laughed.

“Tamia is a little tiger-cat, and Michael has a bit of the Tartar in him. Love? Yes, between their quarrels, in each other’s arms. Young bodies are warm when there’s no fuel in the stove, and kisses sweet between lovers’ quarrels when there’s no sugar in the cup of life.”

Agnew obtained a pass for Katherine to leave Russia. I showed it to her, and said: “Come with me, my dear, out of this stricken country. Michael will be waiting for you, perhaps with Tamia. After this nightmare the awakening will be good—in England, at peace again.”

She struggled between fear and hope. But gradually I made her see that it was best to go, the greatest chance of finding Michael. If he could not escape, by any evil chance, we could come back again and search for him. It was easier to get into Russia than out of it!

So she came with me, and broke down when she said good-bye to Olga Miliukoff, and Suvorin, and the old lady who was bedridden upstairs, and other friends whose misery she had shared, with whom she had been hungry, for whose sake she had hidden fear. I saw in that farewell how much they loved her. Suvorin knelt down, in his emotional way, and would have kissed the hem of her skirt if she hadn’t begged him to get up and not make her look so foolish. They embraced after that, like brother and sister, and Suvorin did not trouble to hide the tears which made his eyes red. Katherine tried to be gay.

“I shall expect you to tea in London,” she said to Olga Miliukoff. “Tamia

will open the door to you.”

“I accept your invitation, my dear,” cried Olga, “subject to any engagement I may have with the Cheka. . . . If you see Tamia—my madcap—tell her that I think of her always, and shall be happy if I know she is safe. Perhaps in a little while the door may be opened for us poor caged birds. Lenin may die—he is, after all, like the rest of men! And meanwhile——”

She did not say what might happen meanwhile, but exchanged a glance with Suvorin. In that “meanwhile” famine was creeping over Russia, and food was scarce in Moscow. We were leaving these people to almost certain death, unless help came to Russia from the outside world. . . .

At Sebash, on the Latvian frontier, we showed our passes for the last time to the Red soldiers of the Soviet Republic.

I turned to Katherine, and said: “My dear, Russia is behind us. That nightmare of yours is over. You are out of the cage!”

She looked back across the railway lines, and there were tears in her eyes.

“Dear Russia!” she said. “My heart stays behind with many friends, and all those suffering people. If it weren’t for Michael——Oh, Gilbert, when shall we get news of Michael, and poor little Tamia?”

She leaned heavily on my arm, and I saw how weak she was.

It was in Riga that I sent off a telegram to Paul and had his answer. My telegram was a long one, explaining things. His answer was short and disappointing.

“No news of Michael or Tamia. Love to Katherine.”

If Michael had escaped he would have wired to Paul.

KATHERINE was taken ill in Berlin, and I stayed three weeks with her there, very anxious because of her extreme weakness. After leaving Russia it was as though all the will-power which had kept her up, and given her strength upon which other people leaned, had suddenly been drained. It was partly, I think, the shock of getting no news of Michael—though it was really too soon to expect it, as I often told her—but also the sudden relaxation of nerve-strain, such as had happened to many demobilised soldiers after the war. Her war had lasted longer than ours. . . .

The German doctors who came to attend her were astonished by the feeble beat of her pulse and by the poverty of her blood. They said the *gnädige Frau* was very much under-nourished. She had undoubtedly been starving. They knew the symptoms well in the poor districts of Berlin, especially among the children and young working-girls. But how could an English lady be like that? When I explained that she had just come out of Russia they were no longer surprised. "It is a wonder she is alive," they said. "Russia is a graveyard."

I was lucky in the nurse I found for her. It was little Rita von Nostitz, who volunteered to come directly I told her what had happened, and devoted herself to Katherine in a way that gained my warmest gratitude. She had been trained as a nurse in time of war, and afterwards among the children starved by our blockade, maintained too long, I think—with detestable cruelty, to tell the honest truth—as a means of pressure to enforce the terms of peace. But she had something better than training—a tenderness of heart—and she fell in love with Katherine, and could not do enough for her.

We had our meals together in a little hotel in the Dorotheenstrasse, to which I had taken Katherine, and it was over one of them that I asked her if she had made up her mind to come back with me and marry Humphrey, who was waiting for her.

She blushed in her childish way, and said, "If you will be good enough to take me."

Several times her blind brother, Otto, joined us, and filled me with pity again because of his fumbling at table, his helplessness, his tragic face. He had given up hope of Germany's industrial recovery, and prophesied that the terrible inflation of paper money would lead to absolute ruin, especially if the French invaded the Ruhr, as they threatened to do. But he seemed to find some spiritual consolation in the very misery that was overtaking his people.

"Things must get worse before they get better," he said. "Not until we are utterly ruined shall we begin to build ourselves up again on a new basis of

philosophy. It will be a purification of our national soul. By extremity of suffering we shall purge ourselves of our old pride and evil traditions. I am sorry for England, still burdened by Imperialism and by the desperate desire to regain her old supremacy of wealth and power. Germany will be liberated from militarism and racial ambitions. We must have peace or die. It is better so."

It was a strange point of view, but, as it seemed to comfort him, I did not argue the matter.

I had one interview with his parents. They were stiff, and the father expressed his extreme displeasure that his daughter should desire to leave her own country to marry a man who had fought against her people. He gave his consent, however, because young people of to-day, he said, were very self-willed, and their parents' wishes counted for nothing. It was better, he thought, to bow to the inevitable with as good a grace as possible. The mother was not so austere. After her first iciness she became human and motherly, when her husband had left the room.

"I think only of Rita's happiness," she said. "Is there any chance of that in England, do you think? I beg you to tell me the truth."

I told her that Humphrey would be a devoted and loyal husband, and that love would make them happy.

My words melted her, and she put her hands to her stout bosom.

"*Liebe!*" she cried; "*Liebe! Ach, Gott, Man kann es nicht versagen!*"

Her German sentimentality gushed up at that word "love." It was not to be denied.

After that three weeks of Katherine's illness the doctors reported that she was well enough to travel, and Rita came with us, dissolved in tears at first because of the parting with her parents, and the great adventure ahead, and the farewell with her blind brother, who came to the station with his mother and held her in his arms, while she clung to him.

"I lose my eyes again," he said in German. "You helped me to see, little sister."

When the train started, he waved his hand and called out in English:

"Give my love to England. . . . Let us make an end of hate!"

I did not see an end of hate in the eyes of a group of people close to him. They must have understood, for one of them turned sharply and scowled at the young blind man, and another, with a slashed cheek of old duelling days, laughed harshly, and said "England!" with no love in his voice. Otto von Nostitz was not typical of German ex-officers. . . .

At Victoria Station—the scene of so many partings and greetings, and haunted for me always by the leave-trains, with our army of youth—Rita and I

helped Katherine to the platform, where she stood with her hand on my arm, very frail, her face looking strangely transparent, but with an eager smile in her eyes at the sight of Paul again, after those years of separation and dreadful history. He was shocked by the sight of her, as I could see, though he tried to hide his distress at the change in her.

After their greeting her first question was of Michael.

“Any news, Paul?”

“Not yet,” he answered, and made a show of optimism by saying, “Heaps of time. He’s sure to turn up.”

The little German girl stood on the platform with us, looking frightened for a moment. She was in England, which hated her folk, and all the English speech about her, and the busy traffic of the station made her repent, perhaps, for just that moment of fear, that she had come with me. I saw her shrink back as a porter pushed by her with his barrow and his shout of “Mind your backs, please!” Suddenly she caught sight of Humphrey, and a rush of colour swept her face, and there was a wonderful look in her eyes as he strode towards her.

He was bronzed and splendid. It was obvious that pedigree pigs were suiting him admirably. He had lost that brooding, harassed look which had worried me so much, and at the sight of Rita his face was lit with eagerness.

Dorothy was close to him, and she and I linked arms and went a little apart from the others, who had so much to say while they waited for their luggage.

“How are things going?” I asked, and she said, “Jolly well! Humphrey is himself again—his dear old self. It was only a question of work and a little hope.”

“And you?”

There was hardly need of her answer. The dark rings round her eyes had gone. Her eyes had their old candour, and humour had come back to them.

“The simple life,” she said. “Better than night-clubs and a life of jazz. We’ve started a poultry farm, and I love all my chicks.”

She looked across at Katherine with a pitying glance.

“Poor Aunt Kitty! I shouldn’t have known her. She looks so old and ill. Is that what they do to people in Bolshevik Russia? . . . And what about Michael?”

I said, “God knows!”

Katherine stayed for a time in Cheyne Walk, while I went to my house in Church Street, Kensington, where my mother rejoiced to have me again, and astonished me as usual by her placid acceptance of life’s adventure. She had some secret philosophy or faith which rebuked my impatience with history in the making, my rage at the folly of statesmanship, my despair at the conditions of Europe. She played patience with a quiet amusement in the vagaries of luck, while millions of men and women were starving to death in Russia; while

France invaded the Ruhr; while the army of unemployed received new recruits in England; while, as it seemed to me, the world was harking back to old hatreds, leading as sure as fate to another war which children now in their cradles would have to fight.

The sight of my little old mother playing patience—sometimes she sat down to the piano and played Mendelssohn and Beethoven rather sweetly—seemed to me the best lesson I could find. It was not carelessness or callousness, because she had a beautiful sympathy. It was an acknowledgment that life must work itself out according to plan, and that the only wisdom is serenity of soul. Patience, and a smile when the cards go wrong! . . .

Rita stayed with us; and my mother, rather shy of her at first, but very gentle and kind, missed her when she went away as Humphrey's wife. She was married, from my house, in old Chelsea Church, to which I drove her in a taxicab. I had come to have a warm affection for her, and I think she looked on me as a kind of foster-father. In that taxi she thanked me for looking after her, and tried to conceal the wetness in her eyes.

"Everybody has been so kind!" she said. "I am very grateful. And I shall feel safe with Humphrey."

I had taken pains to bring only those friends to the house who were not likely to be uncivil to this little German girl—as dainty as a shepherdess in Dresden china—because of racial hatred and war memories. Paul had taken her to his heart at once—as he would have done to any girl not utterly repulsive—for Humphrey's sake, and she had a worshipful reverence for him which was rather touching. So far Clare had not been able to reconcile herself to this marriage, and had refused to see her future daughter-in-law.

Poor Clare! I argued with her, and even bullied her, until I saw how much she was suffering, and understood that hatred may be inspired by generosity as well as meanness, and that its cruelty may be due to hate of cruelty. She could not forget the atrocity stories, the slaughter of our youth by German guns and gas, the bombing of cities, the sinking of ships. Forgiveness of any German—even this fair-haired girl who had been a child when the war began—seemed to her disloyalty to the boys who had died, and to our English ideals. She could not see that responsibility of the war could not be fastened on to individuals—hardly on to nations!—and that our boys who had died would be the first in chivalry to a beaten enemy; that, anyhow, there could be no future peace if hatred were the law of life. She cried "Hypocrisy!" and was rather hysterical, and did not come to church to see the wedding of her boy.

They went away to the little old cottage in Sussex, not far from Evesham Hall, where once we had spent a good summer, and Dorothy waited for them there, because the pigs and the poultry needed her. Some time later I persuaded Katherine to join my mother and me in the same cottage I had taken before the

war, and we went down there in a mild February, while Paul stayed on with Clare in Cheyne Walk.

No word had come from Michael—not a word or sign, though four months had passed since that night he had left the house in Moscow. From Agnew in the British Mission I learnt that, in spite of all enquiries, nothing could be learnt of him in Russia.

“That means nothing,” wrote Agnew. “He may have gone down the Volga and got caught in the tide of refugees fleeing the famine, which is now appalling, so that twenty-five million people are threatened with death unless the world has charity—‘And oh, the rarity of Christian charity under the sun!’ . . . Or he may have tried to escape across the Latvian frontier, and been caught without a passport by the Soviet police. In that case, however, I think I should have heard, because Tchicherin would have told me. He’s not so icy as he looks, and is inclined to be civil because of Russia’s desperate need. Personally, I think the boy will turn up one day. There are a million ways of getting lost in Russia, where the railways have broken down, where the horses are dying for lack of fodder, and where a man on the lonely trail is like an ant in a desert. Russia is a big place! Tell that charming lady not to give up hope.”

Katherine did not give up hope, but hope deferred maketh the heart sick. She was so certain that Michael was still alive, and would find his way to her, that each day was a new torture because it passed without a message. I saw the eagerness with which she watched the postman come up the garden path, and hated to see the light die from her eyes for a moment when still there was no letter for her.

“Perhaps it will be to-morrow, my dear,” said my mother, and always Katherine smiled and answered, “Yes, to-morrow! I must try to be patient.”

I knew she was praying for this boy of hers when she slipped away upstairs and stayed for a long time, coming down again with luminous, mystical eyes that frightened me a little, because she seemed all spirit and no body. But she did not creep about the house like a poor, melancholy creature, spoiling everybody’s happiness. What was so splendid and wonderful was the spirit by which she forced herself to a gaiety that seemed unforced, to an interest in the details of life about her. She loved the beauty of the country, as March passed into April and Nature wakened to the touch of sun. She loved Dorothy’s chicks and Humphrey’s pigs, and I even persuaded her to play the piano again, as in the old days.

To me it seemed like a charming echo of that spring and summer we had spent down here before the war. I forgot, sometimes, that everything had changed, and that death had harvested the youth from English fields—those poor boys, Harold and Cuthbert and Hilary Dick—and that Dorothy was a widow like Betty Evesham, and that Michael was lost in some human jungle, and that Europe was lying in ruins and England sinking to decay for lack of world-trade and work for her men. I forgot—and tried to forget—all that when I went walking with Katherine through wet lanes, or when Humphrey came in after supper with Rita, bringing his banjo, on which he played the same little tune—“Yiddle on my Fiddle”—as once on the terrace of Evesham Hall, when poor old Hugh and I had paced up and down, watching the love-affairs of our young crowd. The black years were wiped out. We were happy again . . . until we remembered.

Betty Evesham came down to see us, and talked for hours with Katherine. Evesham Hall was up for sale, and now belonged to a cousin of Hugh's, who let her live in it until some jerry-builders should knock it down, and disperse its ghosts, and cut down its timber—its grand old trees—and develop the old estate with rows of little houses.

“A crime!” I groaned, but Betty shrugged her shoulders and said, “The income tax, my friend! Death-duties, and the price of victory! I want to howl my eyes out when I think of it, but what's the good? And, anyhow, we're lucky. Think of Russia—and Ireland.”

Ireland didn't bear thinking about, after Sinn Fein burnings, and Black-and-Tan reprisals, and a primitive savagery which smashed one's ideals of Irish chivalry, and degraded that word liberty, whose name throughout all history has been used for murder as well as martyrdom. *O Liberté!* . . .

Gladys Evesham was now Lady Banstead, and the mother of a babe, and shy of meeting Humphrey, as well she might have been. But I forgave her—and I think he did—because of the tragedy of her married life apart from that baby. Banstead was a hopeless cripple after a machine-gun bullet in the spine—at the end of the war, when the cavalry had gone into action. He had to be wheeled about in a chair, as I saw him sitting one day in the pale sunshine of this watery spring, under the shelter of the peach wall.

He greeted me with a melancholy smile, and held out a thin, twisted hand, and spoke an old tag:

“*‘Quantum mutatus ab illo!’*”

How changed he was from what he had been—as a young cavalry officer, with a love of horses and a hunting morning!

“I'll never follow the hounds again,” he said. “Bad luck, eh? But worse for Gladys.”

He spoke of Humphrey, and said, “Gladys ought to have married him. But

in war queer things happen. One isn't accountable, do you think? Gladys and I were together a lot when this old house was a hospital and I had my first wound, which was nothing. Before we knew where we were we—well, we forgot poor old Humphrey. Caddish of me rather. It was all my doing. . . . Perhaps what happened afterwards was a punishment. Anyhow, Gladys has her baby—my boy!—and I shall soon be out of it!”

No, one couldn't forget, and pretend that nothing had happened. We were all different. Everything had gone wrong. Fate had played a dirty trick on all of us in those mad, murderous years. The best we could hope was to play for time, and readjust ourselves to new conditions, and build ourselves anew.

It looked as though Humphrey had readjusted himself all right, after his time of trial when he had nearly gone to pieces. He was happy with that little German girl, and when I went round to his piggery sometimes, I heard him singing and whistling. In riding-breeches and gaiters, with an old felt hat on the back of his head, and a blue shirt rolled up at the sleeves, he looked a good type of manhood, with that touch of the Gipsy which I had seen in him as a boy. He introduced me to the Countess Belinda, the mother of his prize pigs, and, while I poked her back with a stick, Rita and Dorothy came arm in arm from the poultry runs, Dorothy looking very dark and slim and elegant in contrast to Humphrey's little wife, with her golden spun hair and blue eyes.

“How do you like England?” I asked Rita.

She stood there clasping her husband's left arm, with her head against his shoulder, and there was no need of her answer to tell me that she was happy in this little patch of England.

“I am so happy,” she told me, “that I'm afraid of selfishness, when there's so much sadness in the world.”

“Let us make our own little paradise—if we can!” I said. “It's not selfishness, but self-defence—against the world's stupidity.”

Paul came down now and then for a week-end, and cheered up Katherine by his constant assertion that Michael would turn up one day. But he told me privately that he was anxious about her. He didn't like the pallor of her skin, nor the weakness that seemed to be creeping over her. That Russian experience was too much for her, he said. There was nothing left of her but spirit—a white flame burning up the wax.

This brother and sister who had been such comrades in the old days of Romilly Hall, and afterwards in remembrance, despite long years dividing them, resumed their companionship as though time had been rolled back. I left them alone together sometimes, so that they might talk as two can, but not three; and I think their conversation took a religious turn mostly, because Paul was still “groping for God,” as Humphrey called it, and Katherine made him marvel by her faith, which was very mystical, so that she seemed uplifted by

some divine love beyond Paul's reach or understanding.

And yet, as Paul said, she was full of common sense and humour, and was not in the least shocked by the crude scepticism with which he sometimes argued, with a touch of his old medical-student manner.

"Faith is beyond argument or proof," she said one night when I was there with her in the little room with the low ceiling. "I only know that I'm aware of God. I feel so close to the other world that sometimes I think that there's nothing but a little film over our eyes which prevents us from seeing the spiritual life about us."

Paul had some extraordinary theory about vibrations, and universal energy, and ethereal life-force, but Katherine shook her head and laughed, and said, "That's no good, Paul! You can't find the soul of music by studying the piano wires."

Later in the evening Paul expressed his honest desire to become a Christian. He had got as far as believing that Christ's message to the world was the only answer to the riddle of life. It was the only gospel that could save humanity from going straight back to the jungle. But he couldn't get as far as the divinity of Christ. It was too incredible. As a scientist——

Katherine said, "Doubting Thomas! . . . 'Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.' "

"All that happened such a long time ago!" said Paul. "It's so infernally remote from modern history, with its laws of evidence. If we could get some sign——"

Something like a sign—at least, things beyond our understanding—happened then. I saw that Katherine was not listening to Paul's words. She seemed to hear something else, and stood up suddenly, with all her senses alert. A look of joy transfigured her, so that her eyes were shining.

"Oh, Paul!" she cried, and I saw her hand go up to her heart.

"What's the matter?" asked Paul, startled, and a little frightened.

She said, "It's Michael! I heard him calling to me. . . . He said, 'Coming, Mother!'"

Paul and I were silent. We could think of nothing to say for a moment.

It was Paul who spoke first. He rose and put his arms round Katherine.

"Are you feeling unwell, old girl? You look very white." He held her wrist, and said, "That pulse of yours! It's a bit jumpy. If I were you I should go to bed and lie quiet."

"Michael is coming!" said Katherine. "Michael—my son!"

She gave a laughing cry, as though she saw him at the door of that little sitting-room, and faltered forward a few steps before I rushed to her, because I saw that faintness was overtaking her. Paul and I held her as she drooped and

fell unconscious.

That night she recovered consciousness, and Paul sent for a priest and a doctor, who came over by motor-car. I heard them go up to her room as I sat downstairs in the little parlour alone. Paul came in to fetch something—a candlestick—and I saw the gravity of his face.

“How is she?” I asked, and he said: “Bad. It’s her heart. Very wonky.”

He went out again, and I heard his heavy tread up the little wooden staircase.

Katherine was dying. I could tell by the look in Paul’s eyes. My Katherine, whom I had loved since first I saw her face in Romilly Hall a lifetime ago, as it seemed; my dear lady; my faithful, loving friend through all those years; the most beautiful type of English womanhood I had known in life! Now dying, without having seen Michael again, after all that misery and torture of soul. It wasn’t fair! It wasn’t fair!

What was the meaning of that cry of hers? “I heard him calling to me,” she said. . . . I felt cold, and shivered. Perhaps it meant that Michael was dead, and that she was going to him. I had heard queer stories like that in the war. Betty Evesham had seen Hugh standing by her bedside. People believed these things—these uncanny things. . . . Yes, Michael had died out there in Russia, and Katherine had heard his cry.

There were footsteps overhead, and then there was silence again. I thought of Katherine as I had known her in girlhood, so gay, so beautiful, like a rose. I had loved her with a boy’s passion. Now she lay dying upstairs.

I heard the latch of the garden gate click, and footsteps down the flagged path, and rose hurriedly from my chair. It was Humphrey or Dorothy coming down, as they did most evenings.

There was a tap on the knocker—the ridiculous little knocker with a dog’s head in brass—and I went to the door to tell Humphrey to be quiet.

But it wasn’t Humphrey.

I said, “Be quiet, old man, your aunt is very ill!”—and then I saw that someone else was standing there. . . .

It was Michael!

He stood there quietly, smiling, as I saw by the moonlight, which was glamorous in the garden. He had shaved off his beard and moustache, and was as I had known him before.

For a moment I was frightened of him, as though I saw his ghost; and then, in a queer way, I was angry, and said:

“Good God! Why do you come like this, without a word?”

“Didn’t you get my wire?” he asked calmly. “I sent it off from Chelsea when the servant told me you were all down here. Besides, I wired from Berlin to Uncle Paul. Hasn’t he told you?”

Paul had left his office for a week's holiday. Some fool had failed to forward it.

"How's mother?" asked Michael.

I said, "Not very well, old man," and there was a tremor in my voice.

He did not notice my agitation. He asked another question, anxiously.

"Is there any news of Tamia? Is she here?"

"We haven't heard a word," I said.

He gave a groan, and I saw his head droop—he was in the sitting-room, now, standing by the fireplace. Then he raised his head again and stared at me, and seemed to be aware that something was wrong.

"Why is everything so quiet?" he asked. . . . "Why do you look like that at me, after the hellish time I've Had? . . . Where's mother?"

"She's very ill," I told him. "Upstairs, in bed."

There was a heavy tread outside the door, and the doctor came in.

"She's dead," he said. "Poor lady!"

Michael's face was terrible to see, and his cry of anguish worse to hear.

He rushed upstairs, and I heard his weeping . . . and wept.

ONE could write a book about the adventures of Michael in search of his wife. Perhaps one day he will write it himself, with that irony, that ruthless sense of truth, that tragic spirit, which I find in all his writings, now becoming known to a wider public since the great success of his play, *Refugee*.

After Katherine's death the boy was quite broken for a time, and Paul and I were desperately anxious about him. It was not until some weeks had passed that we could get any coherent story from him as to what happened in his efforts to escape from Russia.

My friend Agnew had been right. Michael had been caught in the tide of refugees fleeing from the famine on the Volga, had travelled with them in truck trains—which were shunted on to sidings for weeks at a time because there was no fuel for the engines—while they starved, and died of dysentery and typhus, and suffered abominable miseries. Michael himself caught typhus—conveyed by lice, as we now know—and was nearly buried alive by peasants who found him with the dead. It was owing to some American relief officers who came with rescue to Russia and poured food into the stricken zone that Michael struggled back to life and escaped from Russia at last by way of the Black Sea and Constantinople; and it was with American money, lent generously by a young officer of the Relief Administration that he travelled home by way of Vienna and Berlin.

That was the outline of his story, but he never told us the full details of horror, and we can only guess. . . .

After the shock of his mother's death—the last and most smashing blow of cruelty—he owed his life, I think, to Dorothy. She helped to nurse him when he lay ill with some kind of fever, which was, perhaps, mental rather than physical, though Paul suspected some Russian microbe; and it was her devotion, her plucky spirit, her understanding, which brought him back to sanity and gave him courage enough to live. Presently she taught him to laugh again, and it was when we heard his first laughter after some argument which sounded like a quarrel that we knew the worst was over and that he was on the road to recovery.

During his convalescence he began writing short stories, which he read out to Dorothy, and sometimes to all of us, and I perceived that here was a strain of original genius which might lead one day to something big. Those stories frightened me by their savage strength. They also alarmed the editors to whom I sent them, until Ladbroke—a friend of mine, who was starting a “highbrow”

magazine—accepted several with enthusiasm, and asked for more. It was with money earned in this way that Michael set out on his travels again.

I remember seeing him rise from his chair one evening in the middle of a game of bridge which we were playing with Paul and Dorothy in the Cheyne Walk house.

“Your deal, Michael,” said Dorothy, watching him.

“No,” he answered, “I must go and find Tamia. I can’t sit here fooling any longer. She may be starving somewhere.”

He spoke as though he were starting to find Tamia then and there, but it was three days later that he set out for the Continent.

He came back at unexpected times from places where Russian refugees gathered—Paris, Vienna, Buda Pesth, Constantinople—and where they were trying to earn some kind of livelihood, by serving in restaurants, singing in cabarets, doing needlework and embroidery at sweated rates, making wooden toys, dancing with tourist girls in return for tips, in smart hotels at Venice and Monte Carlo, suffering any kind of humiliation for the sake of a living wage, with a courage and gaiety that was rather marvellous, considering their national character and former life.

Michael hoped to find Tamia among them, or to get news of her. He thought she might have lost her memory, or been imprisoned in Russia, or fallen into some desperate plight which made her send no message to relatives and friends. I think also that in searching for Tamia he was searching for truth, and some answer to the riddle of life. That Russian girl—his wife—became like Beatrice to Dante. He went even into hell to find her—the hell of night life in European capitals, where girls sold themselves for food, and where evil preyed on them.

Then he went back to Russia, and wandered there for six months, ragged, unshaven, unwashed, and worked for a while among the factory hands of Petrograd and Moscow. So we heard from Princess Miliukoff, who came out of Russia at last, owing to the friendly action of Agnew. Michael had called on her one day in the lodging-house where Katherine had lived. He looked hungry and hunted, but said he was learning a lot about life and still hoped to get news of Tamia. “I must go on searching,” he had said. “I shall have no peace of mind until I know the truth. Someone must have seen or heard of her.”

“What do you think,” I asked poor Olga Miliukoff. “Is there any chance that Tamia is still alive?”

She shook her head, and there was a rush of tears to her eyes.

“I shall never see my little Tamia again,” she told me.

An extraordinary situation, with all the elements of tragedy, like some Greek story—that boy Michael, for ever wandering, searching among people of his own race in exile, in poverty, often without knowledge of their own

kindred.

When he came back again at odd times I saw a change in him. He was no longer a boy, though I still thought of him as such. He was older than his years, and, though his mind was still ironical, he became less bitter, not so savage in his satire of life, not so quarrelsome. Some of Katherine's sweetness seemed to be stealing into him. He had more pity for his fellow-men, and less contempt.

Paul saw this as well.

"Michael is like the rest of us; getting normal again, seeing things in better perspective, forgetting war. . . . The wounds are healing. The human mind is like nature. The old battle-fields are hardly visible now that the trenches have silted in and the earth is green again. Life—pushing up—repairs the ruin of the past."

Paul and I had resumed our old comradeship, and, though I gave up my house in Kensington and abandoned London for the cottage in Sussex, I saw him often, as he came down for most week-ends with Humphrey and Rita, now that Dorothy was running the poultry farm. It was not until a year later that Clare came with him, reconciled at last to Humphrey's marriage. That was when their baby arrived.

Paul told me of Clare's surrender, and saw something symbolical in it.

"It means that hate is on the ebb-tide. I see it everywhere, in the minds of men and women. Even in France and Germany. We are drawing out of the darkness towards the light. The spirit of peace is working among the peoples. That 'next war' isn't going to happen in this generation."

"What about the next generation?" I asked. "Humphrey's boy baby? Hasn't he just arrived in time for the War in the Air, above cities choked with dead? That new gas you were telling me about——"

"Humanity won't stand for it," said Paul. "Men will revolt against their own machines. There'll be a crusade against the science of slaughter. I see it coming. It was the last kick of the industrial age which brought so much infernal cruelty, and ugliness, and death. That's passing. Civilisation will be cleaner and simpler."

He was over-optimistic, I thought. I could see a material recovery in Europe—even in Russia, from what Michael told me—but no moral renaissance. I could see a thousand perils lurking beneath an uncertain peace which could never last, as its frontiers had been drawn in the Treaty of Versailles. Germany was harking back to her old gods. France was building up defensive alliances, with fear in every French cottage and heart. And presently even Paul, who was becoming an idealist, with all his hopes centred in the League of Nations, admitted that the passing of the Industrial Age might not be an unmixed blessing, as far as England was concerned.

The markets of the world no longer clamoured for our coal. Mines were

closing down, and the miners were living on the dole. Our ships were sailing with empty bunkers, or not sailing. Our manufacturers could not compete with cheap foreign labour. Taxes were killing industry, and we were living on our capital—as though it would last for ever.

“Paul,” I said one night, “we’re done! Poor old England is on the downgrade. Poverty is creeping up, and we can’t support our people. What are we going to do about it?”

“Readapt ourselves to new conditions,” said Paul calmly. “Get back to the land, and re-establish a peasantry which we ought never to have lost. Send our surplus population to the great Dominions, where there’s heaps of room and a better way of life. We’re not done, old man. We’re only just beginning! There won’t be so much luxury, but it’s going to be a happier world for Humphrey’s baby. He’ll rear pigs like his father. What more honourable, or more amusing, in a world of simple folk, secure of peace, with a wireless on the cottage chimney, and the little comforts of life, and fresh air instead of foul smoke?”

It was a comfortable philosophy—rather spoilt when Humphrey’s herd of pedigree pigs fell ill of swine fever and had to be slaughtered, without compensation. Humphrey took it like a man, but it meant beginning all over again, after the loss of his capital and labour. Rita wept for those poor dear pigs—that affectionate Countess Belinda!—and at this dreadful blow of fate against the husband who worked so hard.

It was after this tragedy in the pigsties—rather serious, though I make light of it—that Michael came home for the third time after his wanderings abroad.

I remember—it was less than a year ago—that he came up the flagged path of my cottage garden as we were having supper one evening. Paul was chaffing my mother about the pretended innocence of Early Victorian girls, *à propos* of her reminiscences of school-days at Mrs. Morgan’s in Bayswater. Dorothy was listening with a smile about her lips, when suddenly I saw her raise her head and look through the muslin curtains of the open window, through which came the scent of sweet-briar. She sprang up with a cry of gladness.

“There’s Michael!”

He came in quietly, as though just back from a week-end visit somewhere, though he had been away nearly a year.

“Any supper going?” he asked.

Then he went over and kissed my mother.

“Any news?” asked Paul. “Where have you been all this time, old lad? Still wandering?”

Michael looked at us all with a strange expression as though hiding some immense emotion. But he answered quietly.

“My wanderings are over. I have found Tamia.”

There was a moment's silence in that little room. It was broken by a cry from Dorothy.

"Oh, Michael! . . . What joy for you!"

"She's dead," said Michael. "I saw her grave in Lubimovka. It was typhus in the time of famine. It's best to know. . . . What about some cold mutton?"

Dorothy said, "Poor little Tamia!" and wept for Michael's sake, though he was unemotional, having exhausted emotion and seen so much of death and tragedy.

That was a year ago, almost, as I have said. Since then Michael has been living with me in the old cottage, and I look on him as my son, for Katherine's sake, and my own. We are good friends, anyhow, and have great talks together about the riddle of life, when he scares me sometimes by his pessimism. That is passing somewhat, I think. His sense of humour is reasserting itself. He is less restless, less melancholy. His laughter rings out sometimes when Dorothy teases him. They amuse each other. . . .

The other night we all went to the first performance of his play *Refugee*. It was well received. I have just been reading what the critics have to say. One of the notices, written by a woman, I guess, seems to me nearest to the truth.

"This ironical play has something of the spirit of Greek tragedy. One feels that the characters are in the hands of a divine justice, punishing them for their own stupidities and cruelties. It is more than a work of promise. It is a thing in itself—big with truth.

"When the author was called before the curtain and stood there looking a little bored, a little amused, by the noise of applause, one felt the man behind the play was typical of its plot and purpose. This young Russian, Michael Detloff, has not much of a Slav look. He might be one of our own ex-officers, and has English eyes. Perhaps he has some English blood in him. However that may be, it is certain that he has experienced the life he depicts on the stage, and that the tragedy of Europe in recent years of history has passed through his own soul. He has seen it all, suffered it all, and it has left its imprint on his face. This remarkable play, so ironical, so ruthless, and yet so pitiful, is profoundly moving, because it comes from one who has seen into the heart of truth, unafraid."

I liked that phrase, "a little bored, a little amused." It described Michael exactly, as he stood on the empty stage while we clapped hands and cheered. . . . Dorothy spoils a pair of white gloves. . . .

Last night Michael and Dorothy went into the garden together before going

to bed, and I heard their voices talking in low tones. It was very warm, and the sky was still blue though after ten o'clock by summer-time, and there was a kind of dusky twilight, through which I could see their figures by the little old sundial.

Paul was reading a book by the light of an oil-lamp as I stood at the open window listening to the nightingales—they kept us awake at night—in the larch grove beyond the garden.

Suddenly I saw Michael take hold of Dorothy's hands and draw her towards him, as years ago in this same garden I had seen two young figures lean together for the first kiss of love.

"Paul!" I said.

He looked up from his book and growled.

"Don't interrupt, old man. I'm getting near the end of my quest—God! I'm beginning to see the light—in spite of this stupid lamp which flickers when the window's open."

"Come and look out of the window," I said. "There's Love in the garden."

"Those noisy nightingales!" said Paul, leaning over his book again.

Michael and Dorothy moved down the path, hand in hand.

But I saw another figure there, unless I dreamed. I saw Katherine in her young beauty, as I had loved her. She stood looking at Michael and Dorothy, and then turned and smiled at me, with shining eyes—unless I dreamed, as a man growing old, remembering youth.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Unchanging Quest* by Philip Gibbs]