

*Tales of Life  
and Adventure*

H.G. Wells

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HERBERT GEORGE WELLS  
1866-1946

TALES  
OF LIFE AND  
ADVENTURE

H. G. WELLS

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*with an introduction by*  
FRANK WELLS



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## HERBERT GEORGE WELLS

Herbert George Wells was born on 21 September 1866 at Bromley, Kent. Destined for the profession of a draper, he became instead one of the great intellectual lights of his age.

His father, Joseph Wells, kept a small hardware shop and was an enthusiastic professional cricketer. His mother, whose maiden name was Neal, had been in domestic service before her marriage. The shop in Bromley High Street never prospered; its income was barely sufficient to keep the family above the poverty line.

From his father, young Herbert George ("Bertie" as he was called) had inherited a taste for reading which he was able to indulge freely at the local Literary Institute and lending library. He was sent to school locally, first to some cottage school and later to an establishment called Morley's Academy. In 1880, when the family found itself in great financial difficulties, Mrs. Wells was offered and accepted a post as housekeeper to her former employers at Uppark, Sussex, and Herbert George was apprenticed to a firm of drapers in Windsor. However, he did not satisfy his employers and had to leave after one month. For a very brief spell he acted as pupil teacher at a school in Somerset, and after that he was a chemist's assistant at Midhurst for one month (January 1881). In April of the same year he found himself once more a draper's apprentice, this time at Southsea. After two years in this soul-destroying occupation he could bear it no longer and left.

He next obtained a post as assistant master at Midhurst Grammar School, and in 1884 was awarded a scholarship (of one guinea a week) at the Normal School of Science (now the Imperial College of Science) South Kensington, London. For three years he studied physics, chemistry, geology, astronomy and biology—the latter under Professor Thomas H. Huxley. On termination of his studies he became assistant master in a school at Holt, North Wales. There he had a severe football accident from the effects of which he suffered for many years. He returned to London in July 1888, and early in 1889 joined the staff of Henley House School at Kilburn. In October 1890 he took a B.Sc. degree with first-class honours in zoology at London University. His next appointment (from 1891-93) was that of a biology tutor for the University Correspondence College.

In the summer of 1893 a serious haemorrhage of the lungs forced him to take a long rest and to adopt a completely sedentary occupation. Around 1891-92 he had contributed essays to various educational and other journals and in 1893 while he was recuperating from his illness he began to write

short stories, essays and reviews for periodicals and magazines, among them *The Pall Mall Gazette*, *St. James's Gazette*, *Black and White*, the *New Review* and *The Saturday Review*. In 1893 his first major work *A Textbook of Biology* was published. The year 1895 saw the publication of a volume of short stories (*The Stolen Bacillus*), a volume of collected essays, and of two novels, *The Time Machine* and *The Wonderful Visit*. The former established his reputation as a writer of extraordinary power and imagination.

In 1895 also he married Miss Amy Catherine Robbins, a former pupil of his—his first marriage (1891) to a cousin having meanwhile been dissolved. Two sons were subsequently born of his second marriage (George Philip, 1901, and Frank, 1903). The next few years brought his series of great scientific romances: *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The War of the Worlds* (1898), *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) as well as many short stories, articles and novels, among them *Love and Mr. Lewisham* (1901).

In 1900 Wells built himself a house at Sandgate near Folkestone, which remained his home for nearly a decade, in the course of which he rose to a position of world-wide literary fame. There, at Sandgate, he wrote some of his most celebrated works, e.g. *Anticipations*, a volume of essays on sociological problems (1901), *The Sea Lady* (1902), *The Food of the Gods* (1904), *Kipps*, *A Modern Utopia* (both in 1905), *In the Days of the Comet* (1906), *The War in the Air* (1908), *Tono Bungay*, *Anne Veronica* (both in 1909), and *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910).

At the turn of the century, his health having greatly improved, Wells began to make frequent trips to the European Continent and in 1906 he went on his first tour to the United States. In 1903 he joined the Fabian Society, with which he remained actively (though not always harmoniously) connected for a number of years. In 1909 he moved to London, and in 1912 bought a house at Easton Park near Dunmow, Essex, which remained his home until his wife's death in 1927.

*The New Machiavelli* (1911) marks a new departure in Wells' creative work; the novel of ideas and of problems in which the (fictional) story becomes subordinate to the sociological and ideological message. The works *Marriage* (1912), *The Passionate Friends* (1913), *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman* (1914), *The Research Magnificent* (1915), belong to this category.

Wells supported the first World War as the "War to end War" and in 1918 became for a short time director of Propaganda Policy against Germany on Lord Northcliffe's Enemy Propaganda Committee. His most important

work, written and published during the war was *Mr. Britling sees it Through* (1916) which achieved tremendous popularity.

Shortly after the war (1920) he visited Soviet Russia and in 1921 he attended the Washington Conference. In the years to follow he travelled much, and spent many winters away from the rigours of the English climate. Though he continued writing novels—his most important novel of the inter-war years was *The World of William Clissold* (1926)—he concentrated more and more on the propagating of ideas. The main thesis which he expounded during the last two decades of his life was that the human race must adapt itself to the material forces it has created, or perish. The three great works *Outline of History* (1920), *Science of Life* (1929), and *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* (1932), were all designed to popularise the ideology appropriate to the task of creating a World State—in his view the only alternative to a return to barbarism and to final annihilation. In 1934 he published two volumes of autobiography, *Experiment in Living*.

The second World War was to him the confirmation that mankind had indeed lost the mastery over the forces of its own making and was heading inexorably towards doom. His last work *Mind at the End of its Tether* (1945) gave expression to his final mood of despair.

Having been ailing for some considerable time, he died in his London home on 13 August 1946.

H. d. R.



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## THE STOLEN BACILLUS

“This again,” said the Bacteriologist, slipping a glass slide under the microscope, “is a preparation of the celebrated Bacillus of cholera—the cholera germ.”

The pale-faced man peered down the microscope. He was evidently not accustomed to that kind of thing, and held a limp white hand over his disengaged eye. “I see very little,” he said.

“Touch this screw,” said the Bacteriologist; “perhaps the microscope is out of focus for you. Eyes vary so much. Just the fraction of a turn this way or that.”

“Ah! now I see,” said the visitor. “Not so very much to see after all. Little streaks and shreds of pink. And yet those little particles, those mere atomies, might multiply and devastate a city! Wonderful!”

He stood up, and releasing the glass slip from the microscope, held it in his hand towards the window. “Scarcely visible,” he said, scrutinising the preparation. He hesitated. “Are these—alive? Are they dangerous now?”

“Those have been stained and killed,” said the Bacteriologist. “I wish, for my own part, we could kill and stain every one of them in the universe.”

“I suppose,” the pale man said, with a slight smile, “that you scarcely care to have such things about you in the living—in the active state?”

“On the contrary, we are obliged to,” said the Bacteriologist. “Here, for instance——” He walked across the room and took up one of several sealed tubes. “Here is the living thing. This is a cultivation of the actual living disease bacteria.” He hesitated. “Bottled cholera, so to speak.”

A slight gleam of satisfaction appeared momentarily in the face of the pale man. “It’s a deadly thing to have in your possession,” he said, devouring the little tube with his eyes. The Bacteriologist watched the morbid pleasure in his visitor’s expression. This man, who had visited him that afternoon with a note of introduction from an old friend, interested him from the very contrast of their dispositions. The lank black hair and deep gray eyes, the haggard expression and nervous manner, the fitful yet keen interest of his visitor were a novel change from the phlegmatic deliberations of the ordinary scientific worker with whom the Bacteriologist chiefly associated. It was perhaps natural, with a hearer evidently so impressionable

to the lethal nature of his topic, to take the most effective aspect of the matter.

He held the tube in his hand thoughtfully. "Yes, here is the pestilence imprisoned. Only break such a little tube as this into a supply of drinking-water, say to these minute particles of life that one must needs stain and examine with the highest powers of the microscope even to see, and that one can neither smell nor taste—say to them, 'Go forth, increase and multiply, and replenish the cisterns,' and death—mysterious, untraceable death, death swift and terrible, death full of pain and indignity—would be released upon this city, and go hither and thither seeking his victims. Here he would take the husband from the wife, here the child from its mother, here the statesman from his duty, and here the toiler from his trouble. He would follow the watermains, creeping along streets, picking out and punishing a house here and a house there where they did not boil their drinking-water, creeping into the wells of the mineral-water makers, getting washed into salad, and lying dormant in ices. He would wait ready to be drunk in the horse-troughs, and by unwary children in the public fountains. He would soak into the soil, to reappear in springs and wells at a thousand unexpected places. Once start him at the water supply, and before we could ring him in, and catch him again, he would have decimated the metropolis."

He stopped abruptly. He had been told rhetoric was his weakness.

"But he is quite safe here, you know—quite safe."

The pale-faced man nodded. His eyes shone. He cleared his throat. "These Anarchist—rascals," said he, "are fools, blind fools—to use bombs when this kind of thing is attainable. I think——"

A gentle rap, a mere light touch of the fingernails, was heard at the door. The Bacteriologist opened it. "Just a minute, dear," whispered his wife.

When he re-entered the laboratory his visitor was looking at his watch. "I had no idea I had wasted an hour of your time," he said. "Twelve minutes to four. I ought to have left here by half-past three. But your things were really too interesting. No, positively I cannot stop a moment longer. I have an engagement at four."

He passed out of the room reiterating his thanks, and the Bacteriologist accompanied him to the door, and then returned thoughtfully along the passage to his laboratory. He was musing on the ethnology of his visitor. Certainly the man was not a Teutonic type nor a common Latin one. "A morbid product, anyhow, I am afraid," said the Bacteriologist to himself.

“How he gloated on those cultivations of disease-germs!” A disturbing thought struck him. He turned to the bench by the vapour-bath, and then very quickly to his writing-table. Then he felt hastily in his pockets and then rushed to the door. “I may have put it down on the hall table,” he said.

“Minnie!” he shouted hoarsely in the hall.

“Yes, dear,” came a remote voice.

“Had I anything in my hand when I spoke to you, dear, just now?”

Pause.

“Nothing, dear, because I remember——”

“Blue ruin!” cried the Bacteriologist, and incontinently ran to the front door and down the steps of his house to the street.

Minnie, hearing the door slam violently, ran in alarm to the window. Down the street a slender man was getting into a cab. The Bacteriologist, hatless, and in his carpet slippers, was running and gesticulating wildly towards this group. One slipper came off, but he did not wait for it. “He has gone *mad!*” said Minnie; “It’s that horrid science of his”; and, opening the window, would have called after him. The slender man, suddenly glancing round, seemed struck with the same idea of mental disorder. He pointed hastily to the Bacteriologist, said something to the cabman, the apron of the cab slammed, the whip swished, the horse’s feet clattered, and in a moment the cab, and Bacteriologist hotly in pursuit, had receded up the vista of the roadway and disappeared round the corner.

Minnie remained straining out of the window for a minute. Then she drew her head back into the room again. She was dumbfounded. “Of course he is eccentric,” she meditated. “But running about London—in the height of the season, too—in his socks!” A happy thought struck her. She hastily put her bonnet on, seized his shoes, went into the hall, took down his hat and light overcoat from the pegs, emerged upon the doorstep, and hailed a cab that opportunely crawled by. “Drive me up the road and round Havelock Crescent, and see if we can find a gentleman running about in a velveteen coat and no hat.”

“Velveteen coat, ma’am, and no ’at. Very good, ma’am.” And the cabman whipped up at once in the most matter-of-fact way, as if he drove to this address every day in his life.

Some few minutes later the little group of cabmen and loafers that collects round the cabmen’s shelter at Haverstock Hill were startled by the

passing of a cab with a ginger-coloured screw of a horse, driven furiously.

They were silent as it went by, and then as it receded—"That's 'Arry 'Icks. Wot's *he* got?" said the stout gentleman known as old Tootles.

"He's a-using his whip, he is, *to* rights," said the ostler boy.

"Hallo!" said poor old Tommy Byles; "here's another bloomin' loonatic. Blowed if there ain't."

"It's old George," said old Tootles, "and he's drivin' a loonatic, *as* you say. Ain't he a-clawin' out of the kebs? Wonder if he's after 'Arry 'Icks?"

The group round the cabmen's shelter became animated. Chorus: "Go it, George!" "It's a race." "You'll ketch 'em!" "Whip up!"

"She's a goer, she is!" said the ostler boy.

"Strike me giddy!" cried old Tootles. "Here! *I'm* a-goin' to begin in a minute. Here's another comin'. If all the kebs in Hampstead ain't gone mad this morning!"

"It's a fieldmale this time," said the ostler boy.

"She's a-followin' *him*," said old Tootles. "Usually the other way about."

"What's she got in her 'and?"

"Looks like a 'igh 'at."

"What a bloomin' lark it is! Three to one on old George," said the ostler boy. "Nexst!"

Minnie went by in a perfect roar of applause. She did not like it, but she felt that she was doing her duty, and whirled on down Haverstock Hill and Camden Town High Street with her eyes ever intent on the animated back view of old George, who was driving her vagrant husband so incomprehensibly away from her.

The man in the foremost cab sat crouched in the corner, his arms tightly folded, and the little tube that contained such vast possibilities of destruction gripped in his hand. His mood was a singular mixture of fear and exultation. Chiefly he was afraid of being caught before he could accomplish his purpose, but behind this was a vaguer but larger fear of the awfulness of his crime. But his exultation far exceeded his fear. No Anarchist before him had ever approached this conception of his. Ravachol, Vaillant, all those distinguished persons whose fame he had envied dwindled into insignificance beside him. He had only to make sure of the water supply, and

break the little tube into a reservoir. How brilliantly he had planned it, forged the letter of introduction and got into the laboratory, and how brilliantly he had seized his opportunity! The world should hear of him at last. All those people who had sneered at him, neglected him, preferred other people to him, found his company undesirable, should consider him at last. Death, death, death! They had always treated him as a man of no importance. All the world had been in a conspiracy to keep him under. He would teach them yet what it is to isolate a man. What was this familiar street? Great Saint Andrew's Street, of course! How fared the chase? He craned out of the cab. The Bacteriologist was scarcely fifty yards behind. That was bad. He would be caught and stopped yet. He felt in his pocket for money, and found half a sovereign. This he thrust up through the trap in the top of the cab into the man's face. "More," he shouted, "if only we get away."

The money was snatched out of his hand. "Right you are," said the cabman, and the trap slammed, and the lash lay along the glistening side of the horse. The cab swayed, and the Anarchist, half-standing under the trap, put the hand containing the little glass tube upon the apron to preserve his balance. He felt the brittle thing crack, and the broken half of it rang upon the floor of the cab. He fell back into the seat with a curse, and stared dismally at the two or three drops of moisture on the apron.

He shuddered.

"Well, I suppose I shall be the first. *Phew!* Anyhow, I shall be a Martyr. That's something. But it is a filthy death, nevertheless. I wonder if it hurts as much as they say."

Presently a thought occurred to him—he groped between his feet. A little drop was still in the broken end of the tube, and he drank that to make sure. It was better to make sure. At any rate, he would not fail.

Then it dawned upon him that there was no further need to escape the Bacteriologist. In Wellington Street he told the cabman to stop, and got out. He slipped on the step, and his head felt queer. It was rapid stuff, this cholera poison. He waved his cabman out of existence, so to speak, and stood on the pavement with his arms folded upon his breast awaiting the arrival of the Bacteriologist. There was something tragic in his pose. The sense of imminent death gave him a certain dignity. He greeted his pursuer with a defiant laugh.

"*Vive l'Anarchie!* You are too late, my friend. I have drunk it. The cholera is abroad!"

The Bacteriologist from his cab beamed curiously at him through his spectacles. "You have drunk it! An Anarchist! I see now." He was about to say something more, and then checked himself. A smile hung in the corner of his mouth. He opened the apron of his cab as if to descend, at which the Anarchist waved him a dramatic farewell and strode off towards Waterloo Bridge, carefully jostling his infected body against as many people as possible. The Bacteriologist was so preoccupied with the vision of him that he scarcely manifested the slightest surprise at the appearance of Minnie upon the pavement with his hat and shoes and overcoat. "Very good of you to bring my things," he said, and remained lost in contemplation of the receding figure of the Anarchist.

"You had better get in," he said, still staring. Minnie felt absolutely convinced now that he was mad, and directed the cabman home on her own responsibility. "Put on my shoes? Certainly, dear," said he, as the cab began to turn, and hid the strutting black figure, now small in the distance, from his eyes. Then suddenly something grotesque struck him, and he laughed. Then he remarked, "It is really very serious, though.

"You see, that man came to my house to see me, and he is an Anarchist. No—don't faint, or I cannot possibly tell you the rest. And I wanted to astonish him, not knowing he was an Anarchist, and took up a cultivation of that new species of Bacterium I was telling you of that infest, and I think cause, the blue patches upon various monkeys; and, like a fool, I said it was Asiatic cholera. And he ran away with it to poison the water of London, and he certainly might have made things look blue for this civilised city. And now he has swallowed it. Of course, I cannot say what will happen, but you know it turned that kitten blue, and the three puppies—in patches, and the sparrow—bright blue. But the bother is, I shall have all the trouble and expense of preparing some more.

"Put on my coat on this hot day! Why? Because we might meet Mrs. Jabber. My dear, Mrs. Jabber is not a draught. But why should I wear a coat on a hot day because of Mrs.— Oh! *very* well."

## THE ARGONAUTS OF THE AIR

One saw Monson's Flying Machine from the windows of the trains passing either along the South-Western main line or along the line between Wimbledon and Worcester Park—to be more exact, one saw the huge scaffoldings which limited the flight of the apparatus. They rose over the tree-tops, a massive alley of interlacing iron and timber, and an enormous web of ropes and tackle, extending the best part of two miles. From the Leatherhead branch this alley was foreshortened and in part hidden by a hill with villas; but from the main line one had it in profile, a complex tangle of girders and curving bars, very impressive to the excursionists from Portsmouth and Southampton and the West. Monson had taken up the work where Maxim had left it, had gone on at first with an utter contempt for the journalistic wit and ignorance that had irritated and hampered his predecessor, and had spent (it was said) rather more than half his immense fortune upon his experiments. The results, to an impatient generation, seemed inconsiderable. When some five years had passed after the growth of the colossal iron groves at Worcester Park, and Monson still failed to put in a fluttering appearance over Trafalgar Square, even the Isle of Wight trippers felt their liberty to smile. And such intelligent people as did not consider Monson a fool stricken with the mania for invention, denounced him as being (for no particular reason) a self-advertising quack.

Yet now and again a morning trainload of season-ticket holders would see a white monster rush headlong through the airy tracery of guides and bars, and hear the further stays, nettings, and buffers snap, creak, and groan with the impact of the blow. Then there would be an efflorescence of black-set white-rimmed faces along the sides of the train, and the morning papers would be neglected for a vigorous discussion of the possibility of flying (in which nothing new was ever said by any chance), until the train reached Waterloo, and its cargo of season-ticket holders dispersed themselves over London. Or the fathers and mothers in some multitudinous train of weary excursionists, returning exhausted from a day of rest by the sea, would find the dark fabric, standing out against the evening sky, useful in diverting some bilious child from its introspection, and be suddenly startled by the swift transit of a huge black flapping shape that strained upward against the guides. It was a great and forcible thing beyond dispute, and excellent for conversation; yet, all the same, it was but flying in leading-strings, and most



of those who witnessed it scarcely counted its flight as flying. More of a switchback it seemed to the run of the folk.

Monson, I say, did not trouble himself very keenly about the opinions of the Press at first. But possibly he, even, had formed but a poor idea of the time it would take before the tactics of flying were mastered, the swift assured adjustment of the big soaring shape to every gust and chance movement of the air; nor had he clearly reckoned the money this prolonged struggle against gravitation would cost him. And he was not so pachydermatous as he seemed. Secretly he had his periodical bundles of cuttings sent him by Romeike, he had his periodical reminders from his banker; and if he did not mind the initial ridicule and scepticism, he felt the growing neglect as the months went by and the money dribbled away. Time was when Monson had sent the enterprising journalist, keen after readable matter, empty from his gates. But when the enterprising journalist ceased from troubling, Monson was anything but satisfied in his heart of hearts. Still day by day the work went on, and the multitudinous subtle difficulties of the steering diminished in number. Day by day, too, the money trickled away, until his balance was no longer a matter of hundreds of thousands, but of tens. And at last came an anniversary.

Monson, sitting in the little drawing-shed, suddenly noticed the date on Woodhouse's calendar.

"It was five years ago to-day that we began," he said to Woodhouse suddenly.

"Is it?" said Woodhouse.

"It's the alterations play the devil with us," said Monson, biting a paper-fastener.

The drawings for the new vans to the hinder screw lay on the table before him as he spoke. He pitched the mutilated brass paper-fastener into the waste-paper basket and drummed with his fingers. "These alterations! Will the mathematicians ever be clever enough to save us all this patching and experimenting? Five years—learning by rule of thumb, when one might think that it was possible to calculate the whole thing out beforehand. The cost of it! I might have hired three senior wranglers for life. But they'd only have developed some beautifully useless theorems in pneumatics. What a time it has been, Woodhouse!"

"These mouldings will take three weeks," said Woodhouse. "At special prices."

“Three weeks!” said Monson, and sat drumming.

“Three weeks certain,” said Woodhouse, an excellent engineer, but no good as a comforter. He drew the sheets towards him and began shading a bar.

Monson stopped drumming, and began to bite his fingernails, staring the while at Woodhouse’s head.

“How long have they been calling this Monson’s Folly?” he said suddenly.

“*Oh!* Year or so,” said Woodhouse carelessly, without looking up.

Monson sucked the air in between his teeth, and went to the window. The stout iron columns carrying the elevated rails upon which the start of the machine was made rose up close by, and the machine was hidden by the upper edge of the window. Through the grove of iron pillars, red painted and ornate with rows of bolts, one had a glimpse of the pretty scenery towards Esher. A train went gliding noiselessly across the middle distance, its rattle drowned by the hammering of the workmen overhead. Monson could imagine the grinning faces at the windows of the carriages. He swore savagely under his breath, and dabbed viciously at a blowfly that suddenly became noisy on the window pane.

“What’s up?” said Woodhouse, staring in surprise at his employer.

“I’m about sick of this.”

Woodhouse scratched his cheek. “*Oh!*” he said, after an assimilating pause. He pushed the drawing away from him.

“Here these fools . . . I’m trying to conquer a new element—trying to do a thing that will revolutionise life. And instead of taking an intelligent interest, they grin and make their stupid jokes, and call me and my appliances names.”

“Asses!” said Woodhouse, letting his eye fall again on the drawing.

The epithet, curiously enough, made Monson wince. “I’m about sick of it, Woodhouse, anyhow,” he said, after a pause.

Woodhouse shrugged his shoulders.

“There’s nothing for it but patience, I suppose,” said Monson, sticking his hands in his pockets. “I’ve started. I’ve made my bed, and I’ve got to lie on it. I can’t go back. I’ll see it through, and spend every penny I have and every penny I can borrow. But I tell you, Woodhouse, I’m infernally sick of

it, all the same. If I'd paid a tenth part of the money towards some political greaser's expenses—I'd have been a baronet before this."

Monson paused. Woodhouse stared in front of him with a blank expression he always employed to indicate sympathy, and tapped his pencil-case on the table. Monson stared at him for a minute.

"Oh, *damn!*" said Monson suddenly, and abruptly rushed out of the room.

Woodhouse continued his sympathetic rigour for perhaps half a minute. Then he sighed and resumed the shading of the drawings. Something had evidently upset Monson. Nice chap, and generous, but difficult to get on with. It was the way with every amateur who had anything to do with engineering—wanted everything finished at once. But Monson had usually the patience of the expert. Odd he was so irritable. Nice and round that aluminium rod did look now! Woodhouse threw back his head, and put it, first this side and then that, to appreciate his bit of shading better.

"Mr. Woodhouse," said Hooper, the foreman of the labourers, putting his head in at the door.

"Hallo!" said Woodhouse, without turning round.

"Nothing happened, sir?" said Hooper.

"Happened?" said Woodhouse.

"The governor just been up the rails swearing like a tornader."

"*Oh!*" said Woodhouse.

"It ain't like him, sir."

"No?"

"And I was thinking perhaps——"

"Don't think," said Woodhouse, still admiring the drawings.

Hooper knew Woodhouse, and he shut the door suddenly with a vicious slam. Woodhouse stared stonily before him for some further minutes, and then made an ineffectual effort to pick his teeth with his pencil. Abruptly he desisted, pitched that old, tried, and stumpy servitor across the room, got up, stretched himself, and followed Hooper.

He looked ruffled—it was visible to every workman he met. When a millionaire who has been spending thousands on experiments that employ quite a little army of people suddenly indicates that he is sick of the

undertaking, there is almost invariably a certain amount of mental friction in the ranks of the little army he employs. And even before he indicates his intentions there are speculations and murmurs, a watching of faces and a study of straws. Hundreds of people knew before the day was out that Monson was ruffled, Woodhouse ruffled, Hooper ruffled. A workman's wife, for instance (whom Monson had never seen), decided to keep her money in the savings-bank instead of buying a velveteen dress. So far-reaching are even the casual curses of a millionaire.

Monson found a certain satisfaction in going on the works and behaving disagreeably to as many people as possible. After a time even that palled upon him, and he rode off the grounds, to every one's relief there, and through the lanes south-eastward, to the infinite tribulation of his house steward at Cheam.

And the immediate cause of it all, the little grain of annoyance that had suddenly precipitated all this discontent with his life-work was—these trivial things that direct all our great decisions!—half a dozen ill-considered remarks made by a pretty girl, prettily dressed, with a beautiful voice and something more than prettiness in her soft gray eyes. And of these half-dozen remarks, two words especially—"Monson's Folly." She had felt she was behaving charmingly to Monson; she reflected the next day how exceptionally effective she had been, and no one would have been more amazed than she, had she learned the effect she had left on Monson's mind. I hope, considering everything, that she never knew.

"How are you getting on with your flying-machine?" she asked. ("I wonder if I shall ever meet any one with the sense not to ask that," thought Monson.) "It will be very dangerous at first, will it not?" ("Thinks I'm afraid.") "Jorgon is going to play presently; have you heard him before?" ("My mania being attended to, we turn to rational conversation.") Gush about Jorgon; gradual decline of conversation, ending with—"You must let me know when your flying-machine is finished, Mr. Monson, and then I will consider the advisability of taking a ticket." ("One would think I was still playing inventions in the nursery.") But the bitterest thing she said was not meant for Monson's ears. To Phlox, the novelist, she was always conscientiously brilliant. "I have been talking to Mr. Monson, and he can think of nothing, positively nothing, but that flying-machine of his. Do you know, all his workmen call that place of his 'Monson's Folly'? He is quite impossible. It is really very, very sad. I always regard him myself in the light of sunken treasure—the Lost Millionaire, you know."

She was pretty and well educated—indeed, she had written an epigrammatic novelette; but the bitterness was that she was typical. She summarised what the world thought of the man who was working sanely, steadily, and surely towards a more tremendous revolution in the appliances of civilisation, a more far-reaching alteration in the ways of humanity than has ever been effected since history began. They did not even take him seriously. In a little while he would be proverbial. “I *must* fly now,” he said on his way home, smarting with a sense of absolute social failure. “I must fly soon. If it doesn’t come off, soon, by God! I shall run amuck.”

He said that before he had gone through his pass-book and his litter of papers. Inadequate as the cause seems, it was that girl’s voice and the expression of her eyes that precipitated his discontent. But certainly the discovery that he had no longer even one hundred thousand pounds’ worth of realisable property behind him was the poison that made the wound deadly.

It was the next day after this that he exploded upon Woodhouse and his workmen, and thereafter his bearing was consistently grim for three weeks, and anxiety dwelt in Cheam and Ewell, Malden, Morden, and Worcester Park, places that had thriven mightily on his experiments.

Four weeks after that first swearing of his, he stood with Woodhouse by the reconstructed machine as it lay across the elevated railway, by means of which it gained its initial impetus. The new propeller glittered a brighter white than the rest of the machine, and a gilder, obedient to a whim of Monson’s, was picking out the aluminium bars with gold. And looking down the long avenue between the ropes (gilded now with the sunset) one saw red signals, and two miles away an ant-hill of workmen busy altering the last falls of the run into a rising slope.

“I’ll *come*,” said Woodhouse. “I’ll come right enough. But I tell you it’s infernally foolhardy. If only you would give another year——”

“I tell you I won’t. I tell you the thing works. I’ve given years enough——”

“It’s not that,” said Woodhouse. “We’re all right with the machine. But it’s the steering——”

“Haven’t I been rushing, night and morning, backwards and forwards, through this squirrel’s cage? If the thing steers true here, it will steer true all across England. It’s just funk, I tell you, Woodhouse. We could have gone a year ago. And besides——”

“Well?” said Woodhouse.

“The money!” snapped Monson over his shoulder.

“Hang it! I never thought of the money,” said Woodhouse, and then, speaking now in a very different tone to that with which he had said the words before, he repeated, “I’ll come. Trust me.”

Monson turned suddenly, and saw all that Woodhouse had not the dexterity to say, shining on his sunset-lit face. He looked for a moment, then impulsively extended his hand. “Thanks,” he said.

“All right,” said Woodhouse, gripping the hand, and with a queer softening of his features. “Trust me.”

Then both men turned to the big apparatus that lay with its flat wings extended upon the carrier, and stared at it meditatively. Monson, guided perhaps by a photographic study of the flight of birds, and by Lilienthal’s methods, had gradually drifted from Maxim’s shapes towards the bird form again. The thing, however, was driven by a huge screw behind in the place of the tail; and so hovering, which needs an almost vertical adjustment of a flat tail, was rendered impossible. The body of the machine was small, almost cylindrical, and pointed. Forward and aft on the pointed ends were two small petroleum engines for the screw, and the navigators sat deep in a canoe-like recess, the foremost one steering, and being protected by a low screen, with two plate-glass windows, from the blinding rush of air. On either side a monstrous flat framework with a curved front border could be adjusted so as either to lie horizontally, or to be tilted upward or down. These wings worked rigidly together, or, by releasing a pin, one could be tilted through a small angle independently of its fellow. The front edge of either wing could also be shifted back so as to diminish the wing-area about one-sixth. The machine was not only not designed to hover, but it was also incapable of fluttering. Monson’s idea was to get into the air with the initial rush of the apparatus, and then to skim, much as a playing-card may be skimmed, keeping up the rush by means of the screw at the stern. Rooks and gulls fly enormous distances in that way with scarcely a perceptible movement of the wings. The bird really drives along on an aerial switchback. It glides slanting downward for a space, until it has gained considerable momentum, and then altering the inclination of its wings, glides up again almost to its original altitude. Even a Londoner who has watched the birds in the aviary in Regent’s Park knows that.

But the bird is practising this art from the moment it leaves its nest. It has not only the perfect apparatus, but the perfect instinct to use it. A man

off his feet has the poorest skill in balancing. Even the simple trick of the bicycle costs him some hours of labour. The instantaneous adjustments of the wings, the quick response to a passing breeze, the swift recovery of equilibrium, the giddy, eddying movements that require such absolute precision—all that he must learn, learn with infinite labour and infinite danger, if ever he is to conquer flying. The flying-machine that will start off some fine day, driven by neat “little levers,” with a nice open deck like a liner, and all loaded up with bombshells and guns, is the easy dreaming of a literary man. In lives and in treasure the cost of the conquest of the empire of the air may even exceed all that has been spent in man’s great conquest of the sea. Certainly it will be costlier than the greatest war that has ever devastated the world.

No one knew these things better than these two practical men. And they knew they were in the front rank of the coming army. Yet there is hope even in a forlorn hope. Men are killed outright in the reserves sometimes, while others who have been left for dead in the thickest corner crawl out and survive.

“If we miss these meadows——” said Woodhouse presently in his slow way.

“My dear chap,” said Monson, whose spirits had been rising fitfully during the last few days, “we mustn’t miss these meadows. There’s a quarter of a square mile for us to hit, fences removed, ditches levelled. We shall come down all right—rest assured. And if we don’t——”

“Ah!” said Woodhouse. “If we don’t!”

Before the day of the start, the newspaper people got wind of the alterations at the northward end of the framework, and Monson was cheered by a decided change in the comments Romeike forwarded him. “He will be off some day,” said the papers. “He will be off some day,” said the South-Western season-ticket holders one to another; the seaside excursionists, the Saturday-to-Monday trippers from Sussex and Hampshire and Dorset and Devon, the eminent literary people from Hazlemere, all remarked eagerly one to another, “He will be off some day,” as the familiar scaffolding came in sight. And actually, one bright morning, in full view of the ten-past-ten train from Basingstoke, Monson’s flying-machine started on its journey.

They saw the carrier running swiftly along its rail, and the white and gold screw spinning in the air. They heard the rapid rumble of wheels, and a thud as the carrier reached the buffers at the end of its run. Then a whirr as the Flying-Machine was shot forward into the networks. All that the

majority of them had seen and heard before. The thing went with a drooping flight through the framework and rose again, and then every beholder shouted, or screamed, or yelled, or shrieked after his kind. For instead of the customary concussion and stoppage, the Flying Machine flew out of its five years' cage like a bolt from a crossbow, and drove slantingly upward into the air, curved round a little, so as to cross the line, and soared in the direction of Wimbledon Common.

It seemed to hang momentarily in the air and grow smaller, then it ducked and vanished over the clustering blue tree-tops to the east of Coombe Hill, and no one stopped staring and gasping until long after it had disappeared.

That was what the people in the train from Basingstoke saw. If you had drawn a line down the middle of that train, from engine to guard's van, you would not have found a living soul on the opposite side to the flying machine. It was a mad rush from window to window as the thing crossed the line. And the engine-driver and stoker never took their eyes off the low hills about Wimbledon, and never noticed that they had run clean through Coombe and Malden and Raynes Park, until, with returning animation, they found themselves pelting, at the most indecent pace, into Wimbledon station.

From the moment when Monson had started the carrier with a "*Now!*" neither he nor Woodhouse said a word. Both men sat with clenched teeth. Monson had crossed the line with a curve that was too sharp, and Woodhouse had opened and shut his white lips; but neither spoke. Woodhouse simply gripped his seat, and breathed sharply through his teeth, watching the blue country to the west rushing past, and down, and away from him. Monson knelt at his post forward and his hands trembled on the spoked wheel that moved the wings. He could see nothing before him but a mass of white clouds in the sky.

The machine went slanting upward, travelling with an enormous speed still, but losing momentum every moment. The land ran away underneath with diminishing speed.

"*Now!*" said Woodhouse at last, and with a violent effort Monson wrenched over the wheel and altered the angle of the wings. The machine seemed to hang for half a minute motionless in mid-air, and then he saw the hazy blue house-covered hills of Kilburn and Hampstead jump up before his eyes and rise steadily, until the little sunlit dome of the Albert Hall appeared through his windows. For a moment he scarcely understood the meaning of



this upward rush of the horizon, but as the nearer and nearer houses came into view, he realised what he had done. He had turned the wings over too far, and they were swooping steeply downward towards the Thames.

The thought, the question, the realisation were all the business of a second of time. "Too much!" gasped Woodhouse. Monson brought the wheel half-way back with a jerk, and forthwith the Kilburn and Hampstead ridge dropped again to the lower edge of his windows. They had been a thousand feet above Coombe and Malden station; fifty seconds after they whizzed, at a frightful pace, not eighty feet above the East Putney station, on the Metropolitan District line, to the screaming astonishment of a platform full of people. Monson flung up the vans against the air, and over Fulham they rushed up their atmospheric switchback again, steeply—too steeply. The buses went floundering across the Fulham Road, the people yelled.

Then down again, too steeply still, and the distant trees and houses about Primrose Hill leapt up across Monson's window, and then suddenly he saw straight before him the greenery of Kensington Gardens and the towers of the Imperial Institute. They were driving straight down upon South Kensington. The pinnacles of the Natural History Museum rushed up into view. There came one fatal second of swift thought, a moment of hesitation. Should he try to clear the towers, or swerve eastward?

He made a hesitating attempt to release the right wing, left the catch half released, and gave a frantic clutch at the wheel.

The nose of the machine seemed to leap up before him. The wheel pressed his hand with irresistible force, and jerked itself out of his control.

Woodhouse, sitting crouched together, gave a hoarse cry, and sprang up towards Monson. "Too far!" he cried, and then he was clinging to the gunwale for dear life, and Monson had been jerked clean overhead, and was falling backwards upon him.

So swiftly had the thing happened that barely a quarter of the people going to and fro in Hyde Park, and Brompton Road, and the Exhibition Road saw anything of the aerial catastrophe. A distant winged shape had appeared above the clustering houses to the south, had fallen and risen, growing larger as it did so; had swooped swiftly down towards the Imperial Institute, a broad spread of flying wings, had swept round in a quarter circle, dashed eastward, and then suddenly sprang vertically into the air. A black object shot out of it, and came spinning downward. A man! Two men clutching each other! They came whirling down, separated as they struck the

roof of the Students' Club, and bounded off into the green bushes on its southward side.

For perhaps half a minute the pointed stem of the big machine still pierced vertically upward, the screw spinning desperately. For one brief instant, that yet seemed an age to all who watched, it had hung motionless in mid-air. Then a spout of yellow flame licked up its length from the stern engine, and swift, swifter, swifter, and flaring like a rocket, it rushed down upon the solid mass of masonry which was formerly the Royal College of Science. The big screw of white and gold touched the parapet, and crumpled up like wet linen. Then the blazing spindle-shaped body smashed and splintered, smashing and splintering in its fall, upon the north-westward angle of the building.

But the crash, the flame of blazing paraffin that shot heavenward from the shattered engines of the machine, the crushed horrors that were found in the garden beyond the Students' Club, the masses of yellow parapet and red brick that fell headlong into the roadway, the running to and fro of people like ants in a broken ant-hill, the galloping of fire-engines, the gathering of crowds—all these things do not belong to this story, which was written only to tell how the first of all successful flying-machines was launched and flew. Though he failed, and failed disastrously, the record of Monson's work remains—a sufficient monument—to guide the next of that band of gallant experimentalists who will sooner or later master this great problem of flying. And between Worcester Park and Malden there still stands that portentous avenue of ironwork, rusting now, and dangerous here and there, to witness to the first desperate struggle for man's right of way through the air.

## IN THE MODERN VEIN

### AN UNSYMPATHETIC LOVE STORY

Of course the cultivated reader has heard of Aubrey Vair. He has published on three several occasions volumes of delicate verses—some, indeed, border on indelicacy—and his column “Of Things Literary” in the *Climax* is well known. His Byronic visage and an interview have appeared in the *Perfect Lady*. It was Aubrey Vair, I believe, who demonstrated that the humour of Dickens was worse than his sentiment, and who detected “a subtle bourgeois flavour” in Shakespeare. However, it is not generally known that Aubrey Vair has had erotic experiences as well as erotic inspirations. He adopted Goethe some little time since as his literary prototype, and that may have had something to do with his temporary lapse from sexual integrity.

For it is one of the commonest things that undermine literary men, giving us landslips and picturesque effects along the otherwise even cliff of their respectable life, ranking next to avarice, and certainly above drink, this instability called genius, or, more fully, the consciousness of genius, such as Aubrey Vair possessed. Since Shelley set the fashion, your man of gifts has been assured that his duty to himself and his duty to his wife are incompatible, and his renunciation of the Philistine has been marked by such infidelity as his means and courage warranted. Most virtue is lack of imagination. At any rate, a minor genius without his affections twisted into an inextricable muddle, and who did not occasionally shed sonnets over his troubles, I have never met.

Even Aubrey Vair did this, weeping the sonnets overnight into his blotting-book, and pretending to write literary *causerie* when his wife came down in her bath slippers to see what kept him up. She did not understand him, of course. He did this even before the other woman appeared, so ingrained is conjugal treachery in the talented mind. Indeed, he wrote more sonnets before the other woman came than after that event, because thereafter he spent much of his leisure in cutting down the old productions, re-trimming them, and generally altering this ready-made clothing of his passion to suit her particular height and complexion.

Aubrey Vair lived in a little red villa with a lawn at the back and a view of the Downs behind Reigate. He lived upon discreet investment eked out by literary work. His wife was handsome, sweet, and gentle, and—such is the

tender humility of good married women—she found her life's happiness in seeing that little Aubrey Vair had well-cooked variety for dinner, and that their house was the neatest and brightest of all the houses they entered. Aubrey Vair enjoyed the dinners, and was proud of the house, yet nevertheless he mourned because his genius dwindled. Moreover, he grew plump, and corpulence threatened him.

We learn in suffering what we teach in song, and Aubrey Vair knew certainly that his soul could give no creditable crops unless his affections were harrowed. And how to harrow them was the trouble, for Reigate is a moral neighbourhood.

So Aubrey Vair's romantic longings blew loose for a time, much as a seedling creeper might, planted in the midst of a flower-bed. But at last, in the fullness of time, the other woman came to the embrace of Aubrey Vair's yearning heart-tendrils, and his romantic episode proceeded as is here faithfully written down.

The other woman was really a girl, and Aubrey Vair met her first at a tennis party at Redhill. Aubrey Vair did not play tennis after the accident to Miss Morton's eye, and because latterly it made him pant and get warmer and moister than even a poet should be; and this young lady had only recently arrived in England, and could not play. So they gravitated into the two vacant basket chairs beside Mrs. Bayne's deaf aunt, in front of the hollyhocks, and were presently talking at their ease together.

The other woman's name was unpropitious—Miss Smith—but you would never have suspected it from her face and costume. Her parentage was promising, she was an orphan, her mother was a Hindoo, and her father an Indian civil servant; and Aubrey Vair—himself a happy mixture of Kelt and Teuton, as, indeed, all literary men have to be nowadays—naturally believed in the literary consequences of a mixture of races. She was dressed in white. She had finely moulded pale features, great depth of expression, and a cloud of delicately *frisé* black hair over her dark eyes, and she looked at Aubrey Vair with a look, half curious and half shy, that contrasted admirably with the stereotyped frankness of your common Reigate girl.

“This is a splendid lawn—the best in Redhill,” said Aubrey Vair in the course of the conversation; “and I like it all the better because the daisies are spared.” He indicated the daisies with a graceful sweep of his rather elegant hand.

“They are sweet little flowers,” said the lady in white, “and I have always associated them with England, chiefly, perhaps, through a picture I

saw ‘over there’ when I was very little, of children making daisy chains. I promised myself that pleasure when I came home. But alas! I feel now rather too large for such delights.”

“I do not see why we should not be able to enjoy these simple pleasures as we grow older—why our growth should have in it so much forgetting. For my own part——”

“Has your wife got Jane’s recipe for stuffing trout?” asked Mrs. Bayne’s deaf aunt abruptly.

“I really don’t know,” said Aubrey Vair.

“That’s all right,” said Mrs. Bayne’s deaf aunt. “It ought to please even you.”

“Anything will please me,” said Aubrey Vair; “I care very little——”

“Oh, it’s a lovely dish,” said Mrs. Bayne’s deaf aunt, and relapsed into contemplation.

“I was saying,” said Aubrey Vair, “that I think I still find my keenest pleasures in childish pastimes. I have a little nephew that I see a great deal of, and when we fly kites together, I am sure it would be hard to tell which of us is the happier. By the bye, you should get at your daisy chains in that way. Beguile some little girl.”

“But I did. I took that Morton mite for a walk in the meadows, and timidly broached the subject. And she reproached me for suggesting ‘frivolous pursuits.’ It was a horrible disappointment.”

“The governess here,” said Aubrey Vair, “is robbing that child of its youth in a terrible way. What will a life be that has no childhood at the beginning?”

“Some human beings are never young,” he continued, “and they never grow up. They lead absolutely colourless lives. They are—they are etiolated. They never love, and never feel the loss of it. They are—for the moment I can think of no better image—they are human flower-pots, in which no soul has been planted. But a human soul properly growing must begin in a fresh childishness.”

“Yes,” said the dark lady thoughtfully, “a careless childhood, running wild almost. That should be the beginning.”

“Then we pass through the wonder and diffidence of youth.”

“To strength and action,” said the dark lady. Her dreamy eyes were fixed on the Downs, and her fingers tightened on her knees as she spoke. “Ah, it is a grand thing to live—as a man does—self-reliant and free.”

“And so at last,” said Aubrey Vair, “come to the culmination and crown of life.” He paused and glanced hastily at her. Then he dropped his voice almost to a whisper—“And the culmination of life is love.”

Their eyes met for a moment, but she looked away at once. Aubrey Vair felt a peculiar thrill and a catching in his breath, but his emotions were too complex for analysis. He had a certain sense of surprise, also, at the way his conversation had developed.

Mrs. Bayne’s deaf aunt suddenly dug him in the chest with her ear-trumpet, and some one at tennis bawled, “Love all!”

“Did I tell you Jane’s girls have had scarlet fever?” asked Mrs. Bayne’s deaf aunt.

“No,” said Aubrey Vair.

“Yes; and they are peeling now,” said Mrs. Bayne’s deaf aunt, shutting her lips tightly, and nodding in a slow, significant manner at both of them.

There was a pause. All three seemed lost in thought, too deep for words.

“Love,” began Aubrey Vair presently, in a severely philosophical tone, leaning back in his chair, holding his hands like a praying saint’s in front of him, and staring at the toe of his shoe—“love is, I believe, the one true and real thing in life. It rises above reason, interest, or explanation. Yet I never read of an age when it was so much forgotten as it is now. Never was love expected to run so much in appointed channels, never was it so despised, checked, ordered, and obstructed. Policemen say, ‘This way, Eros!’ As a result, we relieve our emotional possibilities in the hunt for gold and notoriety. And after all, with the best fortune in these, we only hold up the gilded images of our success, and are weary slaves, with unsatisfied hearts, in the pageant of life.”

Aubrey Vair sighed, and there was a pause. The girl looked at him out of the mysterious darkness of her eyes. She had read many books, but Aubrey Vair was her first literary man, and she took this kind of thing for genius—as girls have done before.

“We are,” continued Aubrey Vair, conscious of a favourable impression—“we are like fireworks, mere dead, inert things until the appointed spark comes; and then—if it is not damp—the dormant soul blazes forth in all its

warmth and beauty. That is living. I sometimes think, do you know, that we should be happier if we could die soon after that golden time, like the Ephemerides. There is a decay sets in.”

“Eigh?” said Mrs. Bayne’s deaf aunt startingly. “I didn’t hear you.”

“I was on the point of remarking,” shouted Aubrey Vair, wheeling the array of his thoughts—“I was on the point of remarking that few people in Redhill could match Mrs. Morton’s fine broad green.”

“Others have noticed it,” Mrs. Bayne’s deaf aunt shouted back. “It is since she has had in her new false teeth.”

This interruption dislocated the conversation a little. However—

“I must thank you, Mr. Vair,” said the dark girl, when they parted that afternoon, “for having given me very much to think about.”

And from her manner, Aubrey Vair perceived clearly he had not wasted his time.

It would require a subtler pen than mine to tell how from that day a passion for Miss Smith grew like Jonah’s gourd in the heart of Aubrey Vair. He became pensive, and in the prolonged absence of Miss Smith, irritable. Mrs. Aubrey Vair felt the change in him, and put it down to a vitriolic Saturday Reviewer. Indisputably the *Saturday* does at times go a little far. He re-read *Elective Affinities*, and lent it to Miss Smith. Incredible as it may appear to members of the Areopagus Club, where we know Aubrey Vair, he did also beyond all question inspire a sort of passion in that sombre-eyed, rather clever, and really very beautiful girl.

He talked to her a lot about love and destiny, and all that bric-à-brac of the minor poet. And they talked together about his genius. He elaborately, though discreetly, sought her society, and presented and read to her the milder of his unpublished sonnets. We consider his Byronic features pasty, but the feminine mind has its own laws. I suppose, also, where a girl is not a fool, a literary man has an enormous advantage over any one but a preacher, in the show he can make of his heart’s wares.

At last a day in that summer came when he met her alone, possibly by chance, in a quiet lane towards Horley. There were ample hedges on either side, rich with honeysuckle, vetch, and mullein.

They conversed intimately of his poetic ambitions, and then he read her those verses of his subsequently published in *Hobson’s Magazine*: “Tenderly ever, since I have met thee.” He had written these the day before; and though

I think the sentiment is uncommonly trite, there is a redeeming note of sincerity about the lines not conspicuous in all Aubrey Vair's poetry.

He read rather well, and a swell of genuine emotion crept into his voice as he read, with one white hand thrown out to point the rhythm of the lines. "Ever, my sweet, for thee," he concluded, looking up into her face.

Before he looked up, he had been thinking chiefly of his poem and its effect. Straightway he forgot it. Her arms hung limply before her, and her hands were clasped together. Her eyes were very tender.

"Your verses go to the heart," she said softly.

Her mobile features were capable of wonderful shades of expression. He suddenly forgot his wife and his position as a minor poet as he looked at her. It is possible that his classical features may themselves have undergone a certain transfiguration. For one brief moment—and it was always to linger in his memory—destiny lifted him out of his vain little self to a nobler level of simplicity. The copy of "Tenderly ever" fluttered from his hand. Considerations vanished. Only one thing seemed of importance.

"I love you," he said abruptly.

An expression of fear came into her eyes. The grip of her hands upon one another tightened convulsively. She became very pale.

Then she moved her lips as if to speak, bringing her face slightly nearer to his. There was nothing in the world at that moment for either of them but one another. They were both trembling exceedingly. In a whisper she said, "You love me?"

Aubrey Vair stood quivering and speechless, looking into her eyes. He had never seen such a light as he saw there before. He was in a wild tumult of emotion. He was dreadfully scared at what he had done. He could not say another word. He nodded.

"And this has come to me?" she said presently, in the same awestricken whisper, and then, "Oh, my love, my love!"

And thereupon Aubrey Vair had her clasped to himself, her cheek upon his shoulder and his lips to hers.

Thus it was that Aubrey Vair came by the cardinal memory of his life. To this day it recurs in his works.

A little boy clambering in the hedge some way down the lane saw this group with surprise, and then with scorn and contempt. Recking nothing of



his destiny, he turned away, feeling that he at least could never come to the unspeakable unmanliness of hugging girls. Unhappily for Reigate scandal, his shame for his sex was altogether too deep for words.

An hour after, Aubrey Vair returned home in a hushed mood. There were muffins after his own heart for his tea—Mrs. Aubrey Vair had had hers. And there were chrysanthemums, chiefly white ones—flowers he loved—set out in the china bowl he was wont to praise. And his wife came behind him to kiss him as he sat eating.

“De lill Jummuns,” she remarked, kissing him under the ear.

Then it came into the mind of Aubrey Vair with startling clearness, while his ear was being kissed, and with his mouth full of muffin, that life is a singularly complex thing.

The summer passed at last into the harvest-time, and the leaves began falling. It was evening, the warm sunset light still touched the Downs, but up the valley a blue haze was creeping. One or two lamps in Reigate were already alight.

About half-way up the slanting road that scales the Downs, there is a wooden seat where one may obtain a fine view of the red villas scattered below, and of the succession of blue hills beyond. Here the girl with the shadowy face was sitting.

She had a book on her knees, but it lay neglected. She was leaning forward, her chin resting upon her hand. She was looking across the valley into the darkening sky, with troubled eyes.

Aubrey Vair appeared through the hazel-bushes, and sat down beside her. He held half a dozen dead leaves in his hand.

She did not alter her attitude. “Well?” she said.

“Is it to be flight?” he asked.

Aubrey Vair was rather pale. He had been having bad nights latterly, with dreams of the Continental Express, Mrs. Aubrey Vair possibly even in pursuit—he always fancied her making the tragedy ridiculous by tearfully bringing additional pairs of socks, and any such trifles he had forgotten, with her—all Reigate and Redhill in commotion. He had never eloped before, and he had visions of difficulties with hotel proprietors. Mrs. Aubrey Vair might telegraph ahead. Even he had had a prophetic vision of a headline in a halfpenny evening newspaper: “Young Lady abducts a Minor Poet.” So there was a quaver in his voice as he asked, “Is it to be flight?”

“As you will,” she answered, still not looking at him.

“I want you to consider particularly how this will affect you. A man,” said Aubrey Vair, slowly, and staring hard at the leaves in his hand, “even gains a certain *éclat* in these affairs. But to a woman it is ruin—social, moral.”

“This is not love,” said the girl in white.

“Ah, my dearest! Think of yourself.”

“Stupid!” she said, under her breath.

“You spoke?”

“Nothing.”

“But cannot we go on, meeting one another, loving one another, without any great scandal or misery? Could we not——”

“That,” interrupted Miss Smith, “would be unspeakably horrible.”

“This is a dreadful conversation to me. Life is so intricate, such a web of subtle strands binds us this way and that. I cannot tell what is right. You must consider——”

“A man would break such strands.”

“There is no manliness,” said Aubrey Vair, with a sudden glow of moral exaltation, “in doing wrong. My love——”

“We could at least die together, dearest,” she said.

“Good Lord!” said Aubrey Vair. “I mean—consider my wife.”

“You have not considered her hitherto.”

“There is a flavour—of cowardice, of desertion, about suicide,” said Aubrey Vair. “Frankly, I have the English prejudice, and do not like any kind of running away.”

Miss Smith smiled very faintly. “I see clearly now what I did not see. My love and yours are very different things.”

“Possibly it is a sexual difference,” said Aubrey Vair; and then, feeling the remark inadequate, he relapsed into silence.

They sat for some time without a word. The two lights in Reigate below multiplied to a score of bright points, and, above, one star had become visible. She began laughing, an almost noiseless, hysterical laugh that jarred unaccountably upon Aubrey Vair.

Presently she stood up. "They will wonder where I am," she said. "I think I must be going."

He followed her to the road. "Then this is the end?" he said, with a curious mixture of relief and poignant regret.

"Yes, this is the end," she answered, and turned away.

There straightway dropped into the soul of Aubrey Vair a sense of infinite loss. It was an altogether new sensation. She was perhaps twenty yards away, when he groaned aloud with the weight of it, and suddenly began running after her with his arms extended.

"Annie," he cried; "Annie! I have been talking *rot*. Annie, now I know I love you! I cannot spare you. This must not be. I did not understand."

The weight was horrible.

"Oh, stop, Annie!" he cried, with a breaking voice, and there were tears on his face.

She turned upon him suddenly, and his arms fell by his side. His expression changed at the sight of her pale face.

"You do not understand," she said. "I have said good-bye."

She looked at him; he was evidently greatly distressed, a little out of breath, and he had just stopped blubbering. His contemptible quality reached the pathetic. She came up close to him, and, taking his damp Byronic visage between her hands, she kissed him again and again. "Good-bye, little man that I loved," she said; "and good-bye to this folly of love."

Then, with something that may have been a laugh or a sob—she herself, when she came to write it all in her novel, did not know which—she turned and hurried away again, and went out of the path that Aubrey Vair must pursue, at the cross-roads.

Aubrey Vair stood, where she had kissed him, with a mind as inactive as his body, until her white dress had disappeared. Then he gave an involuntary sigh, a large exhaustive expiration, and so awoke himself, and began walking, pensively dragging his feet through the dead leaves, home. Emotions are terrible things.

"Do you like the potatoes, dear?" asked Mrs. Aubrey Vair at dinner. "I cooked them myself."

Aubrey Vair descended slowly from cloudy, impalpable meditations to the level of fried potatoes. "These potatoes,"—he remarked, after a pause

during which he was struggling with recollection. “Yes. These potatoes have exactly the tints of the dead leaves of the hazel.”

“What a fanciful poet it is!” said Mrs. Aubrey Vair. “Taste them. They are very nice potatoes indeed.”

## A CATASTROPHE

The little shop was not paying. The realisation came insensibly. Winslow was not the man for definite addition and subtraction and sudden discovery. He became aware of the truth in his mind gradually, as though it had always been there. A lot of facts had converged and led him there. There was that line of cretonnes—four half-pieces—untouched, save for half a yard sold to cover a stool. There were those shirtings at  $4\frac{3}{4}d.$ —Bandersnatch, in the Broadway, was selling them at  $2\frac{3}{4}d.$ —under cost, in fact. (Surely Bandersnatch might let a man live!) Those servants' caps, a selling line, needed replenishing, and that brought back the memory of Winslow's sole wholesale dealers, Helter, Skelter & Grab. Why! how about their account?

Winslow stood with a big green box open on the counter before him when he thought of it. His pale gray eyes grew a little rounder; his pale, straggling moustache twitched. He had been drifting along, day after day. He went round to the ramshackle cash-desk in the corner—it was Winslow's weakness to sell his goods over the counter, give his customers a duplicate bill, and then dodge into the desk to receive the money, as though he doubted his own honesty. His lank forefinger, with the prominent joints, ran down the bright little calendar ("Clack's Cottons last for All Time") "One—two—three; three weeks an' a day!" said Winslow, staring. "March! Only three weeks and a day. It *can't* be."

"Tea, dear," said Mrs. Winslow, opening the door with the glass window and the white blind that communicated with the parlour.

"One minute," said Winslow, and began unlocking the desk.

An irritable old gentleman, very hot and red about the face, and in a heavy fur-lined cloak, came in noisily. Mrs. Winslow vanished.

"Ugh!" said the old gentleman. "Pocket-handkerchief."

"Yes, sir," said Winslow. "About what price——"

"Ugh!" said the old gentleman. "Poggit-handkerchief, quig!"

Winslow began to feel flustered. He produced two boxes.

"These, sir——" began Winslow.

"Sheed tin!" said the old gentleman, clutching the stiffness of the linen. "Wad to blow my nose—not haggit about."

“A cotton one, p'raps, sir?” said Winslow.

“How much?” said the old gentleman over the handkerchief.

“Sevenpence, sir. There's nothing more I can show you? No ties, braces —?”

“Damn!” said the old gentleman, fumbling in his ticket-pocket, and finally producing half-a-crown. Winslow looked round for his little metallic duplicate-book which he kept in various fixtures, according to circumstances, and then he caught the old gentleman's eye. He went straight to the desk at once and got the change, with an entire disregard of the routine of the shop.

Winslow was always more or less excited by a customer. But the open desk reminded him of his trouble. It did not come back to him all at once. He heard a finger-nail softly tapping on the glass, and looking up, saw Minnie's eyes over the blind. It seemed like retreat opening. He shut and locked the desk, and went into the little room to tea.

But he was preoccupied. Three weeks and a day! He took unusually large bites of his bread and butter, and stared hard at the little pot of jam. He answered Minnie's conversational advances distractedly. The shadow of Helter, Skelter & Grab lay upon the teatable. He was struggling with this new idea of failure, the tangible realisation, that was taking shape and substance, condensing, as it were, out of the misty uneasiness of many days. At present it was simply one concrete fact; there were thirty-nine pounds left in the bank, and that day three weeks Messrs. Helter, Skelter & Grab, those enterprising outfitters of young men, would demand their eighty pounds.

After tea there was a customer or so—little purchases: some muslin and buckram, dress-protectors, tape, and a pair of Lisle hose. Then, knowing that Black Care was lurking in the dusky corners of the shop, he lit the three lamps early and set to, refolding his cotton prints, the most vigorous and least meditative proceeding of which he could think. He could see Minnie's shadow in the other room as she moved about the table. She was busy turning an old dress. He had a walk after supper, looked in at the Y.M.C.A., but found no one to talk to, and finally went to bed. Minnie was already there. And there, too, waiting for him, nudging him gently, until about midnight he was hopelessly awake, sat Black Care.

He had had one or two nights lately in that company, but this was much worse. First came Messrs. Helter, Skelter & Grab, and their demand for eighty pounds—an enormous sum when your original capital was only a

hundred and seventy. They camped, as it were, before him, sat down and beleaguered him. He clutched feebly at the circumambient darkness for expedients. Suppose he had a sale, sold things for almost anything? He tried to imagine a sale miraculously successful in some unexpected manner, and mildly profitable, in spite of reductions below cost. Then Bandersnatch Limited, 101, 102, 103, 105, 106, 107 Broadway, joined the siege, a long caterpillar of frontage, a battery of shop fronts, wherein things were sold at a farthing above cost. How could he fight such an establishment? Besides, what had he to sell? He began to review his resources. What taking line was there to bait the sale? Then straightway came those pieces of cretonne, yellow and black, with a bluish-green flower; those discredited skirtings, prints without buoyancy, skirmishing haberdashery, some despairful four-button gloves by an inferior maker—a hopeless crew. And that was his force against Bandersnatch, Helter, Skelter & Grab, and the pitiless world behind them. Whatever had made him think a mortal would buy such things? Why had he bought this and neglected that? He suddenly realised the intensity of his hatred for Helter, Skelter & Grab’s salesman. Then he drove towards an agony of self-reproach. He had spent too much on that cash-desk. What real need was there of a desk? He saw his vanity of that desk in a lurid glow of self-discovery. And the lamps? Five pounds! Then suddenly, with what was almost physical pain, he remembered the rent.

He groaned and turned over. And there, dim in the darkness, was the hummock of Mrs. Winslow’s shoulders. That set him off in another direction. He became acutely sensible of Minnie’s want of feeling. Here he was, worried to death about business, and she sleeping like a little child. He regretted having married with the infinite bitterness that only comes to the human heart in the small hours of the morning. That hummock of white seemed absolutely without helpfulness, a burden, a responsibility. What fools men were to marry! Minnie’s inert repose irritated him so much that he was almost provoked to wake her up and tell her that they were “Ruined.” She would have to go back to her uncle; her uncle had always been against him: and as for his own future, Winslow was exceedingly uncertain. A shop assistant who has once set up for himself finds the utmost difficulty in getting into a situation again. He began to figure himself “crib-hunting” again, going from this wholesale house to that, writing innumerable letters. How he hated writing letters! “Sir—Referring to your advertisement in the *Christian World*.” He beheld an infinite vista of discomfort and disappointment, ending—in a gulf.

He dressed, yawning, and went down to open the shop. He felt tired before the day began. As he carried the shutters in, he kept asking himself

what good he was doing. The end was inevitable, whether he bothered or not. The clear daylight smote into the place, and showed how old and rough and splintered was the floor, how shabby the second-hand counter, how hopeless the whole enterprise. He had been dreaming these past six months of a bright little shop, of a happy couple, of a modest but comely profit flowing in. He had suddenly awakened from his dream. The braid that bound his decent black coat—it was a little loose—caught against the catch of the shop door, and was torn loose. This suddenly turned his wretchedness to wrath. He stood quivering for a moment, then, with a spiteful clutch, tore the braid looser, and went in to Minnie.

“Here,” he said, with infinite reproach; “look here! You might look after a chap a bit.”

“I didn’t see it was torn,” said Minnie.

“You never do,” said Winslow, with gross injustice, “until things are too late.”

Minnie looked suddenly at his face. “I’ll sew it now, Sid, if you like.”

“Let’s have breakfast first,” said Winslow, “and do things at their proper time.”

He was preoccupied at breakfast, and Minnie watched him anxiously. His only remark was to declare his egg a bad one. It wasn’t; it was a little flavoured—being one of those at fifteen a shilling—but quite nice. He pushed it away from him, and then, having eaten a slice of bread and butter, admitted himself in the wrong by resuming the egg.

“Sid,” said Minnie, as he stood up to go into the shop again, “you’re not well.”

“I’m *well* enough.” He looked at her as though he hated her.

“Then there’s something else the matter. You aren’t angry with me, Sid, are you, about that braid? *Do* tell me what’s the matter. You were just like this at tea yesterday, and at supper-time. It wasn’t the braid then.”

“And I’m likely to be.”

She looked interrogation. “Oh, what *is* the matter?” she said.

It was too good a chance to miss; and he brought the evil news out with dramatic force. “Matter?” he said. “I done my best, and here we are. That’s the matter! If I can’t pay Helter, Skelter & Grab eighty pounds, this day



three week—” Pause. “We shall be sold up! Sold up! That’s the matter, Min! SOLD UP!”

“Oh, Sid!” began Minnie.

He slammed the door. For the moment he felt relieved of at least half his misery. He began dusting boxes that did not require dusting, and then reblocked a cretonne already faultlessly blocked. He was in a state of grim wretchedness; a martyr under the harrow of fate. At anyrate, it should not be said he failed for want of industry. And how he had planned and contrived and worked! All to this end! He felt horrible doubts. Providence and Bandersnatch—surely they were incompatible! Perhaps he was being “tried”? That sent him off upon a new tack, a very comforting one. That martyr pose, the gold-in-the-furnace attitude, lasted all the morning.

At dinner—“potato pie”—he looked up suddenly, and saw Minnie’s face regarding him. Pale she looked, and a little red about the eyes. Something caught him suddenly with a queer effect upon his throat. All his thoughts seemed to wheel round into quite a new direction.

He pushed back his plate and stared at her blankly. Then he got up, went round the table to her—she staring at him. He dropped on his knees beside her without a word. “Oh, Minnie!” he said, and suddenly she knew it was peace, and put her arms about him, as he began to sob and weep.

He cried like a little boy, slobbering on her shoulder that he was a knave to have married her and brought her to this, that he hadn’t the wits to be trusted with a penny, that it was all his fault, that he “*had hoped so*”—ending in a howl. And she, crying gently herself, patting his shoulders, said “*Ssh!*” softly to his noisy weeping, and so soothed the outbreak. Then suddenly the crazy little bell upon the shop door began, and Winslow had to jump to his feet, and be a man again.

After that scene they “talked it over” at tea, at supper, in bed, at every possible interval in between, solemnly—quite inconclusively—with set faces and eyes for the most part staring in front of them—and yet with a certain mutual comfort. “What to do I don’t know,” was Winslow’s main proposition. Minnie tried to take a cheerful view of service—with a probable baby. But she found she needed all her courage. And her uncle would help her again, perhaps, just at the critical time. It didn’t do for folks to be too proud. Besides, “something might happen,” a favourite formula with her.

One hopeful line was to anticipate a sudden afflux of customers. “Perhaps,” said Minnie, “you might get together fifty. They know you well

enough to trust you a bit.” They debated that point. Once the possibility of Helter, Skelter & Grab giving credit was admitted, it was pleasant to begin sweating the acceptable minimum. For some half-hour over tea the second day after Winslow’s discoveries they were quite cheerful again, laughing even at their terrific fears. Even twenty pounds to go on with might be considered enough. Then in some mysterious way the pleasant prospect of Messrs. Helter, Skelter & Grab tempering the wind to the shorn retailer vanished—vanished absolutely, and Winslow found himself again in the pit of despair.

He began looking about at the furniture, and wondering idly what it would fetch. The chiffonier was good, anyhow, and there were Minnie’s old plates that her mother used to have. Then he began to think of desperate expedients for putting off the evil day. He had heard somewhere of Bills of Sale—there was to his ears something comfortingly substantial in the phrase. Then, why not “Go to the Money-Lenders?”

One cheering thing happened on Thursday afternoon; a little girl came in with a pattern of “print,” and he was able to match it. He had not been able to match anything out of his meagre stock before. He went in and told Minnie. The incident is mentioned lest the reader should imagine it was uniform despair with him.

The next morning, and the next, after the discovery Winslow opened shop late. When one has been awake most of the night, and has no hope, what *is* the good of getting up punctually? But as he went into the dark shop on Friday he saw something lying on the floor, something lit by the bright light that came under the ill-fitting door—a black oblong. He stooped and picked up an envelope with a deep mourning edge. It was addressed to his wife. Clearly a death in her family—perhaps her uncle. He knew the man too well to have expectations. And they would have to get mourning and go to the funeral. The brutal cruelty of people dying! He saw it all in a flash—he always visualised his thoughts. Black trousers to get, black crape, black gloves—none in stock—the railway fares, the shop closed for the day.

“I’m afraid there’s bad news, Minnie,” he said.

She was kneeling before the fireplace, blowing the fire. She had her housemaid’s gloves on and the old country sun-bonnet she wore of a morning, to keep the dust out of her hair. She turned, saw the envelope, gave a gasp, and pressed two bloodless lips together.

“I’m afraid it’s uncle,” she said, holding the letter, and staring with eyes wide open into Winslow’s face. “*It’s a strange hand!*”

“The postmark’s Hull,” said Winslow.

“The postmark’s Hull.”

Minnie opened the letter slowly, drew it out, hesitated, turned it over, saw the signature. “It’s Mr. Speight!”

“What does he say?” said Winslow.

Minnie began to read. “*Oh!*” she screamed. She dropped the letter, collapsed into a crouching heap, her hands covering her eyes. Winslow snatched at it. “A most terrible accident has occurred,” he read; “Melchior’s chimney fell down yesterday evening right on the top of your uncle’s house, and every living soul was killed—your uncle, your cousin Mary, Will and Ned, and the girl—every one of them, and smashed—you would hardly know them. I’m writing to you to break the news before you see it in the papers——” The letter fluttered from Winslow’s fingers. He put out his hand against the mantel to steady himself.

All of them dead! Then he saw, as in a vision, a row of seven cottages, each let at seven shillings a week, a timber yard, two villas, and the ruins—still marketable—of the avuncular residence. He tried to feel a sense of loss and could not. They were sure to have been left to Minnie’s aunt. All dead!  $7 \times 7 \times 52 \div 20$  began insensibly to work itself out in his mind, but discipline was ever weak in his mental arithmetic; figures kept moving from one line to another, like children playing at Widdy, Widdy Way. Was it two hundred pounds about—or one hundred pounds? Presently he picked up the letter again, and finished reading it. “You being the next of kin,” said Mr. Speight.

“How *awful!*” said Minnie in a horror-struck whisper, and looking up at last. Winslow stared back at her, shaking his head solemnly. There were a thousand things running through his mind, but none that, even to his dull sense, seemed appropriate as a remark. “It was the Lord’s will,” he said at last.

“It seems so very, very terrible,” said Minnie; “auntie, dear auntie—Ted—poor, dear uncle——”

“It was the Lord’s will, Minnie,” said Winslow, with infinite feeling. A long silence.

“Yes,” said Minnie, very slowly, staring thoughtfully at the crackling black paper in the grate. The fire had gone out. “Yes, perhaps it was the Lord’s will.”

They looked gravely at one another. Each would have been terribly shocked at any mention of the property by the other. She turned to the dark fireplace and began tearing up an old newspaper slowly. Whatever our losses may be, the world's work still waits for us. Winslow gave a deep sigh and walked in a hushed manner towards the front door. As he opened it, a flood of sunlight came streaming into the dark shadows of the closed shop. Bandersnatch, Helter, Skelter & Grab had vanished out of his mind like the mists before the rising sun.

Presently he was carrying in the shutters, and in the briskest way, the fire in the kitchen was crackling exhilaratingly, with a little saucepan walloping above it, for Minnie was boiling two eggs—one for herself this morning, as well as one for him—and Minnie herself was audible, laying breakfast with the greatest *éclat*. The blow was a sudden and terrible one—but it behoves us to face such things bravely in this sad, unaccountable world. It was quite midday before either of them mentioned the cottages.

## THE LOST INHERITANCE

“My uncle,” said the man with the glass eye, “was what you might call a hemi-semi-demi millionaire. He was worth about a hundred and twenty thousand. Quite. And he left me all his money.”

I glanced at the shiny sleeve of his coat, and my eye travelled up to the frayed collar.

“Every penny,” said the man with the glass eye, and I caught the active pupil looking at me with a touch of offence.

“I’ve never had any windfalls like that,” I said, trying to speak enviously and propitiate him.

“Even a legacy isn’t always a blessing,” he remarked with a sigh, and with an air of philosophical resignation he put the red nose and the wiry moustache into his tankard for a space.

“Perhaps not,” I said.

“He was an author, you see, and he wrote a lot of books.”

“Indeed!”

“That was the trouble of it all.” He stared at me with the available eye to see if I grasped his statement, then averted his face a little and produced a toothpick.

“You see,” he said, smacking his lips after a pause, “it was like this. He was my uncle—my maternal uncle. And he had—what shall I call it?—a weakness for writing edifying literature. Weakness is hardly the word—downright mania is nearer the mark. He’d been librarian in a Polytechnic, and as soon as the money came to him he began to indulge his ambition. It’s a simply extraordinary and incomprehensible thing to me. Here was a man of thirty-seven suddenly dropped into a perfect pile of gold, and he didn’t go—not a day’s bust on it. One would think a chap would go and get himself dressed a bit decent—say a couple of dozen pairs of trousers at a West End tailor’s; but he never did. You’d hardly believe it, but when he died he hadn’t even a gold watch. It seems wrong for people like that to have money. All he did was just to take a house, and order in pretty nearly five tons of books and ink and paper, and set to writing edifying literature as hard as ever he could write. I *can’t* understand it! But he did. The money came to

him, curiously enough, through a maternal uncle of *his*, unexpected like, when he was seven-and-thirty. My mother, it happened, was his only relation in the wide, wide world, except some second cousins of his. And I was her only son. You follow all that? The second cousins had one only son, too, but they brought him to see the old man too soon. He was rather a spoilt youngster, was this son of theirs, and directly he set eyes on my uncle, he began bawling out as hard as he could. ‘Take ’im away—er,’ he says, ‘take ’im away,’ and so did for himself entirely. It was pretty straight sailing, you’d think, for me, eh? And my mother, being a sensible, careful woman, settled the business in her own mind long before he did.

“He was a curious little chap, was my uncle, as I remember him. I don’t wonder at the kid being scared. Hair, just like these Japanese dolls they sell, black and straight and stiff all round the brim and none in the middle, and below, a whitish kind of face and rather large dark gray eyes moving about behind his spectacles. He used to attach a great deal of importance to dress, and always wore a flapping overcoat and a big-brimmed felt hat of a most extraordinary size. He looked a rummy little beggar, I can tell you. Indoors it was, as a rule, a dirty red flannel dressing-gown and a black skull-cap he had. That black skull-cap made him look like the portraits of all kinds of celebrated people. He was always moving about from house to house, was my uncle, with his chair which had belonged to Savage Landor, and his two writing-tables, one of Carlyle’s and the other of Shelley’s, so the dealer told him, and the completest portable reference library in England, he said he had—and he lugged the whole caravan, now to a house at Down, near Darwin’s old place, then to Reigate, near Meredith, then off to Haslemere, then back to Chelsea for a bit, and then up to Hampstead. He knew there was something wrong with his stuff, but he never knew there was anything wrong with his brains. It was always the air, or the water, or the altitude, or some tommy-rot like that. ‘So much depends on environment,’ he used to say, and stare at you hard, as if he half suspected you were hiding a grin at him somewhere under your face. ‘So much depends on environment to a sensitive mind like mine.’

“What was his name? You wouldn’t know it if I told you. He wrote nothing that any one has ever read—nothing. No one *could* read it. He wanted to be a great teacher, he said, and he didn’t know what he wanted to teach any more than a child. So he just blethered at large about Truth and Righteousness, and the Spirit of History, and all that. Book after book he wrote and published at his own expense. He wasn’t quite right in his head, you know, really; and to hear him go on at the critics—not because they slated him, mind you—he liked that—but because they didn’t take any

notice of him at all. ‘What do the nations want?’ he would ask, holding out his brown old claw. ‘Why, teaching—guidance! They are scattered upon the hills like sheep without a shepherd. There is War and Rumours of War, the unlaid Spirit of Discord abroad in the land, Nihilism, Vivisection, Vaccination, Drunkenness, Penury, Want, Socialistic Error, Selfish Capital! Do you see the clouds, Ted?’—My name, you know—‘Do you see the clouds lowering over the land? and behind it all—the Mongol waits!’ He was always very great on Mongols and the Spectre of Socialism, and such-like things.

“Then out would come his finger at me, and with his eyes all afire and his skull-cap askew, he would whisper: ‘And here am I. What do I want? Nations to teach. Nations! I say it with all modesty, Ted, I *could*. I would guide them; nay! but I *will* guide them to a safe haven, to the land of Righteousness flowing with milk and honey.’

“That’s how he used to go on. Ramble, rave about the nations, and righteousness, and that kind of thing. Kind of mincemeat of Bible and blethers. From fourteen up to three-and-twenty, when I might have been improving my mind, my mother used to wash me and brush my hair (at least in the earlier years of it), with a nice parting down the middle, and take me, once or twice a week, to hear this old lunatic jabber about things he had read of in the morning papers, trying to do it as much like Carlyle as he could, and I used to sit according to instructions, and look intelligent and nice, and pretend to be taking it all in. Afterwards I used to go of my own free will, out of a regard for the legacy. I was the only person that used to go and see him. He wrote, I believe, to every man who made the slightest stir in the world, sending him a copy or so of his books, and inviting him to come and talk about the nations to him; but half of them didn’t answer, and none ever came. And when the girl let you in—she was an artful bit of goods, that girl—there were heaps of letters on the hall-seat waiting to go off, addressed to Prince Bismarck, the President of the United States, and such-like people. And one went up the staircase and along the cobwebby passage—the housekeeper drank like fury, and his passages were always cobwebby—and found him at last, with books turned down all over the room, and heaps of torn paper on the floor, and telegrams and newspapers littered about, and empty coffee-cups and half-eaten bits of toast on the desk and the mantel. You’d see his back humped up, and his hair would be sticking out quite straight between the collar of that dressing-gown thing and the edge of the skull-cap.

“‘A moment!’ he would say. ‘A moment!’ over his shoulder. ‘The *mot juste*, you know, Ted, *le mot juste*. Righteous thought righteously expressed—Ah!—concatenation. And now, Ted,’ he’d say, spinning round in his study chair, ‘how’s Young England?’ That was his silly name for me.

“Well, that was my uncle, and that was how he talked—to me, at anyrate. With others about he seemed a bit shy. And he not only talked to me, but he gave me his books, books of six hundred pages or so, with cock-eyed headings, *The Shrieking Sisterhood*, *The Behemoth of Bigotry*, *Crucibles and Cullenders*, and so on. All very strong, and none of them original. The very last time but one that I saw him he gave me a book. He was feeling ill even then, and his hand shook and he was despondent. I noticed it because I was naturally on the lookout for those little symptoms. ‘My last book, Ted,’ he said. ‘My last book, my boy; my last word to the deaf and hardened nations;’ and I’m hanged if a tear didn’t go rolling down his yellow old cheek. He was regular crying because it was so nearly over, and he hadn’t only written about fifty-three books of rubbish. ‘I’ve sometimes thought, Ted——’ he said, and stopped.

“‘Perhaps I’ve been a bit hasty and angry with this stiff-necked generation. A little more sweetness, perhaps, and a little less blinding light. I’ve sometimes thought—I might have swayed them. But I’ve done my best, Ted.’

“And then, with a burst, for the first and last time in his life he owned himself a failure. It showed he was really ill. He seemed to think for a minute, and then he spoke quietly and low, as sane and sober as I am now. ‘I’ve been a fool, Ted,’ he said. ‘I’ve been flapping nonsense all my life. Only He who readeth the heart knows whether this is anything more than vanity. Ted, I don’t. But He knows, He knows, and if I have done foolishly and vainly, in my heart—in my heart——’

“Just like that he spoke, repeating himself, and he stopped quite short and handed the book to me, trembling. Then the old shine came back into his eye. I remember it all fairly well, because I repeated it and acted it to my old mother when I got home, to cheer her up a bit. ‘Take this book and read it,’ he said. ‘It’s my last word, my very last word. I’ve left all my property to you, Ted, and may you use it better than I have done.’ And then he fell coughing.

“I remember that quite well even now, and how I went home cock-a-hoop, and how he was in bed the next time I called. The housekeeper was downstairs drunk, and I fooled about—as a young man will—with the girl in



the passage before I went to him. He was sinking fast. But even then his vanity clung to him.

“‘Have you read it?’ ” he whispered.

“Sat up all night reading it,” I said in his ear to cheer him. “It’s the last,” said I, and then, with a memory of some poetry or other in my head, “but it’s the bravest and best.”

He smiled a little and tried to squeeze my hand as a woman might do, and left off squeezing in the middle, and lay still. “The bravest and the best,” said I again, seeing it pleased him. But he didn’t answer. I heard the girl giggle outside the door, for occasionally we’d had just a bit of innocent laughter, you know, at his ways. I looked at his face, and his eyes were closed, and it was just as if somebody had punched in his nose on either side. But he was still smiling. It’s queer to think of—he lay dead, lay dead there, an utter failure, with the smile of success on his face.

“That was the end of my uncle. You can imagine me and my mother saw that he had a decent funeral. Then, of course, came the hunt for the will. We began decent and respectful at first, and before the day was out we were ripping chairs, and smashing bureau panels, and sounding walls. Every hour we expected those others to come in. We asked the housekeeper, and found she’d actually witnessed a will—on an ordinary half-sheet of notepaper it was written, and very short, she said—not a month ago. The other witness was the gardener, and he bore her out word for word. But I’m hanged if there was that or any other will to be found. The way my mother talked must have made him turn in his grave. At last a lawyer at Reigate sprang one on us that had been made years ago during some temporary quarrel with my mother. I’m blest if that wasn’t the only will to be discovered anywhere, and it left every penny he possessed to that ‘Take ’im away’ youngster of his second cousin’s—a chap who’d never had to stand his talking not for one afternoon of his life.”

The man with the glass eye stopped.

“I thought you said——” I began.

“Half a minute,” said the man with the glass eye. “I had to wait for the end of the story till this very morning, and I was a blessed sight more interested than you are. You just wait a bit, too. They executed the will, and the other chap inherited, and directly he was one-and-twenty he began to blew it. How he did blew it, to be sure! He bet, he drank, he got in the papers for this and that. I tell you, it makes me wriggle to think of the times

he had. He blew every ha'penny of it before he was thirty, and the last I heard of him was—Holloway! Three years ago.

“Well, I naturally fell on hard times, because, as you see, the only trade I knew was legacy-cadging. All my plans were waiting over to begin, so to speak, when the old chap died. I’ve had my ups and downs since then. Just now it’s a period of depression. I tell you frankly, I’m on the lookout for help. I was hunting round my room to find something to raise a bit on for immediate necessities, and the sight of all those presentation volumes—no one will buy them, not to wrap butter in, even—well, they annoyed me. I’d promised him not to part with them, and I never kept a promise easier. I let out at them with my boot, and sent them shooting across the room. One lifted at the kick, and spun through the air. And out of it flapped—You guess?”

“It was the will. He’d given it me himself in that very last volume of all.”

He folded his arms on the table, and looked sadly with the active eye at his empty tankard. He shook his head slowly, and said softly, “I’d never *opened* the book, much more cut a page!” Then he looked up, with a bitter laugh, for my sympathy. “Fancy hiding it there! Eigh? Of all places.”

He began to fish absently for a dead fly with his finger. “It just shows you the vanity of authors,” he said, looking up at me. “It wasn’t no trick of his. He’d meant perfectly fair. He’d really thought I was really going home to read that blessed book of his through. But it shows you, don’t it?”—his eye went down to the tankard again—“It shows you, too, how we poor human beings fail to understand one another.”

But there was no misunderstanding the eloquent thirst of his eye. He accepted with ill-feigned surprise. He said, in the usual subtle formula, that he didn’t mind if he did.

## A DEAL IN OSTRICHES

“Talking of the prices of birds, I’ve seen an ostrich that cost three hundred pounds,” said the Taxidermist, recalling his youth of travel. “Three hundred pounds!”

He looked at me over his spectacles. “I’ve seen another that was refused at four.”

“No,” he said, “it wasn’t any fancy points. They was just plain ostriches. A little off colour, too—owing to dietary. And there wasn’t any particular restriction of the demand either. You’d have thought five ostriches would have ruled cheap on an East Indiaman. But the point was, one of ’em had swallowed a diamond.

“The chap it got it off was Sir Mohini Padishah, a tremendous swell, a Piccadilly swell you might say up to the neck of him, and then an ugly black head and a whopping turban, with this diamond in it. The blessed bird pecked suddenly and had it, and when the chap made a fuss it realised it had done wrong, I suppose, and went and mixed itself with the others to preserve its *incog*. It all happened in a minute. I was among the first to arrive, and there was this heathen going over his gods, and two sailors and the man who had charge of the birds laughing fit to split. It was a rummy way of losing a jewel, come to think of it. The man in charge hadn’t been about just at the moment, so that he didn’t know which bird it was. Clean lost, you see. I didn’t feel half sorry, to tell you the truth. The beggar had been swaggering over his blessed diamond ever since he came aboard.

“A thing like that goes from stem to stern of a ship in no time. Every one was talking about it. Padishah went below to hide his feelings. At dinner—he pigged at a table by himself, him and two other Hindoos—the captain kind of jeered at him about it, and he got very excited. He turned round and talked into my ear. He would not buy the birds; he would have his diamond. He demanded his rights as a British subject. His diamond must be found. He was firm upon that. He would appeal to the House of Lords. The man in charge of the birds was one of those wooden-headed chaps you can’t get a new idea into anyhow. He refused any proposal to interfere with the birds by way of medicine. His instructions were to feed them so-and-so and treat them so-and-so, and it was as much as his place was worth not to feed them so-and-so and treat them so-and-so. Padishah had wanted a stomach-pump—though you can’t do that to a bird, you know. This Padishah was full of

bad law, like most of these blessed Bengalis, and talked of having a lien on the birds, and so forth. But an old boy, who said his son was a London barrister, argued that what a bird swallowed became *ipso facto* part of the bird, and that Padishah's only remedy lay in an action for damages, and even then it might be possible to show contributory negligence. He hadn't any right of way about an ostrich that didn't belong to him. That upset Padishah extremely, the more so as most of us expressed an opinion that that was the reasonable view. There wasn't any lawyer aboard to settle the matter, so we all talked pretty free. At last, after Aden, it appears that he came round to the general opinion, and went privately to the man in charge and made an offer for all five ostriches.

"The next morning there was a fine shindy at breakfast. The man hadn't any authority to deal with the birds, and nothing on earth would induce him to sell; but it seems he told Padishah that a Eurasian named Potter had already made him an offer, and on that Padishah denounced Potter before us all. But I think the most of us thought it rather smart of Potter, and I know that when Potter said that he'd wired at Aden to London to buy the birds, and would have an answer at Suez, I cursed pretty richly at a lost opportunity.

"At Suez, Padishah gave way to tears—actual wet tears—when Potter became the owner of the birds, and offered him two hundred and fifty right off for the five, being more than two hundred per cent. on what Potter had given. Potter said he'd be hanged if he parted with a feather of them—that he meant to kill them off one by one and find the diamond; but afterwards, thinking it over, he relented a little. He was a gambling hound, was this Potter, a little queer at cards, and this kind of prize-packet business must have suited him down to the ground. Anyhow, he offered, for a lark, to sell the birds separately to separate people by auction at a starting price of £80 for a bird. But one of them, he said, he meant to keep for luck.

"You must understand this diamond was a valuable one—a little Jew chap, a diamond merchant, who was with us, had put it at three or four thousand when Padishah had shown it to him—and this idea of an ostrich gamble caught on. Now it happened that I'd been having a few talks on general subjects with the man who looked after these ostriches, and quite incidentally he'd said one of the birds was ailing, and he fancied it had indigestion. It had one feather in its tail almost all white, by which I knew it, and so when, next day, the auction started with it, I capped Padishah's eighty-five by ninety. I fancy I was a bit too sure and eager with my bid, and some of the others spotted the fact that I was in the know. And Padishah

went for that particular bird like an irresponsible lunatic. At last the Jew diamond merchant got it for £175, and Padishah said £180 just after the hammer came down—so Potter declared. At any rate the Jew merchant secured it, and there and then he got a gun and shot it. Potter made a Hades of a fuss because he said it would injure the sale of the other three, and Padishah, of course, behaved like an idiot; but all of us were very much excited. I can tell you I was precious glad when that dissection was over, and no diamond had turned up—precious glad. I'd gone to one-forty on that particular bird myself.

“The little Jew was like most Jews—he didn't make any great fuss over bad luck; but Potter declined to go on with the auction until it was understood that the goods could not be delivered until the sale was over. The little Jew wanted to argue that the case was exceptional, and as the discussion ran pretty even, the thing was postponed until the next morning. We had a lively dinner-table that evening, I can tell you, but in the end Potter got his way, since it would stand to reason he would be safer if he stuck to all the birds, and that we owed him some consideration for his sportsmanlike behaviour. And the old gentleman whose son was a lawyer said he'd been thinking the thing over and that it was very doubtful if, when a bird had been opened and the diamond recovered, it ought not to be handed back to the proper owner. I remember I suggested it came under the laws of treasure trove—which was really the truth of the matter. There was a hot argument, and we settled it was certainly foolish to kill the bird on board the ship. Then the old gentleman, going at large through his legal talk, tried to make out the sale was a lottery and illegal, and appealed to the captain; but Potter said he sold the birds *as* ostriches. He didn't want to sell any diamonds, he said, and didn't offer that as an inducement. The three birds he put up, to the best of his knowledge and belief, did *not* contain a diamond. It was in the one he kept—so he hoped.

“Prices ruled high next day all the same. The fact that now there were four chances instead of five of course caused a rise. The blessed birds averaged 227, and, oddly enough, this Padishah didn't secure one of 'em—not one. He made too much shindy, and when he ought to have been bidding he was talking about liens, and, besides, Potter was a bit down on him. One fell to a quiet little officer chap, another to the little Jew, and the third was syndicated by the engineers. And then Potter seemed suddenly sorry for having sold them, and said he'd flung away a clear thousand pounds, and that very likely he'd draw a blank and that he always had been a fool, but when I went and had a bit of a talk to him, with the idea of getting him to hedge on his last chance, I found he'd already sold the bird he'd reserved to

a political chap that was on board, a chap who'd been studying Indian morals and social questions in his vacation. That last was the three hundred pounds bird. Well, they landed three of the blessed creatures at Brindisi—though the old gentleman said it was a breach of the Customs regulations—and Potter and Padishah landed too. The Hindoo seemed half mad as he saw his blessed diamond going this way and that, so to speak. He kept on saying he'd get an injunction—he had injunction on the brain—and giving his name and address to the chaps who'd bought the birds, so that they'd know where to send the diamond. None of them wanted his name and address, and none of them would give their own. It was a fine row I can tell you—on the platform. They all went off by different trains. I came on to Southampton, and there I saw the last of the birds, as I came ashore; it was the one the engineers bought, and it was standing up near the bridge, in a kind of crate, and looking as leggy and silly a setting for a valuable diamond as ever you saw—if it *was* a setting for a valuable diamond.

“*How did it end?* Oh! like that. Well—perhaps. Yes, there's one more thing that may throw light on it. A week or so after landing I was down Regent Street doing a bit of shopping, and who should I see arm-in-arm and having a purple time of it but Padishah and Potter. If you come to think of it

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“Yes. *I've* thought that. Only, you see, there's no doubt the diamond was real. And Padishah was an eminent Hindoo. I've seen his name in the papers—often. But whether the bird swallowed the diamond certainly is another matter, as you say.”

## THROUGH A WINDOW

After his legs were set, they carried Bailey into the study and put him on a couch before the open window. There he lay, a live—even a feverish man down to the loins, and below that a double-barrelled mummy swathed in white wrappings. He tried to read, even tried to write a little, but most of the time he looked out of the window.

He had thought the window cheerful to begin with, but now he thanked God for it many times a day. Within, the room was dim and gray, and in the reflected light the wear of the furniture showed plainly. His medicine and drink stood on the little table, with such litter as the bare branches of a bunch of grapes or the ashes of a cigar upon a green plate, or a day old evening paper. The view outside was flooded with light, and across the corner of it came the head of the acacia, and at the foot the top of the balcony-railing of hammered iron. In the foreground was the weltering silver of the river, never quiet and yet never tiresome. Beyond was the reedy bank, a broad stretch of meadow land, and then a dark line of trees ending in a group of poplars at the distant bend of the river, and, upstanding behind them, a square church tower.

Up and down the river, all day long, things were passing. Now a string of barges drifting down to London, piled with lime or barrels of beer; then a steam-launch, disengaging heavy masses of black smoke, and disturbing the whole width of the river with long rolling waves; then an impetuous electric launch, and then a boatload of pleasure-seekers, a solitary sculler, or a four from some rowing club. Perhaps the river was quietest of a morning or late at night. One moonlight night some people drifted down singing, and with a zither playing—it sounded very pleasantly across the water.

In a few days Bailey began to recognise some of the craft; in a week he knew the intimate history of half a dozen. The launch *Luzon*, from Fitzgibbon's, two miles up, would go fretting by, sometimes three or four times a day, conspicuous with its colouring of Indian-red and yellow, and its two Oriental attendants; and one day, to Bailey's vast amusement, the houseboat *Purple Emperor* came to a stop outside, and breakfasted in the most shameless domesticity. Then one afternoon, the captain of a slow-moving barge began a quarrel with his wife as they came into sight from the left, and had carried it to personal violence before he vanished behind the window-frame to the right. Bailey regarded all this as an entertainment got

up to while away his illness, and applauded all the more moving incidents. Mrs. Green, coming in at rare intervals with his meals, would catch him clapping his hands or softly crying, "Encore!" But the river players had other engagements, and his encore went unheeded.

"I should never have thought I could take such an interest in things that did not concern me," said Bailey to Wilderspin, who used to come in in his nervous, friendly way and try to comfort the sufferer by being talked to. "I thought this idle capacity was distinctive of little children and old maids. But it's just circumstances. I simply can't work, and things have to drift; it's no good to fret and struggle. And so I lie here and am as amused as a baby with a rattle, at this river and its affairs.

"Sometimes, of course, it gets a bit dull, but not often.

"I would give anything, Wilderspin, for a swamp—just one swamp—once. Heads swimming and a steam-launch to the rescue, and a chap or so hauled out with a boat-hook. . . . There goes Fitzgibbon's launch! They have a new boat-hook, I see, and the little blackie is still in the dumps. I don't think he's very well, Wilderspin. He's been like that for two or three days, squatting sulky-fashion and meditating over the churning of the water. Unwholesome for him to be always staring at the frothy water running away from the stern."

They watched the little steamer fuss across the patch of sunlit river, suffer momentary occultation from the acacia, and glide out of sight behind the dark window-frame.

"I'm getting a wonderful eye for details," said Bailey: "I spotted that new boat-hook at once. The other nigger is a funny little chap. He never used to swagger with the old boat-hook like that."

"Malays, aren't they?" said Wilderspin.

"Don't know," said Bailey. "I thought one called all that sort of mariner Lascar."

Then he began to tell Wilderspin what he knew of the private affairs of the houseboat, *Purple Emperor*. "Funny," he said, "how these people come from all points of the compass—from Oxford and Windsor, from Asia and Africa—and gather and pass opposite the window just to entertain me. One man floated out of the infinite the day before yesterday, caught one perfect crab opposite, lost and recovered a scull, and passed on again. Probably he will never come into my life again. So far as I am concerned, he has lived and had his little troubles, perhaps thirty—perhaps forty—years on the earth,



merely to make an ass of himself for three minutes in front of my window. Wonderful thing, Wilderspin, if you come to think of it.”

“Yes,” said Wilderspin; “*isn't* it?”

A day or two after this Bailey had a brilliant morning. Indeed, towards the end of the affair, it became almost as exciting as any window show very well could be. We will, however, begin at the beginning.

Bailey was all alone in the house, for his housekeeper had gone into the town three miles away to pay bills, and the servant had her holiday. The morning began dull. A canoe went up about half-past nine, and later a boatload of camping men came down. But this was mere margin. Things became cheerful about ten o'clock.

It began with something white fluttering in the remote distance where the three poplars marked the river bend. “Pocket-handkerchief,” said Bailey, when he saw it. “No. Too big! Flag perhaps.”

However, it was not a flag, for it jumped about. “Man in whites running fast, and this way,” said Bailey. “That’s luck! But his whites are precious loose!”

Then a singular thing happened. There was a minute pink gleam among the dark trees in the distance, and a little puff of pale gray that began to drift and vanish eastward. The man in white jumped and continued running. Presently the report of the shot arrived.

“What the devil!” said Bailey. “Looks as if some one was shooting at him.”

He sat up stiffly and stared hard. The white figure was coming along the pathway through the corn. “It’s one of those niggers from the Fitzgibbon’s,” said Bailey; “or may I be hanged! I wonder why he keeps sawing with his arm.”

Then three other figures became indistinctly visible against the dark background of the trees.

Abruptly on the opposite bank a man walked into the picture. He was black-bearded, dressed in flannels, had a red belt, and a vast gray felt hat. He walked, leaning very much forward and with his hands swinging before him. Behind him one could see the grass swept by the towing-rope of the boat he was dragging. He was steadfastly regarding the white figure that was hurrying through the corn. Suddenly he stopped. Then, with a peculiar gesture, Bailey could see that he began pulling in the tow-rope hand over

hand. Over the water could be heard the voices of the people in the still invisible boat.

“What are you after, Hagshot?” said some one.

The individual with the red belt shouted something that was inaudible, and went on lugging in the rope, looking over his shoulder at the advancing white figure as he did so. He came down the bank, and the rope bent a lane among the reeds and lashed the water between his pulls.

Then just the bows of the boat came into view, with the towing-mast and a tall, fair-haired man standing up and trying to see over the bank. The boat bumped unexpectedly among the reeds, and the tall, fair-haired man disappeared suddenly, having apparently fallen back into the invisible part of the boat. There was a curse and some indistinct laughter. Hagshot did not laugh, but hastily clambered into the boat and pushed off. Abruptly the boat passed out of Bailey’s sight.

But it was still audible. The melody of voices suggested that its occupants were busy telling each other what to do.

The running figure was drawing near the bank. Bailey could now see clearly that it was one of Fitzgibbon’s Orientals, and began to realise what the sinuous thing the man carried in his hand might be. Three other men followed one another through the corn, and the foremost carried what was probably the gun. They were perhaps two hundred yards or more behind the Malay.

“It’s a man hunt, by all that’s holy!” said Bailey.

The Malay stopped for a moment and surveyed the bank to the right. Then he left the path, and, breaking through the corn, vanished in that direction. The three pursuers followed suit, and their heads and gesticulating arms above the corn, after a brief interval, also went out of Bailey’s field of vision.

Bailey so far forgot himself as to swear. “Just as things were getting lively!” he said. Something like a woman’s shriek came through the air. Then shouts, a howl, a dull whack upon the balcony outside that made Bailey jump, and then the report of a gun.

“This is precious hard on an invalid,” said Bailey.

But more was to happen yet in his picture. In fact a great deal more. The Malay appeared again, running now along the bank up-stream. His stride had more swing and less pace in it than before. He was threatening some

one ahead with the ugly krees he carried. The blade, Bailey noticed, was dull—it did not shine as steel should.

Then came the tall, fair man, brandishing a boat-hook, and after him three other men in boating costume, running clumsily with oars. The man with the gray hat and red belt was not with them. After an interval the three men with the gun reappeared, still in the corn, but now near the river bank. They emerged upon the towing-path, and hurried after the others. The opposite bank was left blank and desolate again.

The sick-room was disgraced by more profanity. “I would give my life to see the end of this,” said Bailey. There were indistinct shouts up-stream. Once they seemed to be coming nearer, but they disappointed him.

Bailey sat and grumbled. He was still grumbling when his eye caught something black and round among the waves. “Hallo!” he said. He looked narrowly and saw two triangular black bodies frothing every now and then about a yard in front of this.

He was still doubtful when the little band of pursuers came into sight again, and began to point to this floating object. They were talking eagerly. Then the man with the gun took aim.

“He’s swimming the river, by George!” said Bailey.

The Malay looked round, saw the gun, and went under. He came up so close to Bailey’s bank of the river that one of the bars of the balcony hid him for a moment. As he emerged the man with the gun fired. The Malay kept steadily onward—Bailey could see the wet hair on his forehead now and the krees between his teeth—and was presently hidden by the balcony.

This seemed to Bailey an unendurable wrong. The man was lost to him for ever now, so he thought. Why couldn’t the brute have got himself decently caught on the opposite bank, or shot in the water?

“It’s worse than Edwin Drood,” said Bailey.

Over the river, too, things had become an absolute blank. All seven men had gone down-stream again, probably to get the boat and follow across. Bailey listened and waited. There was silence. “Surely it’s not over like this,” said Bailey.

Five minutes passed—ten minutes. Then a tug with two barges went up-stream. The attitudes of the men upon these were the attitudes of those who see nothing remarkable in earth, water, or sky. Clearly the whole affair had

passed out of sight of the river. Probably the hunt had gone into the beech-woods behind the house.

“Confound it!” said Bailey. “To be continued again, and no chance this time of the sequel. But this is hard on a sick man.”

He heard a step on the staircase behind him, and looking round saw the door open. Mrs. Green came in and sat down, panting. She still had her bonnet on, her purse in her hand, and her little brown basket upon her arm. “Oh, there!” she said, and left Bailey to imagine the rest.

“Have a little whisky and water, Mrs. Green, and tell me about it,” said Bailey.

Sipping a little, the lady began to recover her powers of explanation.

One of those black creatures at the Fitzgibbon’s had gone mad, and was running about with a big knife, stabbing people. He had killed a groom, and stabbed the under-butler, and almost cut the arm off a boating gentleman.

“Running amuck with a krees,” said Bailey. “I thought that was it.”

And he was hiding in the wood when she came through it from the town.

“What! Did he run after you?” asked Bailey, with a certain touch of glee in his voice.

“No, that was the horrible part of it,” Mrs. Green explained. She had been right through the woods and had *never known he was there*. It was only when she met young Mr. Fitzgibbon carrying his gun in the shrubbery that she heard anything about it. Apparently, what upset Mrs. Green was the lost opportunity for emotion. She was determined, however, to make the most of what was left her.

“To think he was there all the time!” she said, over and over again.

Bailey endured this patiently enough for perhaps ten minutes. At last he thought it advisable to assert himself. “It’s twenty past one, Mrs. Green,” he said. “Don’t you think it time you got me something to eat?”

This brought Mrs. Green suddenly to her knees.

“Oh, Lord, sir!” she said. “Oh! don’t go making me go out of this room, sir, till I know he’s caught. He might have got into the house, sir. He might be creeping, creeping, with that knife of his, along the passage this very \_\_\_\_\_”

She broke off suddenly and glared over him at the window. Her lower jaw dropped. Bailey turned his head sharply.

For the space of half a second things seemed just as they were. There was the tree, the balcony, the shining river, the distant church tower. Then he noticed that the acacia was displaced about a foot to the right, and that it was quivering, and the leaves were rustling. The tree was shaken violently, and a heavy panting was audible.

In another moment a hairy brown hand had appeared and clutched the balcony railings, and in another the face of the Malay was peering through these at the man on the couch. His expression was an unpleasant grin, by reason of the krees he held between his teeth, and he was bleeding from an ugly wound in his cheek. His hair wet to drying stuck out like horns from his head. His body was bare save for the wet trousers that clung to him. Bailey's first impulse was to spring from the couch, but his legs reminded him that this was impossible.

By means of the balcony and tree the man slowly raised himself until he was visible to Mrs. Green. With a choking cry she made for the door and fumbled with the handle.

Bailey thought swiftly and clutched a medicine bottle in either hand. One he flung, and it smashed against the acacia. Silently and deliberately, and keeping his bright eyes fixed on Bailey, the Malay clambered into the balcony. Bailey, still clutching his second bottle, but with a sickening, sinking feeling about his heart, watched first one leg come over the railing and then the other.

It was Bailey's impression that the Malay took about an hour to get his second leg over the rail. The period that elapsed before the sitting position was changed to a standing one seemed enormous—days, weeks, possibly a year or so. Yet Bailey had no clear impression of anything going on in his mind during that vast period, except a vague wonder at his inability to throw the second medicine bottle. Suddenly the Malay glanced over his shoulder. There was the crack of a rifle. He flung up his arms and came down upon the couch. Mrs. Green began a dismal shriek that seemed likely to last until Doomsday. Bailey stared at the brown body with its shoulder blade driven in, that writhed painfully across his legs and rapidly staining and soaking the spotless bandages. Then he looked at the long krees, with the reddish streaks upon its blade, that lay an inch beyond the trembling brown fingers upon the floor. Then at Mrs. Green, who had backed hard against the door and was

staring at the body and shrieking in gusty outbursts as if she would wake the dead. And then the body was shaken by one last convulsive effort.

The Malay gripped the knees, tried to raise himself with his left hand, and collapsed. Then he raised his head, stared for a moment at Mrs. Green, and twisting his face round looked at Bailey. With a gasping groan the dying man succeeded in clutching the bed clothes with his disabled hand, and by a violent effort, which hurt Bailey's legs exceedingly, writhed sideways towards what must be his last victim. Then something seemed released in Bailey's mind and he brought down the second bottle with all his strength on to the Malay's face. The knees fell heavily upon the floor.

"Easy with those legs," said Bailey, as young Fitzgibbon and one of the boating party lifted the body off him.

Young Fitzgibbon was very white in the face. "I didn't mean to kill him," he said.

"It's just as well," said Bailey.

## THE FLYING MAN

The Ethnologist looked at the *bhimraj* feather thoughtfully. "They seemed loath to part with it," he said.

"It is sacred to the Chiefs," said the lieutenant; "just as yellow silk, you know, is sacred to the Chinese Emperor."

The Ethnologist did not answer. He hesitated. Then opening the topic abruptly, "What on earth is this cock-and-bull story they have of a flying man?"

The lieutenant smiled faintly. "What did they tell you?"

"I see," said the Ethnologist, "that you know of your fame."

The lieutenant rolled himself a cigarette. "I don't mind hearing about it once more. How does it stand at present?"

"It's so confoundedly childish," said the Ethnologist, becoming irritated. "How did you play it off upon them?"

The lieutenant made no answer, but lounged back in his folding-chair, still smiling.

"Here am I, come four hundred miles out of my way to get what is left of the folk-lore of these people, before they are utterly demoralised by missionaries and the military, and all I find are a lot of impossible legends about a sandy-haired scrub of an infantry lieutenant. How he is invulnerable—how he can jump over elephants—how he can fly. That's the toughest nut. One old gentleman described your wings, said they had black plumage and were not quite as long as a mule. Said he often saw you by moonlight hovering over the crests out towards the Shendu country—Confound it, man!"

The lieutenant laughed cheerfully. "Go on," he said. "Go on."

The Ethnologist did. At last he wearied. "To trade so," he said, "on these unsophisticated children of the mountains. How could you bring yourself to do it, man?"

"I'm sorry," said the lieutenant, "but truly the thing was forced upon me. I can assure you I was driven to it. And at the time I had not the faintest idea of how the Chin imagination would take it. Or curiosity. I can only plead it was an indiscretion and not malice that made me replace the folk-lore by a

new legend. But as you seem aggrieved, I will try to explain the business to you.

“It was in the time of the last Lushai expedition but one, and Walters thought these people you have been visiting were friendly. So, with an airy confidence in my capacity for taking care of myself, he sent me up the gorge—fourteen miles of it—with three of the Derbyshire men and half a dozen Sepoys, two mules, and his blessing, to see what popular feeling was like at that village you visited. A force of ten—not counting the mules—fourteen miles, and during a war! You saw the road?”

“*Road?*” said the Ethnologist.

“It’s better now than it was. When we went up we had to wade in the river for a mile where the valley narrows, with a smart stream frothing round our knees and the stones as slippery as ice. There it was I dropped my rifle. Afterwards the Sappers blasted the cliff with dynamite and made the convenient way you came by. Then below, where those very high cliffs come, we had to keep on dodging across the river—I should say we crossed it a dozen times in a couple of miles.

“We got in sight of the place early the next morning. You know how it lies, on a spur half-way between the big hills, and as we began to appreciate how wickedly quiet the village lay under the sunlight, we came to a stop to consider.

“At that they fired a lump of filed brass idol at us, just by way of a welcome. It came twanging down the slope to the right of us where the boulders are, missed my shoulder by an inch or so, and plugged the mule that carried all the provisions and utensils. I never heard such a death-rattle before or since. And at that we became aware of a number of gentlemen carrying matchlocks, and dressed in things like plaid dusters, dodging about along the neck between the village and the crest to the east.

“‘Right about face,’ I said. ‘Not too close together.’”

“And with that encouragement my expedition of ten men came round and set off at a smart trot down the valley again hitherward. We did not wait to save anything our dead had carried, but we kept the second mule with us—he carried my tent and some other rubbish—out of a feeling of friendship.

“So ended the battle—ingloriously. Glancing back, I saw the valley dotted with the victors, shouting and firing at us. But no one was hit. These Chins and their guns are very little good except at a sitting shot. They will sit and finick over a boulder for hours taking aim, and when they fire



running it is chiefly for stage effect. Hooker, one of the Derbyshire men, fancied himself rather with the rifle, and stopped behind for half a minute to try his luck as we turned the bend. But he got nothing.

“I’m not a Xenophon to spin much of a yarn about my retreating army. We had to pull the enemy up twice in the next two miles when he became a bit pressing, by exchanging shots with him, but it was a fairly monotonous affair—hard breathing chiefly—until we got near the place where the hills run in towards the river and pinch the valley into a gorge. And there we very luckily caught a glimpse of half a dozen round black heads coming slanting-ways over the hill to the left of us—the east that is—and almost parallel with us.

“At that I called a halt. ‘Look here,’ says I to Hooker and the other Englishmen; ‘what are we to do now?’ and I pointed to the heads.

“‘Headed orf, or I’m a nigger,’ said one of the men.

“‘We shall be,’ said another. ‘You know the Chin way, George?’

“‘They can pot every one of us at fifty yards,’ says Hooker, ‘in the place where the river is narrow. It’s just suicide to go on down.’

“I looked at the hill to the right of us. It grew steeper lower down the valley, but it still seemed climbable. And all the Chins we had seen hitherto had been on the other side of the stream.

“‘It’s that or stopping,’ says one of the Sepoys.

“So we started slanting up the hill. There was something faintly suggestive of a road running obliquely up the face of it, and that we followed. Some Chins presently came into view up the valley, and I heard some shots. Then I saw one of the Sepoys was sitting down about thirty yards below us. He had simply sat down without a word, apparently not wishing to give trouble. At that I called a halt again; I told Hooker to try another shot, and went back and found the man was hit in the leg. I took him up, carried him along to put him on the mule—already pretty well laden with the tent and other things which we had no time to take off. When I got up to the rest with him, Hooker had his empty Martini in his hand, and was grinning and pointing to a motionless black spot up the valley. All the rest of the Chins were behind boulders or back round the bend. ‘Five hundred yards,’ says Hooker, ‘if an inch. And I’ll swear I hit him in the head.’

“I told him to go and do it again, and with that we went on again.

“Now the hillside kept getting steeper as we pushed on, and the road we were following more and more of a shelf. At last it was mere cliff above and below us. ‘It’s the best road I have seen yet in Chin Lushai land,’ said I to encourage the men, though I had a fear of what was coming.

“And in a few minutes the way bent round a corner of the cliff. Then, *finis!* the ledge came to an end.

“As soon as he grasped the position one of the Derbyshire men fell a-swearing at the trap we had fallen into. The Sepoys halted quietly. Hooker grunted and re-loaded, and went back to the bend.

“Then two of the Sepoy chaps helped their comrade down and began to unload the mule.

“Now, when I came to look about me, I began to think we had not been so very unfortunate after all. We were on a shelf perhaps ten yards across it at widest. Above it the cliff projected so that we could not be shot down upon, and below was an almost sheer precipice of perhaps two or three hundred feet. Lying down we were invisible to any one across the ravine. The only approach was along the ledge, and on that one man was as good as a host. We were in a natural stronghold, with only one disadvantage, our sole provision against hunger and thirst was one live mule. Still, we were at most eight or nine miles from the main expedition, and no doubt, after a day or so, they would send up after us if we did not return.

“After a day or so . . .”

The lieutenant paused. “Ever been thirsty, Graham?”

“Not that kind,” said the Ethnologist.

“H’m. We had the whole of that day, the night, and the next day of it, and only a trifle of dew we wrung out of our clothes and the tent. And below us was the river going giggle, giggle, round a rock in mid-stream. I never knew such a barrenness of incident, or such a quantity of sensation. The sun might have had Joshua’s command still upon it for all the motion one could see; and it blazed like a near furnace. Towards the evening of the first day one of the Derbyshire men said something—nobody heard what—and went off round the bend of the cliff. We heard shots, and when Hooker looked round the corner he was gone. And in the morning the Sepoy whose leg was shot was in delirium, and jumped or fell over the cliff. Then we took the mule and shot it, and that must needs go over the cliff too in its last struggles, leaving eight of us.

“We could see the body of the Sepoy down below, with the head in the water. He was lying face downwards, and so far as I could make out was scarcely smashed at all. Badly as the Chins might covet his head, they had the sense to leave it alone until the darkness came.

“At first we talked of all the chances there were of the main body hearing the firing, and reckoned whether they would begin to miss us, and all that kind of thing, but we dried up as the evening came on. The Sepoys played games with bits of stone among themselves, and afterwards told stories. The night was rather chilly. The second day nobody spoke. Our lips were black and our throats afire, and we lay about on the ledge and glared at one another. Perhaps it’s as well we kept our thoughts to ourselves. One of the British soldiers began writing some blasphemous rot on the rock with a bit of pipeclay, about his last dying will, until I stopped it. As I looked over the edge down into the valley and saw the river rippling I was nearly tempted to go after the Sepoy. It seemed a pleasant and desirable thing to go rushing down through the air with something to drink—or no more thirst at any rate—at the bottom. I remembered in time, though, that I was the officer in command, and my duty to set a good example, and that kept me from any such foolishness.

“Yet, thinking of that, put an idea into my head. I got up and looked at the tent and tent ropes, and wondered why I had not thought of it before. Then I came and peered over the cliff again. This time the height seemed greater and the pose of the Sepoy rather more painful. But it was that or nothing. And to cut it short, I parachuted.

“I got a big circle of canvas out of the tent, about three times the size of that table-cover, and plugged the hole in the centre, and I tied eight ropes round it to meet in the middle and make a parachute. The other chaps lay about and watched me as though they thought it was a new kind of delirium. Then I explained my notion to the two British soldiers and how I meant to do it, and as soon as the short dusk had darkened into night, I risked it. They held the thing high up, and I took a run the whole length of the ledge. The thing filled with air like a sail, but at the edge I will confess I faked and pulled up.

“As soon as I stopped I was ashamed of myself—as well I might be in front of privates—and went back and started again. Off I jumped this time—with a kind of sob, I remember—clean into the air, with the big white sail belying out above me.

“I must have thought at a frightful pace. It seemed a long time before I was sure that the thing meant to keep steady. At first it heeled sideways. Then I noticed the face of the rock which seemed to be streaming up past me, and me motionless. Then I looked down and saw in the darkness the river and the dead Sepoy rushing up towards me. But in the indistinct light I also saw three Chins, seemingly aghast at the sight of me, and that the Sepoy was decapitated. At that I wanted to go back again.

“Then my boot was in the mouth of one, and in a moment he and I were in a heap with the canvas fluttering down on the top of us. I fancy I dashed out his brains with my foot. I expected nothing more than to be brained myself by the other two, but the poor heathen had never heard of Baldwin, and incontinently bolted.

“I struggled out of the tangle of dead Chin and canvas, and looked round. About ten paces off lay the head of the Sepoy staring in the moonlight. Then I saw the water and went and drank. There wasn’t a sound in the world but the footsteps of the departing Chins, a faint shout from above, and the gluck of the water. So soon as I had drunk my full I started off down the river.

“That about ends the explanation of the flying man story. I never met a soul the whole eight miles of the way. I got to Walters’ camp by ten o’clock, and a born idiot of a sentinel had the cheek to fire at me as I came trotting out of the darkness. So soon as I had hammered my story into Winter’s thick skull, about fifty men started up the valley to clear the Chins out and get our men down. But for my own part I had too good a thirst to provoke it by going with them.

“You have heard what kind of a yarn the Chins made of it. Wings as long as a mule, eh?—And black feathers! The gay lieutenant bird! Well, well.”

The lieutenant meditated cheerfully for a moment. Then he added, “You would scarcely credit it, but when they got to the ridge at last, they found two more of the Sepoys had jumped over.”

“The rest were all right?” asked the Ethnologist.

“Yes,” said the lieutenant; “the rest were all right, barring a certain thirst, you know.”

And at the memory he helped himself to soda and whisky again.

## THE DIAMOND MAKER

Some business had detained me in Chancery Lane until nine in the evening, and thereafter, having some inkling of a headache, I was disinclined either for entertainment or further work. So much of the sky as the high cliffs of that narrow cañon of traffic left visible spoke of a serene night, and I determined to make my way down to the Embankment, and rest my eyes and cool my head by watching the variegated lights upon the river. Beyond comparison the night is the best time for this place; a merciful darkness hides the dirt of the waters, and the lights of this transition age, red, glaring orange, gas yellow, and electric white, are set in shadowy outlines of every possible shade between gray and deep purple. Through the arches of Waterloo Bridge a hundred points of light mark the sweep of the Embankment, and above its parapet rise the towers of Westminster, warm gray against the starlight. The black river goes by with only a rare ripple breaking its silence, and disturbing the reflections of the lights that swim upon its surface.

“A warm night,” said a voice at my side.

I turned my head, and saw the profile of a man who was leaning over the parapet beside me. It was a refined face, not unhandsome, though pinched and pale enough, and the coat collar turned up and pinned round the throat marked his status in life as sharply as a uniform. I felt I was committed to the price of a bed and breakfast if I answered him.

I looked at him curiously. Would he have anything to tell me worth the money, or was he the common incapable—incapable even of telling his own story? There was a quality of intelligence in his forehead and eyes, and a certain tremulousness in his nether lip that decided me.

“Very warm,” said I; “but not too warm for us here.”

“No,” he said, still looking across the water, “it is pleasant enough here . . . just now.”

“It is good,” he continued after a pause, “to find anything so restful as this in London. After one has been fretting about business all day, about getting on, meeting obligations, and parrying dangers, I do not know what one would do if it were not for such pacific corners.” He spoke with long pauses between the sentences. “You must know a little of the irksome labour of the world, or you would not be here. But I doubt if you can be so brain

wearily and footsore as I am . . . Bah! Sometimes I doubt if the game is worth the candle. I feel inclined to throw the whole thing over—name, wealth, and position—and take to some modest trade. But I know if I abandoned my ambition—hardly as she uses me—I should have nothing but remorse left for the rest of my days.”

He became silent. I looked at him in astonishment. If ever I saw a man hopelessly hard up it was the man in front of me. He was ragged and he was dirty, unshaven and unkempt; he looked as though he had been left in a dust-bin for a week. And he was talking to *me* of the irksome worries of a large business. I almost laughed outright. Either he was mad or playing a sorry jest on his own poverty.

“If high aims and high positions,” said I, “have their drawbacks of hard work and anxiety, they have their compensations. Influence, the power of doing good, of assisting those weaker and poorer than ourselves; and there is even a certain gratification in display. . . .”

My banter under the circumstances was in very vile taste. I spoke on the spur of the contrast of his appearance and speech. I was sorry even while I was speaking.

He turned a haggard but very composed face upon me. Said he: “I forget myself. Of course you would not understand.”

He measured me for a moment. “No doubt it is very absurd. You will not believe me even when I tell you, so that it is fairly safe to tell you. And it will be a comfort to tell some one. I really have a big business in hand, a very big business. But there are troubles just now. The fact is . . . I make diamonds.”

“I suppose,” said I, “you are out of work just at present?”

“I am sick of being disbelieved,” he said impatiently, and suddenly unbuttoning his wretched coat he pulled out a little canvas bag that was hanging by a cord round his neck. From this he produced a brown pebble. “I wonder if you know enough to know what that is?” He handed it to me.

Now, a year or so ago, I had occupied my leisure in taking a London science degree, so that I have a smattering of physics and mineralogy. The thing was not unlike an uncut diamond of the darker sort, though far too large, being almost as big as the top of my thumb. I took it, and saw it had the form of a regular octahedron, with the curved faces peculiar to the most precious of minerals. I took out my penknife and tried to scratch it—vainly.

Leaning forward towards the gas-lamp, I tried the thing on my watch-glass, and scored a white line across that with the greatest ease.

I looked at my interlocutor with rising curiosity. "It certainly is rather like a diamond. But if so, it is a Behemoth of diamonds. Where did you get it?"

"I tell you I made it," he said. "Give it back to me."

He replaced it hastily and buttoned his jacket. "I will sell it you for one hundred pounds," he suddenly whispered eagerly. With that my suspicions returned. The thing might, after all, be merely a lump of that almost equally hard substance, corundum, with an accidental resemblance in shape to the diamond. Or if it was a diamond, how came he by it, and why should he offer it at a hundred pounds?

We looked into one another's eyes. He seemed eager, but honestly eager. At that moment I believed it was a diamond he was trying to sell. Yet I am a poor man, a hundred pounds would leave a visible gap in my fortunes, and no sane man would buy a diamond by gaslight from a ragged tramp on his personal warranty only. Still, a diamond that size conjured up a vision of many thousands of pounds. Then, thought I, such a stone could scarcely exist without being mentioned in every book on gems, and again I called to mind the stories of contraband and light-fingered Kaffirs at the Cape. I put the question of purchase on one side.

"How did you get it?" said I.

"I made it."

I had heard something of Moissan, but I knew his artificial diamonds were very small. I shook my head.

"You seem to know something of this kind of thing. I will tell you a little about myself. Perhaps then you may think better of the purchase." He turned round with his back to the river, and put his hands in his pockets. He sighed. "I know you will not believe me."

"Diamonds," he began—and as he spoke his voice lost its faint flavour of the tramp and assumed something of the easy tone of an educated man—"are to be made by throwing carbon out of combination in a suitable flux and under a suitable pressure; the carbon crystallises out, not as black lead or charcoal powder, but as small diamonds. So much has been known to chemists for years, but no one yet has hit upon exactly the right flux in which to melt up the carbon, or exactly the right pressure for the best results. Consequently the diamonds made by chemists are small and dark, and

worthless as jewels. Now I, you know, have given up my life to this problem—given my life to it.

“I began to work at the conditions of diamond making when I was seventeen, and now I am thirty-two. It seemed to me that it might take all the thought and energies of a man for ten years, or twenty years, but, even if it did, the game was still worth the candle. Suppose one to have at last just hit the right trick, before the secret got out and diamonds became as common as coal, one might realise millions. Millions!”

He paused and looked for my sympathy. His eyes shone hungrily. “To think,” said he, “that I am on the verge of it all, and here!

“I had,” he proceeded, “about a thousand pounds when I was twenty-one, and this, I thought, eked out by a little teaching, would keep my researches going. A year or two was spent in study, at Berlin chiefly, and then I continued on my own account. The trouble was the secrecy. You see, if once I had let out what I was doing, other men might have been spurred on by my belief in the practicability of the idea; and I do not pretend to be such a genius as to have been sure of coming in first, in the case of a race for the discovery. And you see it was important that if I really meant to make a pile, people should not know it was an artificial process and capable of turning out diamonds by the ton. So I had to work all alone. At first I had a little laboratory, but as my resources began to run out I had to conduct my experiments in a wretched unfurnished room in Kentish Town, where I slept at last on a straw mattress on the floor among all my apparatus. The money simply flowed away. I grudged myself everything except scientific appliances. I tried to keep things going by a little teaching, but I am not a very good teacher, and I have no university degree, nor very much education except in chemistry, and I found I had to give a lot of time and labour for precious little money. But I got nearer and nearer the thing. Three years ago I settled the problem of the composition of the flux, and got near the pressure by putting this flux of mine and a certain carbon composition into a closed-up gun barrel, filling up with water, sealing tightly, and heating.”

He paused.

“Rather risky,” said I.

“Yes. It burst, and smashed all my windows and a lot of my apparatus; but I got a kind of diamond powder nevertheless. Following out the problem of getting a big pressure upon the molten mixture from which the things were to crystallise, I hit upon some researches of Daubr e’s at the Paris *Laboratoire des Poudres et Salp tres*. He exploded dynamite in a tightly



screwed steel cylinder, too strong to burst, and I found he could crush rocks into a muck not unlike the South African bed in which diamonds are found. It was a tremendous strain on my resources, but I got a steel cylinder made for my purpose after his pattern. I put in all my stuff and my explosives, built up a fire in my furnace, put the whole concern in, and—went out for a walk.”

I could not help laughing at his matter-of-fact manner. “Did you not think it would blow up the house? Were there other people in the place?”

“It was in the interest of science,” he said ultimately. “There was a costermonger family on the floor below, a begging letter writer in the room behind mine, and two flower women were upstairs. Perhaps it was a bit thoughtless. But possibly some of them were out.

“When I came back the thing was just where I left it, among the white hot coals. The explosive hadn’t burst the case. And then I had a problem to face. You know time is an important element in crystallisation. If you hurry the process the crystals are small—it is only by prolonged standing that they grow to any size. I resolved to let this apparatus cool for two years, letting the temperature go down slowly during that time. And I was now quite out of money; and with a big fire and the rent of my room, as well as my hunger to satisfy, I had scarcely a penny in the world.

“I can hardly tell you all the shifts I was put to while I was making the diamonds. I have sold newspapers, held horses, opened cab doors. For many weeks I addressed envelopes. I had a place as assistant to a man who owned a barrow, and used to call down one side of the road while he called down the other. Once for a week I had absolutely nothing to do, and I begged. What a week that was! One day the fire was going out and I had eaten nothing all day, and a little chap taking his girl out, gave me sixpence—to show off. Thank heaven for vanity! How the fish shops smelt! But I went and spent it all on coals, and had the furnace bright red again, and then—Well, hunger makes a fool of a man.

“At last, three weeks ago, I let the fire out. I took my cylinder and unscrewed it while it was still so hot that it punished my hands, and I scraped out the crumbling lavalike mass with a chisel, and hammered it into a powder upon an iron plate. And I found three big diamonds and five small ones. As I sat on the floor hammering, my door opened, and my neighbour, the begging letter writer, came in. He was drunk—as he usually is. ‘Nerchist,’ said he. ‘You’re drunk,’ said I. ‘Structive scoundrel,’ said he. ‘Go to your father,’ said I, meaning the Father of Lies. ‘Never you mind,’

said he, and gave me a cunning wink, and hiccuped, and, leaning up against the door, with his other eye against the door-post, began to babble of how he had been prying in my room, and how he had gone to the police that morning, and how they had taken down everything he had to say — ‘siffiwas a ge’m,’ said he. Then I suddenly realised I was in a hole. Either I should have to tell these police my little secret, and get the whole thing blown upon, or be lagged as an Anarchist. So I went up to my neighbour and took him by the collar, and rolled him about a bit, and then I gathered up my diamonds and cleared out. The evening newspapers called my den the Kentish Town Bomb Factory. And now I cannot part with the things for love or money.

“If I go in to respectable jewellers they ask me to wait, and go and whisper to a clerk to fetch a policeman, and then I say I cannot wait. And I found out a receiver of stolen goods, and he simply stuck to the one I gave him and told me to prosecute if I wanted it back. I am going about now with several hundred thousand pounds’ worth of diamonds round my neck, and without either food or shelter. You are the first person I have taken into my confidence. But I like your face and I am hard-driven.”

He looked into my eyes.

“It would be madness,” said I, “for me to buy a diamond under the circumstances. Besides, I do not carry hundreds of pounds about in my pocket. Yet I more than half believe your story. I will, if you like, do this: come to my office to-morrow. . . .”

“You think I am a thief!” said he keenly. “You will tell the police. I am not coming into a trap.”

“Somehow I am assured you are no thief. Here is my card. Take that, anyhow. You need not come to any appointment. Come when you will.”

He took the card, and an earnest of my good-will.

“Think better of it and come,” said I.

He shook his head doubtfully. “I will pay back your half-crown with interest some day—such interest as will amaze you,” said he. “Anyhow, you will keep the secret? . . . Don’t follow me.”

He crossed the road and went into the darkness towards the little steps under the archway leading into Essex Street, and I let him go. And that was the last I ever saw of him.

Afterwards I had two letters from him asking me to send bank-notes—not cheques—to certain addresses. I weighed the matter over, and took what I conceived to be the wisest course. Once he called upon me when I was out. My urchin described him as a very thin, dirty, and ragged man, with a dreadful cough. He left no message. That was the finish of him so far as my story goes. I wonder sometimes what has become of him. Was he an ingenious monomaniac, or a fraudulent dealer in pebbles, or has he really made diamonds, as he asserted? The latter is just sufficiently credible to make me think at times that I have missed the most brilliant opportunity of my life. He may, of course, be dead, and his diamonds carelessly thrown aside—one, I repeat, was almost as big as my thumb. Or he may be still wandering about trying to sell the things. It is just possible he may yet emerge upon society, and, passing athwart my heavens in the serene altitude sacred to the wealthy and the well-advertised, reproach me silently for my want of enterprise. I sometimes think I might at least have risked five pounds.

## THE HAMMERPOND PARK BURGLARY

It is a moot point whether burglary is to be considered as a sport, a trade, or an art. For a trade, the technique is scarcely rigid enough, and its claims to be considered an art are vitiated by the mercenary element that qualifies its triumphs. On the whole it seems to be most justly ranked as sport, a sport for which no rules are at present formulated, and of which the prizes are distributed in an extremely informal manner. It was this informality of burglary that led to the regrettable extinction of two promising beginners at Hammerpond Park.

The stakes offered in this affair consisted chiefly of diamonds and other personal *bric-à-brac* belonging to the newly married Lady Aveling. Lady Aveling, as the reader will remember, was the only daughter of Mrs. Montagu Pangs, the well-known hostess. Her marriage to Lord Aveling was extensively advertised in the papers, the quantity and quality of her wedding presents, and the fact that the honeymoon was to be spent at Hammerpond. The announcement of these valuable prizes created a considerable sensation in the small circle in which Mr. Teddy Watkins was the undisputed leader, and it was decided that, accompanied by a duly qualified assistant, he should visit the village of Hammerpond in his professional capacity.

Being a man of naturally retiring and modest disposition, Mr. Watkins determined to make this visit *incog.*, and after due consideration of the conditions of his enterprise, he selected the rôle of a landscape artist and the unassuming surname of Smith. He preceded his assistant, who, it was decided, should join him only on the last afternoon of his stay at Hammerpond. Now the village of Hammerpond is perhaps one of the prettiest little corners in Sussex; many thatched houses still survive, the flint-built church with its tall spire nestling under the down is one of the finest and least restored in the county, and the beech-woods and bracken jungles through which the road runs to the great house are singularly rich in what the vulgar artist and photographer call "bits." So that Mr. Watkins, on his arrival with two virgin canvases, a brand new easel, a paint-box, portmanteau, an ingenious little ladder made in sections (after the pattern of the late lamented master, Charles Peace), crowbar, and wire coils, found himself welcomed with effusion and some curiosity by half a dozen other brethren of the brush. It rendered the disguise he had chosen unexpectedly plausible, but it inflicted upon him a considerable amount of aesthetic conversation for which he was very imperfectly prepared.

“Have you exhibited very much?” said Young Porson in the bar-parlour of the “Coach and Horses,” where Mr. Watkins was skilfully accumulating local information on the night of his arrival.

“Very little,” said Mr. Watkins, “just a snack here and there.”

“Academy?”

“In course. *And* at the Crystal Palace.”

“Did they hang you well?” said Porson.

“Don’t rot,” said Mr. Watkins; “I don’t like it.”

“I mean did they put you in a good place?”

“Whadyer mean?” said Mr. Watkins suspiciously. “One ’ud think you were trying to make out I’d been put away.”

Porson had been brought up by aunts, and was a gentlemanly young man even for an artist; he did not know what being “put away” meant, but he thought it best to explain that he intended nothing of the sort. As the question of hanging seemed a sore point with Mr. Watkins, he tried to divert the conversation a little.

“Do you do figure-work at all?”

“No, never had a head for figures,” said Mr. Watkins, “my miss—Mrs. Smith, I mean, does all that.”

“She paints too!” said Porson. “That’s rather jolly.”

“Very,” said Mr. Watkins, though he really did not think so, and, feeling the conversation was drifting a little beyond his grasp, added, “I came down here to paint Hammerpond House by moonlight.”

“Really!” said Porson. “That’s rather a novel idea.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Watkins, “I thought it rather a good notion when it occurred to me. I expect to begin to-morrow night.”

“What! You don’t mean to paint in the open, by night?”

“I do, though.”

“But how will you see your canvas?”

“Have a bloomin’ cop’s——” began Mr. Watkins, rising too quickly to the question, and then realising this, bawled to Miss Durgan for another glass of beer. “I’m goin’ to have a thing called a dark lantern,” he said to Porson.

“But it’s about new moon now,” objected Porson. “There won’t be any moon.”

“There’ll be the house,” said Watkins, “at any rate. I’m goin’, you see, to paint the house first and the moon afterwards.”

“Oh!” said Porson, too staggered to continue the conversation.

“They doo say,” said old Durgan, the landlord, who had maintained a respectful silence during the technical conversation, “as there’s no less than three p’licemen from ’Azelworth on dewty every night in the house—’count of this Lady Aveling ’n her jewellery. One’m won fower-and-six last night, off second footman—tossin’.”

Towards sunset next day Mr. Watkins, virgin canvas, easel, and a very considerable case of other appliances in hand, strolled up the pleasant pathway through the beech-woods to Hammerpond Park, and pitched his apparatus in a strategic position commanding the house. Here he was observed by Mr. Raphael Sant, who was returning across the park from a study of the chalk-pits. His curiosity having been fired by Porson’s account of the new arrival, he turned aside with the idea of discussing nocturnal art.

Mr. Watkins was apparently unaware of his approach. A friendly conversation with Lady Hammerpond’s butler had just terminated, and that individual, surrounded by the three pet dogs which it was his duty to take for an airing after dinner had been served, was receding in the distance. Mr. Watkins was mixing colour with an air of great industry. Sant, approaching more nearly, was surprised to see the colour in question was as harsh and brilliant an emerald green as it is possible to imagine. Having cultivated an extreme sensibility to colour from his earliest years, he drew the air in sharply between his teeth at the very first glimpse of this brew. Mr. Watkins turned round. He looked annoyed.

“What on earth are you going to do with that *beastly* green?” said Sant.

Mr. Watkins realised that his zeal to appear busy in the eyes of the butler had evidently betrayed him into some technical error. He looked at Sant and hesitated.

“Pardon my rudeness,” said Sant; “but really, that green is altogether too amazing. It came as a shock. What *do* you mean to do with it?”

Mr. Watkins was collecting his resources. Nothing could save the situation but decision. “If you come here interrupting my work,” he said, “I’m a-goin’ to paint your face with it.”

Sant retired, for he was a humorist and a peaceful man. Going down the hill he met Porson and Wainright. "Either that man is a genius or he is a dangerous lunatic," said he. "Just go up and look at his green." And he continued his way, his countenance brightened by a pleasant anticipation of a cheerful affray round an easel in the gloaming, and the shedding of much green paint.

But to Porson and Wainwright, Mr. Watkins was less aggressive, and explained that the green was intended to be the first coating of his picture. It was, he admitted in response to a remark, an absolutely new method, invented by himself. But subsequently he became more reticent; he explained he was not going to tell every passer-by the secret of his own particular style, and added some scathing remarks upon the meanness of people "hanging about" to pick up such tricks of the masters as they could, which immediately relieved him of their company.

Twilight deepened, first one then another star appeared. The rooks amid the tall trees to the left of the house had long since lapsed into slumbrous silence, the house itself lost all the details of its architecture and became a dark gray outline, and then the windows of the salon shone out brilliantly, the conservatory was lighted up, and here and there a bedroom window burnt yellow. Had any one approached the easel in the park it would have been found deserted. One brief uncivil word in brilliant green sullied the purity of its canvas. Mr. Watkins was busy in the shrubbery with his assistant, who had discreetly joined him from the carriage-drive.

Mr. Watkins was inclined to be self-congratulatory upon the ingenious device by which he had carried all his apparatus boldly, and in the sight of all men, right up to the scene of operations. "That's the dressing-room," he said to his assistant, "and, as soon as the maid takes the candle away and goes down to supper, we'll call in. My! how nice the house do look, to be sure, against the starlight, and with all its windows and lights! Swopme, Jim, I almost wish I *was* a painter-chap. Have you fixed that there wire across the path from the laundry?"

He cautiously approached the house until he stood below the dressing-room window, and began to put together his folding ladder. He was much too experienced a practitioner to feel any unusual excitement. Jim was reconnoitring the smoking room. Suddenly, close beside Mr. Watkins in the bushes, there was a violent crash and a stifled curse. Some one had tumbled over the wire which his assistant had just arranged. He heard feet running on the gravel pathway beyond. Mr. Watkins, like all true artists, was a singularly shy man, and he incontinently dropped his folding ladder and

began running circumspectly through the shrubbery. He was indistinctly aware of two people hot upon his heels, and he fancied that he distinguished the outline of his assistant in front of him. In another moment he had vaulted the low stone wall bounding the shrubbery, and was in the open park. Two thuds on the turf followed his own leap.

It was a close chase in the darkness through the trees. Mr. Watkins was a loosely built man and in good training, and he gained hand over hand upon the hoarsely panting figure in front. Neither spoke, but, as Mr. Watkins pulled up alongside, a qualm of awful doubt came over him. The man turned his head at the same moment and gave an exclamation of surprise. "It's not Jim," thought Mr. Watkins, and simultaneously the stranger flung himself, as it were, at Watkins's knees, and they were forthwith grappling on the ground together. "Lend a hand, Bill," cried the stranger as the third man came up. And Bill did—two hands in fact, and some accentuated feet. The fourth man, presumably Jim, had apparently turned aside and made off in a different direction. At any rate, he did not join the trio.

Mr. Watkins's memory of the incidents of the next two minutes is extremely vague. He has a dim recollection of having his thumb in the corner of the mouth of the first man, and feeling anxious about its safety, and for some seconds at least he held the head of the gentleman answering to the name of Bill, to the ground by the hair. He was also kicked in a great number of different places, apparently by a vast multitude of people. Then the gentleman who was not Bill got his knee below Mr. Watkins's diaphragm, and tried to curl him up upon it.

When his sensations became less entangled he was sitting upon the turf, and eight or ten men—the night was dark, and he was rather too confused to count—standing round him, apparently waiting for him to recover. He mournfully assumed that he was captured, and would probably have made some philosophical reflections on the fickleness of fortune, had not his internal sensations disinclined him for speech.

He noticed very quickly that his wrists were not handcuffed, and then a flask of brandy was put in his hands. This touched him a little—it was such unexpected kindness.

"He's a-comin' round," said a voice which he fancied he recognised as belonging to the Hammerpond second footman.

"We've got 'em, sir, both of 'em," said the Hammerpond butler, the man who had handed him the flask. "Thanks to *you*."



No one answered this remark. Yet he failed to see how it applied to him.

“He’s fair dazed,” said a strange voice; “the villains half-murdered him.”

Mr. Teddy Watkins decided to remain fair dazed until he had a better grasp of the situation. He perceived that two of the black figures round him stood side by side with a dejected air, and there was something in the carriage of their shoulders that suggested to his experienced eye hands that were bound together. Two! In a flash he rose to his position. He emptied the little flask and staggered—obsequious hands assisting him—to his feet. There was a sympathetic murmur.

“Shake hands, sir, shake hands,” said one of the figures near him. “Permit me to introduce myself. I am very greatly indebted to you. It was the jewels of my wife, Lady Aveling, which attracted these scoundrels to the house.”

“Very glad to make your lordship’s acquaintance,” said Teddy Watkins.

“I presume you saw the rascals making for the shrubbery, and dropped down on them?”

“That’s exactly how it happened,” said Mr. Watkins.

“You should have waited till they got in at the window,” said Lord Aveling; “they would get it hotter if they had actually committed the burglary. And it was lucky for you two of the policemen were out by the gates, and followed up the three of you. I doubt if you could have secured the two of them—though it was confoundedly plucky of you, all the same.”

“Yes, I ought to have thought of all that,” said Mr. Watkins; “but one can’t think of everythink.”

“Certainly not,” said Lord Aveling. “I am afraid they have mauled you a little,” he added. The party was now moving towards the house. “You walk rather lame. May I offer you my arm?”

And instead of entering Hammerpond House by the dressing-room window, Mr. Watkins entered it—slightly intoxicated, and inclined now to cheerfulness again—on the arm of a real live peer, and by the front door. “This,” thought Mr. Watkins, “is burgling in style!” The “scoundrels,” seen by the gaslight, proved to be mere local amateurs unknown to Mr. Watkins, and they were taken down into the pantry and there watched over by the three policemen, two gamekeepers with loaded guns, the butler, an ostler, and a carman, until the dawn allowed of their removal to Hazelhurst police-station. Mr. Watkins was made much of in the salon. They devoted a sofa to

him, and would not hear of a return to the village that night. Lady Aveling was sure he was brilliantly original, and said her idea of Turner was just such another rough, half-inebriated, deep-eyed, brave, and clever man. Some one brought up a remarkable little folding ladder that had been picked up in the shrubbery, and showed him how it was put together. They also described how wires had been found in the shrubbery, evidently placed there to trip-up unwary pursuers. It was lucky he had escaped these snares. And they showed him the jewels.

Mr. Watkins had the sense not to talk too much, and in any conversational difficulty fell back on his internal pains. At last he was seized with stiffness in the back, and yawning. Every one suddenly awoke to the fact that it was a shame to keep him talking after his affray, so he retired early to his room, the little red room next to Lord Aveling's suite.

The dawn found a deserted easel bearing a canvas with a green inscription, in the Hammerpond Park, and it found Hammerpond House in commotion. But if the dawn found Mr. Teddy Watkins and the Aveling diamonds, it did not communicate the information to the police.

## THE JILTING OF JANE

As I sit writing in my study, I can hear our Jane bumping her way downstairs with a brush and dustpan. She used in the old days to sing hymn tunes, or the British national song for the time being, to these instruments, but latterly she has been silent and even careful over her work. Time was when I prayed with fervour for such silence, and my wife with sighs for such care, but now they have come we are not so glad as we might have anticipated we should be. Indeed, I would rejoice secretly, though it may be unmanly weakness to admit it, even to hear Jane sing "Daisy," or by the fracture of any plate but one of Euphemia's best green ones, to learn that the period of brooding has come to an end.

Yet how we longed to hear the last of Jane's young man before we heard the last of him! Jane was always very free with her conversation to my wife, and discoursed admirably in the kitchen on a variety of topics—so well, indeed, that I sometimes left my study door open—our house is a small one—to partake of it. But after William came, it was always William, nothing but William; William this and William that; and when we thought William was worked out and exhausted altogether, then William all over again. The engagement lasted altogether three years; yet how she got introduced to William, and so became thus saturated with him, was always a secret. For my part, I believe it was at the street corner where the Rev. Barnabas Baux used to hold an open-air service after evensong on Sundays. Young Cupids were wont to flit like moths round the paraffin flare of the centre of High Church hymn-singing. I fancy she stood singing hymns there, out of memory and her imagination, instead of coming home to get supper, and William came up beside her and said, "Hello!" "Hello yourself!" she said; and, etiquette being satisfied, they proceeded to talk together.

As Euphemia has a reprehensible way of letting her servants talk to her, she soon heard of him. "He is *such* a respectable young man, ma'am," said Jane, "you don't know." Ignoring the slur cast on her acquaintance, my wife inquired further about this William.

"He is second porter at Maynard's, the drapers," said Jane, "and gets eighteen shillings—nearly a pound—a week, ma'am; and when the head porter leaves he will be head porter. His relatives are quite superior people, ma'am. Not labouring people at all. His father was a greengrosher, ma'am, and had a chumor, and he was bankrup' twice. And one of his sisters is in a

Home for the Dying. It will be a very good match for me, ma'am," said Jane, "me being an orphan girl."

"Then you are engaged to him?" asked my wife.

"Not engaged, ma'am; but he is saving money to buy a ring—hammyfist."

"Well, Jane, when you are properly engaged to him you may ask him round here on Sunday afternoons, and have tea with him in the kitchen." For my Euphemia has a motherly conception of her duty towards her maid-servants. And presently the amethystine ring was being worn about the house, even with ostentation, and Jane developed a new way of bringing in the joint, so that this gage was evident. The elder Miss Maitland was aggrieved by it, and told my wife that servants ought not to wear rings. But my wife looked it up in *Enquire Within* and *Mrs. Motherly's Book of Household Management*, and found no prohibition. So Jane remained with this happiness added to her love.

The treasure of Jane's heart appeared to me to be what respectable people call a very deserving young man. "William, ma'am," said Jane one day suddenly, with ill-concealed complacency, as she counted out the beer bottles, "William, ma'am, is a teetotaller. Yes, m'm; and he don't smoke. Smoking, ma'am," said Jane, as one who reads the heart, "*do* make such a dust about. Beside the waste of money. *And* the smell. However, I suppose it's necessary to some."

Possibly it dawned on Jane that she was reflecting a little severely upon Euphemia's comparative ill-fortune, and she added kindly, "I'm sure the master is a hangel when his pipe's alight. Compared to other times."

William was at first a rather shabby young man of the ready-made black coat school of costume. He had watery-gray eyes, and a complexion appropriate to the brother of one in a Home for the Dying.

Euphemia did not fancy him very much, even at the beginning. His eminent respectability was vouched for by an alpaca umbrella, from which he never allowed himself to be parted.

"He goes to chapel," said Jane. "His papa, ma'am——"

"His *what*, Jane?"

"His papa, ma'am, was Church; but Mr. Maynard is a Plymouth Brother, and William thinks it Policy, ma'am, to go there too. Mr. Maynard comes and talks to him quite friendly, when they ain't busy, about using up all the

ends of string, and about his soul. He takes a lot of notice, do Mr. Maynard, of William, and the way he saves string and his soul, ma'am."

Presently we heard that the head porter at Maynard's had left, and that William was head porter at twenty-three shillings a week. "He is really kind of over the man who drives the van," said Jane, "and him married with three children." And she promised in the pride of her heart to make interest for us with William to favour us so that we might get our parcels of drapery from Maynard's with exceptional promptitude.

After this promotion a rapidly increasing prosperity came upon Jane's young man. One day, we learned that Mr. Maynard had given William a book. "*Smiles' 'Elp Yourself*, it's called," said Jane; "but it ain't comic. It tells you how to get on in the world, and some what William read to me was lovely, ma'am."

Euphemia told me of this laughing, and then she became suddenly grave. "Do you know, dear," she said, "Jane said one thing I did not like. She had been quiet for a minute, and then she suddenly remarked, 'William is a lot above me, ma'am, ain't he?'"

"I don't see anything in that," I said, though later my eyes were to be opened.

One Sunday afternoon about that time I was sitting at my writing-desk—possibly I was reading a good book—when a something went by the window. I heard a startled exclamation behind me, and saw Euphemia with her hands clasped together and her eyes dilated. "George," she said in an awestricken whisper, "did you see?"

Then we both spoke to one another at the same moment, slowly and solemnly: "*A silk hat! Yellow gloves! A new umbrella!*"

"It may be my fancy, dear," said Euphemia; "but his tie was very like yours. I believe Jane keeps him in ties. She told me a little while ago in a way that implied volumes about the rest of your costume, 'The master *do* wear pretty ties, ma'am.' And he echoes all your novelties."

The young couple passed our window again on their way to their customary walk. They were arm-in-arm. Jane looked exquisitely proud, happy, and uncomfortable, with new white cotton gloves, and William, in the silk hat, singularly genteel!

That was the culmination of Jane's happiness. When she returned, "Mr. Maynard has been talking to William, ma'am," she said, "and he is to serve customers, just like the young shop gentlemen, during the next sale. And if

he gets on, he is to be made an assistant, ma'am, at the first opportunity. He has got to be as gentlemanly as he can, ma'am; and if he ain't, ma'am, he says it won't be for want of trying. Mr. Maynard has took a great fancy to him."

"He *is* getting on, Jane," said my wife.

"Yes, ma'am," said Jane thoughtfully, "he *is* getting on."

And she sighed.

That next Sunday, as I drank my tea, I interrogated my wife. "How is this Sunday different from all other Sundays, little woman? What has happened? Have you altered the curtains, or rearranged the furniture, or where is the indefinable difference of it? Are you wearing your hair in a new way without warning me? I clearly perceive a change in my environment, and I cannot for the life of me say what it is."

Then my wife answered in her most tragic voice: "George," she said, "that—that William has not come near the place to-day! And Jane is crying her heart out upstairs."

There followed a period of silence. Jane, as I have said, stopped singing about the house, and began to care for our brittle possessions, which struck my wife as being a very sad sign indeed. The next Sunday, and the next, Jane asked to go out, "to walk with William," and my wife, who never attempts to extort confidences, gave her permission, and asked no questions. On each occasion Jane came back looking flushed and very determined. At last one day she became communicative.

"William is being led away," she remarked abruptly, with a catching of the breath, apropos of tablecloths. "Yes, ma'am. She is a milliner, and she can play on the piano."

"I thought," said my wife, "that you went out with him on Sunday."

"Not out with him, ma'am—after him. I walked along by the side of them, and told her he was engaged to me."

"Dear me, Jane, did you? What did they do?"

"Took no more notice of me than if I was dirt. So I told her she should suffer for it."

"It could not have been a very agreeable walk, Jane."

"Not for no parties, ma'am."

“I wish,” said Jane, “I could play the piano, ma’am. But anyhow, I don’t mean to let *her* get him away from me. She’s older than him, and her hair ain’t gold to the roots, ma’am.”

It was on the August Bank Holiday that the crisis came. We do not clearly know the details of the fray, but only such fragments as poor Jane let fall. She came home dusty, excited, and with her heart hot within her.

The milliner’s mother, the milliner, and William had made a party to the Art Museum at South Kensington, I think. Anyhow, Jane had calmly but firmly accosted them somewhere in the streets, and asserted her right to what, in spite of the consensus of literature, she held to be her inalienable property. She did, I think, go so far as to lay hands on him. They dealt with her in a crushingly superior way. They “called a cab.” There was a “scene,” William being pulled away into the four-wheeler by his future wife and mother-in-law from the reluctant hands of our discarded Jane. There were threats of giving her “in charge.”

“My poor Jane!” said my wife, mincing veal as though she was mincing William. “It’s a shame of them. I would think no more of him. He is not worthy of you.”

“No, ma’am,” said Jane. “He *is* weak.”

“But it’s that woman has done it,” said Jane. She was never known to bring herself to pronounce “that woman’s” name or to admit her girlishness. “I can’t think what minds some women must have—to try and get a girl’s young man away from her. But there, it only hurts to talk about it,” said Jane.

Thereafter our house rested from William. But there was something in the manner of Jane’s scrubbing the front doorstep or sweeping out the rooms, a certain viciousness, that persuaded me that the story had not yet ended.

“Please, ma’am, may I go and see a wedding to-morrow?” said Jane one day.

My wife knew by instinct whose wedding. “Do you think it is wise, Jane?” she said.

“I would like to see the last of him,” said Jane.

“My dear,” said my wife, fluttering into my room about twenty minutes after Jane had started, “Jane has been to the boot-hole and taken all the left-

off boots and shoes, and gone off to the wedding with them in a bag. Surely she cannot mean——”

“Jane,” I said, “is developing character. Let us hope for the best.”

Jane came back with a pale, hard face. All the boots seemed to be still in her bag, at which my wife heaved a premature sigh of relief. We heard her go upstairs and replace the boots with considerable emphasis.

“Quite a crowd at the wedding, ma’am,” she said presently, in a purely conversational style, sitting in our little kitchen, and scrubbing the potatoes; “and such a lovely day for them.” She proceeded to numerous other details, clearly avoiding some cardinal incident.

“It was all extremely respectable and nice, ma’am; but *her* father didn’t wear a black coat, and looked quite out of place, ma’am. Mr. Piddingquirk ——”

“*Who?*”

“Mr. Piddingquirk—William that *was*, ma’am—had white gloves, and a coat like a clergyman, and a lovely chrysanthemum. He looked so nice, ma’am. And there was red carpet down, just like for gentlefolks. And they say he gave the clerk four shillings, ma’am. It was a real kerridge they had—not a fly. When they came out of church there was rice-throwing, and her two little sisters dropping dead flowers. And some one threw a slipper, and then I threw a boot——”

“Threw a *boot*, Jane!”

“Yes, ma’am. Aimed at *her*. But it hit *him*. Yes, ma’am, hard. Gev him a black eye, I should think. I only threw that one. I hadn’t the heart to try again. All the little boys cheered when it hit him.”

After an interval—“I am sorry the boot *hit* him.”

Another pause. The potatoes were being scrubbed violently. “He always *was* a bit above me, you know, ma’am. And he was led away.”

The potatoes were more than finished. Jane rose sharply, with a sigh, and rapped the basin down on the table.

“I don’t care,” she said. “I don’t care a rap. He will find out his mistake yet. It serves me right. I was stuck up about him. I ought not to have looked so high. And I am glad things are as things are.”

My wife was in the kitchen, seeing to the higher cookery. After the confession of the boot-throwing, she must have watched poor Jane fuming



with a certain dismay in those brown eyes of hers. But I imagine they softened again very quickly, and then Jane's must have met them.

“Oh, ma'am,” said Jane, with an astonishing change of note, “think of all that *might* have been! Oh, ma'am, I *could* have been so happy! I ought to have known, but I didn't know . . . You're very kind to let me talk to you, ma'am . . . for it's hard on me, ma'am . . . it's har-r-r-d——”

And I gather that Euphemia so far forgot herself as to let Jane sob out some of the fullness of her heart on a sympathetic shoulder. My Euphemia, thank Heaven, has never properly grasped the importance of “keeping up her position.” And since that fit of weeping, much of the accent of bitterness has gone out of Jane's scrubbing and brush work.

Indeed, something passed the other day with the butcher-boy—but that scarcely belongs to this story. However, Jane is young still, and time and change are at work with her. We all have our sorrows, but I do not believe very much in the existence of sorrows that never heal.

## THE CONE

The night was hot and overcast, the sky red-rimmed with the lingering sunset of midsummer. They sat at the open window, trying to fancy the air was fresher there. The trees and shrubs of the garden stood stiff and dark; beyond in the roadway a gas-lamp burnt, bright orange against the hazy blue of the evening. Farther were the three lights of the railway signal against the lowering sky. The man and woman spoke to one another in low tones.

“He does not suspect?” said the man, a little nervously.

“Not he,” she said peevishly, as though that, too, irritated her. “He thinks of nothing but the works and the prices of fuel. He has no imagination, no poetry.”

“None of these men of iron have,” he said sententiously. “They have no hearts.”

“*He* has not,” she said. She turned her discontented face towards the window. The distant sound of a roaring and rushing drew nearer and grew in volume; the house quivered; one heard the metallic rattle of the tender. As the train passed, there was a glare of light above the cutting and a driving tumult of smoke; one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight black oblongs—eight trucks—passed across the dim gray of the embankment, and were suddenly extinguished one by one in the throat of the tunnel, which, with the last, seemed to swallow down train, smoke, and sound in one abrupt gulp.

“This country was all fresh and beautiful once,” he said; “and now—it is Gehenna. Down that way—nothing but pot-banks and chimneys belching fire and dust into the face of heaven. . . . But what does it matter? An end comes, an end to all this cruelty. . . . *To-morrow*.” He spoke the last word in a whisper.

“*To-morrow*,” she said, speaking in a whisper too, and still staring out of the window.

“Dear!” he said, putting his hand on hers.

She turned with a start, and their eyes searched one another’s. Hers softened to his gaze. “My dear one!” she said, and then: “It seems so strange—that you should have come into my life like this—to open——” She paused.

“To open?” he said.

“All this wonderful world”—she hesitated, and spoke still more softly—“this world of *love* to me.”

Then suddenly the door clicked and closed. They turned their heads, and he started violently back. In the shadow of the room stood a great shadowy figure—silent. They saw the face dimly in the half-light, with unexpressive dark patches under the penthouse brows. Every muscle in Raut’s body suddenly became tense. When could the door have opened? What had he heard? Had he heard all? What had he seen? A tumult of questions.

The new-comer’s voice came at last, after a pause that seemed interminable. “Well?” he said.

“I was afraid I had missed you, Horrocks,” said the man at the window, gripping the window-ledge with his hand. His voice was unsteady.

The clumsy figure of Horrocks came forward out of the shadow. He made no answer to Raut’s remark. For a moment he stood above them.

The woman’s heart was cold within her. “I told Mr. Raut it was just possible you might come back,” she said, in a voice that never quivered.

Horrocks, still silent, sat down abruptly in the chair by her little work-table. His big hands were clenched; one saw now the fire of his eyes under the shadow of his brows. He was trying to get his breath. His eyes went from the woman he had trusted to the friend he had trusted, and then back to the woman.

By this time and for the moment all three half understood one another. Yet none dared say a word to ease the pent-up things that choked them.

It was the husband’s voice that broke the silence at last.

“You wanted to see me?” he said to Raut.

Raut started as he spoke. “I came to see you,” he said, resolved to lie to the last.

“Yes,” said Horrocks.

“You promised,” said Raut, “to show me some fine effects of moonlight and smoke.”

“I promised to show you some fine effects of moonlight and smoke,” repeated Horrocks in a colourless voice.

“And I thought I might catch you to-night before you went down to the works,” proceeded Raut, “and come with you.”

There was another pause. Did the man mean to take the thing coolly? Did he after all know? How long had he been in the room? Yet even at the moment when they heard the door, their attitudes . . . Horrocks glanced at the profile of the woman, shadowy pallid in the half-light. Then he glanced at Raut, and seemed to recover himself suddenly. “Of course,” he said, “I promised to show you the works under their proper dramatic conditions. It’s odd how I could have forgotten.”

“If I am troubling you——” began Raut.

Horrocks started again. A new light had suddenly come into the sultry gloom of his eyes. “Not in the least,” he said.

“Have you been telling Mr. Raut of all these contrasts of flame and shadow you think so splendid?” said the woman, turning now to her husband for the first time, her confidence creeping back again, her voice just one half-note too high. “That dreadful theory of yours that machinery is beautiful, and everything else in the world ugly. I thought he would not spare you, Mr. Raut. It’s his great theory, his one discovery in art.”

“I am slow to make discoveries,” said Horrocks grimly, damping her suddenly. “But what I discover . . .” He stopped.

“Well?” she said.

“Nothing;” and suddenly he rose to his feet.

“I promised to show you the works,” he said to Raut, and put his big, clumsy hand on his friend’s shoulder. “And you are ready to go?”

“Quite,” said Raut, and stood up also.

There was another pause. Each of them peered through the indistinctness of the dusk at the other two. Horrocks’s hand still rested on Raut’s shoulder. Raut half fancied still that the incident was trivial after all. But Mrs. Horrocks knew her husband better, knew that grim quiet in his voice, and the confusion in her mind took a vague shape of physical evil. “Very well,” said Horrocks, and, dropping his hand, turned towards the door.

“My hat?” Raut looked round in the half-light.

“That’s my work-basket,” said Mrs. Horrocks, with a gust of hysterical laughter. Their hands came together on the back of the chair. “Here it is!” he said. She had an impulse to warn him in an undertone, but she could not

frame a word. “Don’t go!” and “Beware of him!” struggled in her mind, and the swift moment passed.

“Got it?” said Horrocks, standing with the door half open.

Raut stepped towards him. “Better say good-bye to Mrs. Horrocks,” said the ironmaster, even more grimly quiet in his tone than before.

Raut started and turned. “Good-evening, Mrs. Horrocks,” he said, and their hands touched.

Horrocks held the door open with a ceremonial politeness unusual in him towards men. Raut went out, and then, after a wordless look at her, her husband followed. She stood motionless while Raut’s light footfall and her husband’s heavy tread, like bass and treble, passed down the passage together. The front door slammed heavily. She went to the window, moving slowly, and stood watching—leaning forward. The two men appeared for a moment at the gateway in the road, passed under the street lamp, and were hidden by the black masses of the shrubbery. The lamplight fell for a moment on their faces, showing only unmeaning pale patches, telling nothing of what she still feared, and doubted, and craved vainly to know. Then she sank down into a crouching attitude in the big arm-chair, her eyes wide open and staring out at the red lights from the furnaces that flickered in the sky. An hour after she was still there, her attitude scarcely changed.

The oppressive stillness of the evening weighed heavily upon Raut. They went side by side down the road in silence, and in silence turned into the cinder-made by-way that presently opened out the prospect of the valley.

A blue haze, half dust, half mist, touched the long valley with mystery. Beyond were Hanley and Etruria, gray and dark masses, outlined thinly by the rare golden dots of the street lamps, and here and there a gaslit window, or the yellow glare of some late-working factory or crowded public-house. Out of the masses, clear and slender against the evening sky, rose a multitude of tall chimneys, many of them reeking, a few smokeless during a season of “play.” Here and there a pallid patch and ghostly stunted beehive shapes showed the position of a pot-bank, or a wheel, black and sharp against the hot lower sky, marked some colliery where they raise the iridescent coal of the place. Nearer at hand was the broad stretch of railway, and half invisible trains shunted—a steady puffing and rumbling, with every run a ringing concussion and a rhythmic series of impacts, and a passage of intermittent puffs of white steam across the further view. And to the left, between the railway and the dark mass of the low hill beyond, dominating the whole view, colossal, inky-black, and crowned with smoke and fitful

flames, stood the great cylinders of the Jeddah Company Blast Furnaces, the central edifices of the big ironworks of which Horrocks was the manager. They stood heavy and threatening, full of an incessant turmoil of flames and seething molten iron, and about the feet of them rattled the rolling-mills, and the steam-hammer beat heavily and splashed the white iron sparks hither and thither. Even as they looked, a truckful of fuel was shot into one of the giants, and the red flames gleamed out, and a confusion of smoke and black dust came boiling upwards towards the sky.

“Certainly you get some fine effects of colour with your furnaces,” said Raut, breaking a silence that had become apprehensive.

Horrocks grunted. He stood with his hands in his pockets, frowning down at the dim steaming railway and the busy ironworks beyond, frowning as if he were thinking out some knotty problem.

Raut glanced at him and away again. “At present your moonlight effect is hardly ripe,” he continued, looking upward; “the moon is still smothered by the vestiges of daylight.”

Horrocks stared at him with the expression of a man who has suddenly awakened. “Vestiges of daylight? . . . Of course, of course.” He, too, looked up at the moon, pale still in the midsummer sky. “Come along,” he said suddenly, and, gripping Raul’s arm in his hand, made a move towards the path that dropped from them to the railway.

Raut hung back. Their eyes met and saw a thousand things in a moment that their lips came near to say. Horrocks’s hand tightened and then relaxed. He let go, and before Raut was aware of it, they were arm in arm, and walking, one unwillingly enough, down the path.

“You see the fine effect of the railway signals towards Burslem,” said Horrocks, suddenly breaking into loquacity, striding fast and tightening the grip of his elbow the while. “Little green lights and red and white lights, all against the haze. You have an eye for effect, Raut. It’s a fine effect. And look at those furnaces of mine, how they rise upon us as we come down the hill. That to the right is my pet—seventy feet of him. I packed him myself, and he’s boiled away cheerfully with iron in his guts for five long years. I’ve a particular fancy for *him*. That line of red there—a lovely bit of warm orange you’d call it, Raut—that’s the puddler’s furnaces, and there, in the hot light, three black figures—did you see the white splash of the steam-hammer then?—that’s the rolling-mills. Come along! Clang, clatter, how it goes rattling across the floor! Sheet tin, Raut—amazing stuff. Glass mirrors are

not in it when that stuff comes from the mill. And, squelch!—there goes the hammer again. Come along!”

He had to stop talking to catch at his breath. His arm twisted into Raut’s with benumbing tightness. He had come striding down the black path towards the railway as though he was possessed. Raut had not spoken a word, had simply hung back against Horrocks’s pull with all his strength.

“I say,” he said now, laughing nervously, but with an undernote of snarl in his voice, “why on earth are you nipping my arm off, Horrocks, and dragging me along like this?”

At length Horrocks released him. His manner changed again. “Nipping your arm off?” he said. “Sorry. But it’s you taught me the trick of walking in that friendly way.”

“You haven’t learnt the refinements of it yet then,” said Raut, laughing artificially again. “By Jove! I’m black and blue.” Horrocks offered no apology. They stood now near the bottom of the hill, close to the fence that bordered the railway. The ironworks had grown larger and spread out with their approach. They looked up to the blast furnaces now instead of down; the further view of Etruria and Hanley had dropped out of sight with their descent. Before them, by the stile, rose a notice-board, bearing, still dimly visible, the words, “BEWARE OF THE TRAINS,” half hidden by splashes of coaly mud.

“Fine effects,” said Horrocks, waving his arm. “Here comes a train. The puffs of smoke, the orange glare, the round eye of light in front of it, the melodious rattle. Fine effects! But these furnaces of mine used to be finer, before we shoved cones in their throats, and saved the gas.”

“How?” said Raut. “Cones?”

“Cones, my man, cones. I’ll show you one nearer. The flames used to flare out of the open throats, great—what is it?—pillars of cloud by day, red and black smoke, and pillars of fire by night. Now we run it off in pipes, and burn it to heat the blast, and the top is shut by a cone. You’ll be interested in that cone.”

“But every now and then,” said Raut, “you get a burst of fire and smoke up there.”

“The cone’s not fixed, it’s hung by a chain from a lever, and balanced by an equipoise. You shall see it nearer. Else, of course, there’d be no way of getting fuel into the thing. Every now and then the cone dips, and out comes the flare.”

“I see,” said Raut. He looked over his shoulder. “The moon gets brighter,” he said.

“Come along,” said Horrocks abruptly, gripping his shoulder again, and moving him suddenly towards the railway crossing. And then came one of those swift incidents, vivid, but so rapid that they leave one doubtful and reeling. Half-way across, Horrocks’s hand suddenly clenched upon him like a vice and swung him backward and through a half-turn, so that he looked up the line. And there a chain of lamp-lit carriage-windows telescoped swiftly as it came towards them, and the red and yellow lights of an engine grew larger and larger, rushing down upon them. As he grasped what this meant, he turned his face to Horrocks, and pushed with all his strength against the arm that held him back between the rails. The struggle did not last a moment. Just as certain as it was that Horrocks held him there, so certain was it that he had been violently lugged out of danger.

“Out of the way,” said Horrocks, with a gasp, as the train came rattling by, and they stood panting by the gate into the ironworks.

“I did not see it coming,” said Raut, still, even in spite of his own apprehensions, trying to keep up an appearance of ordinary intercourse.

Horrocks answered with a grunt. “The cone,” he said, and then, as one who recovers himself, “I thought you did not hear.”

“I didn’t,” said Raut.

“I wouldn’t have had you run over then for the world,” said Horrocks.

“For a moment I lost my nerve,” said Raut.

Horrocks stood for half a minute, then turned abruptly towards the ironworks again. “See how fine these great mounds of mine, these clinker-heaps, look in the night! That truck yonder, up above there! Up it goes, and out-tilts the slag. See the palpitating red stuff go sliding down the slope. As we get nearer, the heap rises up and cuts the blast furnaces. See the quiver up above the big one. Not that way! This way, between the heaps. That goes to the puddling furnaces, but I want to show you the canal first.” He came and took Raut by the elbow, and so they went along side by side. Raut answered Horrocks vaguely. What, he asked himself, had really happened on the line? Was he deluding himself with his own fancies, or had Horrocks actually held him back in the way of the train? Had he just been within an ace of being murdered?

Suppose this slouching, scowling monster *did* know anything? For a minute or two then Raut was really afraid for his life, but the mood passed



as he reasoned with himself. After all, Horrocks might have heard nothing. At any rate, he had pulled him out of the way in time. His odd manner might be due to the mere vague jealousy he had shown once before. He was talking now of the ash-heaps and the canal. "Eigh?" said Horrocks.

"What?" said Raut. "Rather! The haze in the moonlight. Fine!"

"Our canal," said Horrocks, stopping suddenly. "Our canal by moonlight and firelight is an immense effect. You've never seen it? Fancy that! You've spent too many of your evenings philandering up in Newcastle there. I tell you, for real florid effects—— But you shall see. Boiling water. . . ."

As they came out of the labyrinth of clinker-heap and mounds of coal and ore, the noises of the rolling-mill sprang upon them suddenly, loud, near, and distinct. Three shadowy workmen went by and touched their caps to Horrocks. Their faces were vague in the darkness. Raut felt a futile impulse to address them, and before he could frame his words, they passed into the shadows. Horrocks pointed to the canal close before them now: a weird-looking place it seemed, in the blood-red reflections of the furnaces. The hot water that cooled the tuyères came into it, some fifty yards up—a tumultuous, almost boiling affluent, and the steam rose up from the water in silent white wisps and streaks, wrapping damply about them, an incessant succession of ghosts coming up from the black and red eddies, a white uprising that made the head swim. The shining black tower of the larger blast-furnace rose overhead out of the mist, and its tumultuous riot filled their ears. Raut kept away from the edge of the water, and watched Horrocks.

"Here it is red," said Horrocks, "blood-red vapour as red and hot as sin; but yonder there, where the moonlight falls on it, and it drives across the clinker-heaps, it is as white as death."

Raut turned his head for a moment, and then came back hastily to his watch on Horrocks. "Come along to the rolling-mills," said Horrocks. The threatening hold was not so evident that time, and Raut felt a little reassured. But all the same, what on earth did Horrocks mean about "white as death" and "red as sin?" Coincidence, perhaps?

They went and stood behind the puddlers for a little while, and then through the rolling-mills, where amidst an incessant din the deliberate steam-hammer beat the juice out of the succulent iron, and black, half-naked Titans rushed the plastic bars, like hot sealing-wax, between the wheels. "Come on," said Horrocks in Raut's ear, and they went and peeped through the little glass hole behind the tuyères, and saw the tumbled fire writhing in

the pit of the blast-furnace. It left one eye blinded for a while. Then, with green and blue patches dancing across the dark, they went to the lift by which the trucks of ore and fuel and lime were raised to the top of the big cylinder.

And out upon the narrow rail that overhung the furnace, Raut's doubts came upon him again. Was it wise to be here? If Horrocks did know—everything! Do what he would, he could not resist a violent trembling. Right under foot was a sheer depth of seventy feet. It was a dangerous place. They pushed by a truck of fuel to get to the railing that crowned the place. The reek of the furnace, a sulphurous vapour streaked with pungent bitterness, seemed to make the distant hillside of Hanley quiver. The moon was riding out now from among a drift of clouds, half-way up the sky above the undulating wooded outlines of Newcastle. The steaming canal ran away from below them under an indistinct bridge, and vanished into the dim haze of the flat fields towards Burslem.

“That's the cone I've been telling you of,” shouted Horrocks; “and, below that, sixty feet of fire and molten metal, with the air of the blast frothing through it like gas in soda-water.”

Raut gripped the hand-rail tightly, and stared down at the cone. The heat was intense. The boiling of the iron and the tumult of the blast made a thunderous accompaniment to Horrocks's voice. But the thing had to be gone through now. Perhaps, after all. . . .

“In the middle,” bawled Horrocks, “temperature near a thousand degrees. If *you* were dropped into it . . . flash into flame like a pinch of gunpowder in a candle. Put your hand out and feel the heat of his breath. Why, even up here I've seen the rain-water boiling off the trucks. And that cone there. It's a damned sight too hot for roasting cakes. The top side of it's three hundred degrees.”

“Three hundred degrees!” said Raut.

“Three hundred centigrade, mind!” said Horrocks. “It will boil the blood out of you in no time.”

“Eigh?” said Raut, and turned.

“Boil the blood out of you in . . . No, you don't!”

“Let me go!” screamed Raut. “Let go my arm!”

With one hand he clutched at the hand-rail, then with both. For a moment the two men stood swaying. Then suddenly, with a violent jerk,

Horrocks had twisted him from his hold. He clutched at Horrocks and missed, his foot went back into empty air; in mid-air he twisted himself, and then cheek and shoulder and knee struck the hot cone together.

He clutched the chain by which the cone hung, and the thing sank an infinitesimal amount as he struck it. A circle of glowing red appeared about him, and a tongue of flame, released from the chaos within, flickered up towards him. An intense pain assailed him at the knees, and he could smell the singeing of his hands. He raised himself to his feet, and tried to climb up the chain, and then something struck his head. Black and shining with the moonlight, the throat of the furnace rose about him.

Horrocks, he saw, stood above him by one of the trucks of fuel on the rail. The gesticulating figure was bright and white in the moonlight, and shouting, "Fizzle, you fool! Fizzle, you hunter of women! You hot-blooded hound! Boil! boil! boil!"

Suddenly he caught up a handful of coal out of the truck, and flung it deliberately, lump after lump, at Raut.

"Horrocks!" cried Raut. "Horrocks!"

He clung crying to the chain, pulling himself up from the burning of the cone. Each missile Horrocks flung hit him. His clothes charred and glowed, and as he struggled the cone dropped, and a rush of hot suffocating gas whooped out and burned round him in a swift breath of flame.

His human likeness departed from him. When the momentary red had passed, Horrocks saw a charred, blackened figure, its head streaked with blood, still clutching and fumbling with the chain, and writhing in agony—a cindery animal, an inhuman, monstrous creature that began a sobbing intermittent shriek.

Abruptly, at the sight, the ironmaster's anger passed. A deadly sickness came upon him. The heavy odour of burning flesh came drifting up to his nostrils. His sanity returned to him.

"God have mercy upon me!" he cried. "O God! what have I done?"

He knew the thing below him, save that it still moved and felt, was already a dead man—that the blood of the poor wretch must be boiling in his veins. An intense realisation of that agony came to his mind, and overcame every other feeling. For a moment he stood irresolute, and then, turning to the truck, he hastily tilted its contents upon the struggling thing that had once been a man. The mass fell with a thud, and went radiating over the cone. With the thud the shriek ended, and a boiling confusion of smoke,

dust, and flame came rushing up towards him. As it passed, he saw the cone clear again.

Then he staggered back, and stood trembling, clinging to the rail with both hands. His lips moved, but no words came to them.

Down below was the sound of voices and running steps. The clangour of rolling in the shed ceased abruptly.

## THE LORD OF THE DYNAMOS

The chief attendant of the three dynamos that buzzed and rattled at Camberwell, and kept the electric railway going, came out of Yorkshire, and his name was James Holroyd. He was a practical electrician, but fond of whisky, a heavy, red-haired brute with irregular teeth. He doubted the existence of the Deity, but accepted Carnot's cycle, and he had read Shakespeare and found him weak in chemistry. His helper came out of the mysterious East, and his name was Azuma-zi. But Holroyd called him Poohbah. Holroyd liked a nigger help because he would stand kicking—a habit with Holroyd—and did not pry into the machinery and try to learn the ways of it. Certain odd possibilities of the negro mind brought into abrupt contact with the crown of our civilisation Holroyd never fully realised, though just at the end he got some inkling of them.

To define Azuma-zi was beyond ethnology. He was, perhaps, more negroid than anything else, though his hair was curly rather than frizzy, and his nose had a bridge. Moreover, his skin was brown rather than black, and the whites of his eyes were yellow. His broad cheek-bones and narrow chin gave his face something of the viperine V. His head, too, was broad behind, and low and narrow at the forehead, as if his brain had been twisted round in the reverse way to a European's. He was short of stature and still shorter of English. In conversation he made numerous odd noises of no known marketable value, and his infrequent words were carved and wrought into heraldic grotesqueness. Holroyd tried to elucidate his religious beliefs, and—especially after whisky—lectured to him against superstition and missionaries. Azuma-zi, however, shirked the discussion of his gods, even though he was kicked for it.

Azuma-zi had come, clad in white but insufficient raiment, out of the stoke-hole of the *Lord Clive*, from the Straits Settlements and beyond, into London. He had heard even in his youth of the greatness and riches of London, where all the women are white and fair, and even the beggars in the streets are white, and he had arrived, with newly-earned gold coins in his pocket, to worship at the shrine of civilization. The day of his landing was a dismal one; the sky was dun, and a wind-worried drizzle filtered down to the greasy streets, but he plunged boldly into the delights of Shadwell, and was presently cast up, shattered in health, civilised in costume, penniless, and, except in matters of the direst necessity, practically a dumb animal, to toil

for James Holroyd, and to be bullied by him in the dynamo shed at Camberwell. And to James Holroyd bullying was a labour of love.

There were three dynamos with their engines at Camberwell. The two that have been there since the beginning are small machines; the larger one was new. The smaller machines made a reasonable noise; their straps hummed over the drums, every now and then the brushes buzzed and fizzled, and the air churned steadily, whoo! whoo! whoo! between their poles. One was loose in its foundations and kept the shed vibrating. But the big dynamo drowned these little noises altogether with the sustained drone of its iron core, which somehow set part of the ironwork humming. The place made the visitor's head reel with the throb, throb, throb of the engines, the rotation of the big wheels, the spinning ball-valves, the occasional spittings of the steam, and over all the deep, unceasing, surging note of the big dynamo. This last noise was from an engineering point of view a defect, but Azuma-zi accounted it unto the monster for mightiness and pride.

If it were possible we would have the noises of that shed always about the reader as he reads, we would tell all our story to such an accompaniment. It was a steady stream of din, from which the ear picked out first one thread and then another; there was the intermittent snorting, panting, and seething of the steam engines, the suck and thud of their pistons, the dull beat on the air as the spokes of the great driving wheels came round, a note the leather straps made as they ran tighter and looser, and a fretful tumult from the dynamos; and, over all, sometimes inaudible, as the ear tired of it, and then creeping back upon the senses again, was this trombone note of the big machine. The floor never felt steady and quiet beneath one's feet, but quivered and jarred. It was a confusing, unsteady place, and enough to send any one's thoughts jerking into odd zigzags. And for three months, while the big strike of the engineers was in progress, Holroyd, who was a blackleg, and Azuma-zi, who was a mere black, were never out of the stir and eddy of it, but slept and fed in the little wooden shanty between the shed and the gates.

Holroyd delivered a theological lecture on the text of his big machine soon after Azuma-zi came. He had to shout to be heard in the din. "Look at that," said Holroyd; "where's your 'eathen idol to match 'im?" And Azuma-zi looked. For a moment Holroyd was inaudible, and then Azuma-zi heard: "Kill a hundred men. Twelve per cent. on the ordinary shares," said Holroyd, "and that's something like a Gord."

Holroyd was proud of his big dynamo, and expatiated upon its size and power to Azuma-zi until heaven knows what odd currents of thought that

and the incessant whirling and shindy set up within the curly black cranium. He would explain in the most graphic manner the dozen or so ways in which a man might be killed by it, and once he gave Azuma-zi a shock as a sample of its quality. After that, in the breathing-times of his labour—it was heavy labour, being not only his own, but most of Holroyd's—Azuma-zi would sit and watch the big machine. Now and then the brushes would sparkle and spit blue flashes, at which Holroyd would swear, but all the rest was as smooth and rhythmic as breathing. The band ran shouting over the shaft, and ever behind one as one watched was the complacent thud of the piston. So it lived all day in this big airy shed, with him and Holroyd to wait upon it; not prisoned up and slaving to drive a ship as the other engines he knew—mere captive devils of the British Solomon—had been, but a machine enthroned. Those two smaller dynamos Azuma-zi by force of contrast despised; the large one he privately christened the Lord of the Dynamos. They were fretful and irregular, but the big dynamo was steady. How great it was! How serene and easy in its working! Greater and calmer even than the Buddhas he had seen at Rangoon, and yet not motionless, but living! The great black coils spun, spun, spun, the rings ran round under the brushes, and the deep note of its coil steadied the whole. It affected Azuma-zi queerly.

Azuma-zi was not fond of labour. He would sit about and watch the Lord of the Dynamos while Holroyd went away to persuade the yard porter to get whisky, although his proper place was not in the dynamo shed but behind the engines, and, moreover, if Holroyd caught him skulking he got hit for it with a rod of stout copper wire. He would go and stand close to the colossus, and look up at the great leather band running overhead. There was a black patch on the band that came round, and it pleased him somehow among all the clatter to watch this return again and again. Odd thoughts spun with the whirl of it. Scientific people tell us that savages give souls to rocks and trees—and a machine is a thousand times more alive than a rock or a tree. And Azuma-zi was practically a savage still; the veneer of civilisation lay no deeper than his slop suit, his bruises, and the coal grime on his face and hands. His father before him had worshipped a meteoric stone, kindred blood, it may be, had splashed the broad wheels of Juggernaut.

He took every opportunity Holroyd gave him of touching and handling the great dynamo that was fascinating him. He polished and cleaned it until the metal parts were blinding in the sun. He felt a mysterious sense of service in doing this. He would go up to it and touch its spinning coils gently. The gods he had worshipped were all far away. The people in London hid their gods.

At last his dim feelings grew more distinct, and took shape in thoughts, and at last in acts. When he came into the roaring shed one morning he salaamed to the Lord of the Dynamos, and then, when Holroyd was away, he went and whispered to the thundering machine that he was its servant, and prayed it to have pity on him and save him from Holroyd. As he did so a rare gleam of light came in through the open archway of the throbbing machine-shed, and the Lord of the Dynamos, as he whirled and roared, was radiant with pale gold. Then Azuma-zi knew that his service was acceptable to his Lord. After that he did not feel so lonely as he had done, and he had indeed been very much alone in London. And even when his work time was over, which was rare, he loitered about the shed.

Then, the next time Holroyd maltreated him, Azuma-zi went presently to the Lord of the Dynamos and whispered, "Thou seest, O my Lord!" and the angry whirr of the machinery seemed to answer him. Thereafter it appeared to him that whenever Holroyd came into the shed a different note came into the sounds of the dynamo. "My Lord bides his time," said Azuma-zi to himself. "The iniquity of the fool is not yet ripe." And he waited and watched for the day of reckoning. One day there was evidence of short circuiting, and Holroyd, making an unwary examination—it was in the afternoon—got a rather severe shock. Azuma-zi from behind the engine saw him jump off and curse at the peccant coil.

"He is warned," said Azuma-zi to himself. "Surely my Lord is very patient."

Holroyd had at first initiated his "nigger" into such elementary conceptions of the dynamo's working as would enable him to take temporary charge of the shed in his absence. But when he noticed the manner in which Azuma-zi hung about the monster he became suspicious. He dimly perceived his assistant was "up to something," and connecting him with the anointing of the coils with oil that had rotted the varnish in one place, he issued an edict, shouted above the confusion of the machinery, "Don't 'ee go nigh that big dynamo any more, Pooh-bah, or a'll take thy skin off!" Besides, if it pleased Azuma-zi to be near the big machine, it was plain sense and decency to keep him away from it.

Azuma-zi obeyed at the time, but later he was caught bowing before the Lord of the Dynamos. At which Holroyd twisted his arm and kicked him as he turned to go away. As Azuma-zi presently stood behind the engine and glared at the back of the hated Holroyd, the noises of the machinery took a new rhythm, and sounded like four words in his native tongue.



It is hard to say exactly what madness is. I fancy Azuma-zi was mad. The incessant din and whirl of the dynamo shed may have churned up his little store of knowledge and big store of superstitious fancy, at last, into something akin to frenzy. At any rate, when the idea of making Holroyd a sacrifice to the Dynamo Fetich was thus suggested to him, it filled him with a strange tumult of exultant emotion.

That night the two men and their black shadows were alone in the shed together. The shed was lit with one big arc light that winked and flickered purple. The shadows lay black behind the dynamos, the ball governors of the engines whirled from light to darkness, and their pistons beat loud and steady. The world outside seen through the open end of the shed seemed incredibly dim and remote. It seemed absolutely silent, too, since the riot of the machinery drowned every external sound. Far away was the black fence of the yard with gray shadowy houses behind, and above was the deep blue sky and the pale little stars. Azuma-zi suddenly walked across the centre of the shed above which the leather bands were running, and went into the shadow by the big dynamo. Holroyd heard a click, and the spin of the armature changed.

“What are you dewin’ with that switch?” he bawled in surprise. “Hadn’t I told you——”

Then he saw the set expression of Azuma-zi’s eyes as the Asiatic came out of the shadow towards him.

In another moment the two men were grappling fiercely in front of the great dynamo.

“You coffee-headed fool!” gasped Holroyd, with a brown hand at his throat. “Keep off those contact rings.” In another moment he was tripped and reeling back upon the Lord of the Dynamos. He instinctively loosened his grip upon his antagonist to save himself from the machine.

The messenger, sent in furious haste from the station to find out what had happened in the dynamo shed, met Azuma-zi at the porter’s lodge by the gate. Azuma-zi tried to explain something, but the messenger could make nothing of the black’s incoherent English, and hurried on to the shed. The machines were all noisily at work, and nothing seemed to be disarranged. There was, however, a queer smell of singed hair. Then he saw an odd-looking crumpled mass clinging to the front of the big dynamo, and, approaching, recognised the distorted remains of Holroyd.

The man stared and hesitated a moment. Then he saw the face, and shut his eyes convulsively. He turned on his heel before he opened them, so that he should not see Holroyd again, and went out of the shed to get advice and help.

When Azuma-zi saw Holroyd die in the grip of the Great Dynamo he had been a little scared about the consequences of his act. Yet he felt strangely elated, and knew that the favour of the Lord Dynamo was upon him. His plan was already settled when he met the man coming from the station, and the scientific manager who speedily arrived on the scene jumped at the obvious conclusion of suicide. This expert scarcely noticed Azuma-zi, except to ask a few questions. Did he see Holroyd kill himself? Azuma-zi explained he had been out of sight at the engine furnace until he heard a difference in the noise from the dynamo. It was not a difficult examination, being untinged by suspicion.

The distorted remains of Holroyd, which the electrician removed from the machine, were hastily covered by the porter with a coffee-stained tablecloth. Somebody, by a happy inspiration, fetched a medical man. The expert was chiefly anxious to get the machine at work again, for seven or eight trains had stopped midway in the stuffy tunnels of the electric railway. Azuma-zi, answering or misunderstanding the questions of the people who had by authority or impudence come into the shed, was presently sent back to the stoke-hole by the scientific manager. Of course a crowd collected outside the gates of the yard—a crowd, for no known reason, always hovers for a day or two near the scene of a sudden death in London—two or three reporters percolated somehow into the engine-shed, and one even got to Azuma-zi; but the scientific expert cleared them out again, being himself an amateur journalist.

Presently the body was carried away, and public interest departed with it. Azuma-zi remained very quietly at his furnace, seeing over and over again in the coals a figure that wriggled violently and became still. An hour after the murder, to any one coming into the shed it would have looked exactly as if nothing remarkable had ever happened there. Peeping presently from his engine-room the black saw the Lord Dynamo spin and whirl beside his little brothers, and the driving wheels were beating round, and the steam in the pistons went thud, thud, exactly as it had been earlier in the evening. After all, from the mechanical point of view, it had been a most insignificant incident—the mere temporary deflection of a current. But now the slender form and slender shadow of the scientific manager replaced the sturdy

outline of Holroyd travelling up and down the lane of light upon the vibrating floor under the straps between the engines and the dynamos.

“Have I not served my Lord?” said Azuma-zi inaudibly, from his shadow, and the note of the great dynamo rang out full and clear. As he looked at the big whirling mechanism the strange fascination of it that had been a little in abeyance since Holroyd’s death resumed its sway.

Never had Azuma-zi seen a man killed so swiftly and pitilessly. The big humming machine had slain its victim without wavering for a second from its steady beating. It was indeed a mighty god.

The unconscious scientific manager stood with his back to him, scribbling on a piece of paper. His shadow lay at the foot of the monster.

Was the Lord Dynamo still hungry? His servant was ready.

Azuma-zi made a stealthy step forward; then stopped. The scientific manager suddenly stopped writing, and walked down the shed to the endmost of the dynamos, and began to examine the brushes.

Azuma-zi hesitated, and then slipped across noiselessly into the shadow by the switch. There he waited. Presently the manager’s footsteps could be heard returning. He stopped in his old position, unconscious of the stoker crouching ten feet away from him. Then the big dynamo suddenly fizzled, and in another moment Azuma-zi had sprung out of the darkness upon him.

First, the scientific manager was gripped round the body and swung towards the big dynamo, then, kicking with his knee and forcing his antagonist’s head down with his hands, he loosened the grip on his waist and swung round away from the machine. Then the black grasped him again, putting a curly head against his chest, and they swayed and panted as it seemed for an age or so. Then the scientific manager was impelled to catch a black ear in his teeth and bite furiously. The black yelled hideously.

They rolled over on the floor, and the black, who had apparently slipped from the vice of the teeth or parted with some ear—the scientific manager wondered which at the time—tried to throttle him. The scientific manager was making some ineffectual efforts to claw something with his hands and to kick, when the welcome sound of quick footsteps sounded on the floor. The next moment Azuma-zi had left him and darted towards the big dynamo. There was a splutter amid the roar.

The officer of the company who had entered stood staring as Azuma-zi caught the naked terminals in his hands, gave one horrible convulsion, and then hung motionless from the machine, his face violently distorted.

“I’m jolly glad you came in when you did,” said the scientific manager, still sitting on the floor.

He looked at the still quivering figure. “It is not a nice death to die, apparently—but it is quick.”

The official was still staring at the body. He was a man of slow apprehension.

There was a pause.

The scientific manager got up on his feet rather awkwardly. He ran his fingers along his collar thoughtfully, and moved his head to and fro several times.

“Poor Holroyd! I see now.” Then almost mechanically he went towards the switch in the shadow and turned the current into the railway circuit again. As he did so the singed body loosened its grip upon the machine and fell forward on its face. The core of the dynamo roared out loud and clear, and the armature beat the air.

So ended prematurely the worship of the Dynamo Deity, perhaps the most short-lived of all religions. Yet withal it could at least boast a Martyrdom and a Human Sacrifice.

## THE TREASURE IN THE FOREST

The canoe was now approaching the land. The bay opened out, and a gap in the white surf of the reef marked where the little river ran out to the sea; the thicker and deeper green of the virgin forest showed its course down the distant hill slope. The forest here came close to the beach. Far beyond, dim and almost cloudlike in texture, rose the mountains, like suddenly frozen waves. The sea was still save for an almost imperceptible swell. The sky blazed.

The man with the carved paddle stopped. "It should be somewhere here," he said. He shipped the paddle and held his arms out straight before him.

The other man had been in the forepart of the canoe, closely scrutinising the land. He had a sheet of yellow paper on his knee.

"Come and look at this, Evans," he said.

Both men spoke in low tones, and their lips were hard and dry.

The man called Evans came swaying along the canoe until he could look over his companion's shoulder.

The paper had the appearance of a rough map. By much folding it was creased and worn to the pitch of separation, and the second man held the discoloured fragments together where they had parted. On it one could dimly make out, in almost obliterated pencil, the outline of the bay.

"Here," said Evans, "is the reef, and here is the gap." He ran his thumbnail over the chart.

"This curved and twisting line is the river—I could do with a drink now!—and this star is the place."

"You see this dotted line," said the man with the map; "it is a straight line, and runs from the opening of the reef to a clump of palm-trees. The star comes just where it cuts the river. We must mark the place as we go into the lagoon."

"It's queer," said Evans, after a pause, "what these little marks down here are for. It looks like the plan of a house or something; but what all these little dashes, pointing this way and that, may mean I can't get a notion. And what's the writing?"

“Chinese,” said the man with the map.

“Of course! *He* was a Chinese,” said Evans.

“They all were,” said the man with the map.

They both sat for some minutes staring at the land, while the canoe drifted slowly. Then Evans looked towards the paddle.

“Your turn with the paddle now, Hooker,” said he.

And his companion quietly folded up his map, put it in his pocket, passed Evans carefully, and began to paddle. His movements were languid, like those of a man whose strength was nearly exhausted.

Evans sat with his eyes half-closed, watching the frothy breakwater of the coral creep nearer and nearer. The sky was like a furnace, now, for the sun was near the zenith. Though they were so near the Treasure he did not feel the exaltation he had anticipated. The intense excitement of the struggle for the plan, and the long night voyage from the mainland in the unprovisioned canoe had, to use his own expression, “taken it out of him.” He tried to arouse himself by directing his mind to the ingots the Chinamen had spoken of, but it would not rest there; it came back headlong to the thought of sweet water rippling in the river, and to the almost unendurable dryness of his lips and throat. The rhythmic wash of the sea upon the reef was becoming audible now, and it had a pleasant sound in his ears; the water washed along the side of the canoe, and the paddle dripped between each stroke. Presently he began to doze.

He was still dimly conscious of the island, but a queer dream texture interwove with his sensations. Once again it was the night when he and Hooker had hit upon the Chinamen’s secret; he saw the moonlit trees, the little fire burning, and the black figures of the three Chinamen—silvered on one side by moonlight, and on the other glowing from the firelight—and heard them talking together in pigeon-English—for they came from different provinces. Hooker had caught the drift of their talk first, and had motioned to him to listen. Fragments of the conversation were inaudible, and fragments incomprehensible. A Spanish galleon from the Philippines hopelessly aground, and its treasure buried against the day of return, lay in the background of the story; a shipwrecked crew thinned by disease, a quarrel or so, and the needs of discipline, and at last taking to their boats never to be heard of again. Then Chang-hi, only a year since, wandering ashore, had happened upon the ingots hidden for two hundred years, had deserted his junk, and re-buried them with infinite toil, single-handed but

very safe. He laid great stress on the safety—it was a secret of his. Now he wanted help to return and exhume them. Presently the little map fluttered and the voices sank. A fine story for two stranded British wastrels to hear! Evans's dream shifted to the moment when he had Chang-hi's pig-tail in his hand. The life of a Chinaman is scarcely sacred like a European's. The cunning little face of Chang-hi, first keen and furious like a startled snake, and then fearful, treacherous, and pitiful, became overwhelmingly prominent in the dream. At the end Chang-hi had grinned, a most incomprehensible and startling grin. Abruptly things became very unpleasant, as they will do at times in dreams. Chang-hi gibbered and threatened him. He saw in his dream heaps and heaps of gold, and Chang-hi intervening and struggling to hold him back from it. He took Chang-hi by the pig-tail—how big the yellow brute was, and how he struggled and grinned! He kept growing bigger, too. Then the bright heaps of gold turned to a roaring furnace, and a vast devil, surprisingly like Chang-hi, but with a huge black tail, began to feed him with coals. They burnt his mouth horribly. Another devil was shouting his name: "Evans, Evans, you sleepy fool!"—or was it Hooker?

He woke up. They were in the mouth of the lagoon.

"There are the three palm-trees. It must be in a line with the clump of bushes," said his companion. "Mark that. If we go to those bushes and then strike into the bush in a straight line from here, we shall come to it when we come to the stream."

They could see now where the mouth of the stream opened out. At the sight of it Evans revived. "Hurry up, man," he said, "or by heaven I shall have to drink sea water!" He gnawed his hand and stared at the gleam of silver among the rocks and green tangle.

Presently he turned almost fiercely upon Hooker. "Give *me* the paddle," he said.

So they reached the river mouth. A little way up Hooker took some water in the hollow of his hand, tasted it, and spat it out. A little further he tried again. "This will do," he said, and they began drinking eagerly.

"Curse this!" said Evans suddenly. "It's too slow." And, leaning dangerously over the fore part of the canoe, he began to suck up the water with his lips.

Presently they made an end of drinking, and, running the canoe into a little creek, were about to land among the thick growth that overhung the water.

“We shall have to scramble through this to the beach to find our bushes and get the line to the place,” said Evans.

“We had better paddle round,” said Hooker.

So they pushed out again into the river and paddled back down it to the sea, and along the shore to the place where the clump of bushes grew. Here they landed, pulled the light canoe far up the beach, and then went up towards the edge of the jungle until they could see the opening of the reef and the bushes in a straight line. Evans had taken a native implement out of the canoe. It was L-shaped, and the transverse piece was armed with polished stone. Hooker carried the paddle. “It is straight now in this direction,” said he; “we must push through this till we strike the stream. Then we must prospect.”

They pushed through a close tangle of reeds, broad fronds, and young trees, and at first it was toilsome going, but very speedily the trees became larger and the ground beneath them opened out. The blaze of the sunlight was replaced by insensible degrees by cool shadow. The trees became at last vast pillars that rose up to a canopy of greenery far overhead. Dim white flowers hung from their stems, and ropy creepers swung from tree to tree. The shadow deepened. On the ground, blotched fungi and a red-brown incrustation became frequent.

Evans shivered. “It seems almost cold here after the blaze outside.”

“I hope we are keeping to the straight,” said Hooker.

Presently they saw, far ahead, a gap in the sombre darkness where white shafts of hot sunlight smote into the forest. There also was brilliant green undergrowth and coloured flowers. Then they heard the rush of water.

“Here is the river. We should be close to it now,” said Hooker.

The vegetation was thick by the river bank. Great plants, as yet unnamed, grew among the roots of the big trees, and spread rosettes of huge green fans towards the strip of sky. Many flowers and a creeper with shiny foliage clung to the exposed stems. On the water of the broad, quiet pool which the treasure-seekers now overlooked there floated big oval leaves and a waxen, pinkish-white flower not unlike a water-lily. Further, as the river bent away from them, the water suddenly frothed and became noisy in a rapid.

“Well?” said Evans.



“We have swerved a little from the straight,” said Hooker. “That was to be expected.”

He turned and looked into the dim cool shadows of the silent forest behind them. “If we beat a little way up and down stream we should come to something.”

“You said——” began Evans.

“*He* said there was a heap of stones,” said Hooker.

The two men looked at each other for a moment.

“Let us try a little down-stream first,” said Evans.

They advanced slowly, looking curiously about them. Suddenly Evans stopped. “What the devil’s that?” he said.

Hooker followed his finger. “Something blue,” he said. It had come into view as they topped a gentle swell of the ground. Then he began to distinguish what it was.

He advanced suddenly with hasty steps, until the body that belonged to the limp hand and arm had become visible. His grip tightened on the implement he carried. The thing was the figure of a Chinaman lying on his face. The *abandon* of the pose was unmistakable.

The two men drew closer together, and stood staring silently at this ominous dead body. It lay in a clear space among the trees. Near by was a spade after the Chinese pattern, and further off lay a scattered heap of stones, close to a freshly dug hole.

Then suddenly Evans began to swear and rave, and stamp upon the ground.

Hooker turned white but said nothing. He advanced towards the prostrate body. He saw the neck was puffed and purple, and the hands and ankles swollen. “Pah!” he said, and suddenly turned away and went towards the excavation. He gave a cry of surprise. He shouted to Evans, who was following him slowly.

“You fool! It’s all right. It’s here still.” Then he turned again and looked at the dead Chinaman, and then again at the hole.

Evans hurried to the hole. Already half exposed by the ill-fated wretch beside them lay a number of dull yellow bars. He bent down in the hole, and, clearing off the soil with his bare hands, hastily pulled one of the heavy

masses out. As he did so a little thorn pricked his hand. He pulled the delicate spike out with his fingers and lifted the ingot.

“Only gold or lead could weigh like this,” he said exultantly.

Hooker was still looking at the dead Chinaman. He was puzzled.

“He stole a march on his friends,” he said at last. “He came here alone, and some poisonous snake has killed him. . . . I wonder how he found the place.”

Evans stood with the ingot in his hands. What did a dead Chinaman signify? “We shall have to take this stuff to the mainland piecemeal, and bury it there for a while. How shall we get it to the canoe?”

He took his jacket off and spread it on the ground, and flung two or three ingots into it. Presently he found that another little thorn had punctured his skin.

“This is as much as we can carry,” said he. Then suddenly, with a queer rush of irritation, “What are you staring at?”

Hooker turned to him. “I can’t stand . . . him.” He nodded towards the corpse. “It’s so like——”

“Rubbish!” said Evans. “All Chinamen are alike.”

Hooker looked into his face. “I’m going to bury *that*, anyhow, before I lend a hand with this stuff.”

“Don’t be a fool, Hooker,” said Evans. “Let that mass of corruption bide.”

Hooker hesitated, and then his eye went carefully over the brown soil about them. “It scares me somehow,” he said.

“The thing is,” said Evans, “what to do with these ingots. Shall we re-bury them over here, or take them across the strait in the canoe?”

Hooker thought. His puzzled gaze wandered among the tall tree-trunks, and up into the remote sunlit greenery overhead. He shivered again as his eye rested upon the blue figure of the Chinaman. He stared searchingly among the gray depths between the trees.

“What’s come to you, Hooker?” said Evans. “Have you lost your wits?”

“Let’s get the gold out of this place, anyhow,” said Hooker.

He took the ends of the collar of the coat in his hands, and Evans took the opposite corners, and they lifted the mass.

“Which way?” said Evans. “To the canoe?”

“It’s queer,” said Evans, when they had advanced only a few steps, “but my arms ache still with that paddling.”

“Curse it!” he said. “But they ache! I must rest.”

They let the coat down. Evans’s face was white, and little drops of sweat stood out upon his forehead. “It’s stuffy, somehow, in this forest.”

Then with an abrupt transition to unreasonable anger: “What is the good of waiting here all the day? Lend a hand, I say! You have done nothing but moon since we saw the dead Chinaman.”

Hooker was looking steadfastly at his companion’s face. He helped raise the coat bearing the ingots, and they went forward perhaps a hundred yards in silence. Evans began to breathe heavily. “Can’t you speak?” he said.

“What’s the matter with you?” said Hooker.

Evans stumbled, and then with a sudden curse flung the coat from him. He stood for a moment staring at Hooker, and then with a groan clutched at his own throat.

“Don’t come near me,” he said, and went and leant against a tree. Then in a steadier voice, “I’ll be better in a minute.”

Presently his grip upon the trunk loosened, and he slipped slowly down the stem of the tree until he was a crumpled heap at its foot. His hands were clenched convulsively. His face became distorted with pain. Hooker approached him.

“Don’t touch me! Don’t touch me!” said Evans in a stifled voice. “Put the gold back on the coat.”

“Can’t I do anything for you?” said Hooker.

“Put the gold back on the coat.”

As Hooker handled the ingots he felt a little prick on the ball of his thumb. He looked at his hand and saw a slender thorn, perhaps two inches in length.

Evans gave an inarticulate cry and rolled over.

Hooker's jaw dropped. He stared at the thorn for a moment with dilated eyes. Then he looked at Evans, who was now crumpled together on the ground, his back bending and straightening spasmodically. Then he looked through the pillars of the trees and net-work of creeper stems, to where in the dim gray shadow the blue-clad body of the Chinaman was still indistinctly visible. He thought of the little dashes in the corner of the plan, and in a moment he understood.

“God help me!” he said. For the thorns were similar to those the Dyaks poison and use in their blowing-tubes. He understood now what Chang-hi's assurance of the safety of his treasure meant. He understood that grin now.

“Evans!” he cried.

But Evans was silent and motionless, save for a horrible spasmodic twitching of his limbs. A profound silence brooded over the forest.

Then Hooker began to suck furiously at the little pink spot on the ball of his thumb—sucking for dear life. Presently he felt a strange aching pain in his arms and shoulders, and his fingers seemed difficult to bend. Then he knew that sucking was no good.

Abruptly he stopped, and sitting down by the pile of ingots, and resting his chin upon his hands and his elbows upon his knees, stared at the distorted but still stirring body of his companion. Chang-hi's grin came in his mind again. The dull pain spread towards his throat and grew slowly in intensity. Far above him a faint breeze stirred the greenery, and the white petals of some unknown flower came floating down through the gloom.

## THE OBLITERATED MAN

I was—you shall hear immediately why I am not now—Egbert Craddock Cummins. The name remains. I am still (Heaven help me!) Dramatic Critic to the *Fiery Cross*. What I shall be in a little while I do not know. I write in great trouble and confusion of mind. I will do what I can to make myself clear in the face of terrible difficulties. You must bear with me a little. When a man is rapidly losing his own identity, he naturally finds a difficulty in expressing himself. I will make it perfectly plain in a minute, when once I get my grip upon the story. Let me see—where *am* I? I wish I knew. Ah, I have it! Dead self! Egbert Craddock Cummins!

In the past I should have disliked writing anything quite so full of “I” as this story must be. It is full of “I’s” before and behind, like the beast in Revelation—the one with a head like a calf, I am afraid. But my tastes have changed since I became a Dramatic Critic and studied the masters—G.A.S., G.B.S., G.R.S., and the others. Everything has changed since then. At least the story is about myself—so that there is some excuse for me. And it is really not egotism, because, as I say, since those days my identity has undergone an entire alteration.

That past! . . . I was—in those days—rather a nice fellow, rather shy—taste for gray in my clothes, weedy little moustache, face “interesting,” slight stutter which I had caught in my early life from a schoolfellow. Engaged to a very nice girl, named Delia. Fairly new, she was—cigarettes—liked me because I was human and original. Considered I was like Lamb—on the strength of the stutter, I believe. Father, an eminent authority on postage stamps. She read a great deal in the British Museum. (A perfect pairing ground for literary people, that British Museum—you should read George Egerton and Justin Huntly M’Carthy and Gissing and the rest of them.) We loved in our intellectual way, and shared the brightest hopes. (All gone now.) And her father liked me because I seemed honestly eager to hear about stamps. She had no mother. Indeed, I had the happiest prospects a young man could have. I never went to theatres in those days. My Aunt Charlotte before she died had told me not to.

Then Barnaby, the editor of the *Fiery Cross*, made me—in spite of my spasmodic efforts to escape—Dramatic Critic. He is a fine, healthy man, Barnaby, with an enormous head of frizzy black hair and a convincing manner, and he caught me on the staircase going to see Wembly. He had

been dining, and was more than usually buoyant. “Hallo, Cummins!” he said. “The very man I want!” He caught me by the shoulder or the collar or something, ran me up the little passage, and flung me over the waste-paper basket into the arm-chair in his office. “Pray be seated,” he said, as he did so. Then he ran across the room and came back with some pink and yellow tickets and pushed them into my hand. “Opera Comique,” he said, “Thursday; Friday, the Surrey; Saturday, the Frivolity. That’s all, I think.”

“But——” I began.

“Glad you’re free,” he said, snatching some proofs off the desk and beginning to read.

“I don’t quite understand,” I said.

“*Eigh?*” he said, at the top of his voice, as though he thought I had gone and was startled at my remark.

“Do you want me to criticise these plays?”

“Do something with ’em. . . . Did you think it was a treat?”

“But I can’t.”

“Did you call me a fool?”

“Well, I’ve never been to a theatre in my life.”

“Virgin soil.”

“But I don’t know anything about it, you know.”

“That’s just it. New view. No habits. No *clichés* in stock. Ours is a live paper, not a bag of tricks. None of your clockwork professional journalism in this office. And I can rely on your integrity——”

“But I’ve conscientious scruples——”

He caught me up suddenly and put me outside his door. “Go and talk to Wembly about that,” he said. “He’ll explain.”

As I stood perplexed, he opened the door again, said, “I forgot this,” thrust a fourth ticket into my hand (it was for that night—in twenty minutes’ time) and slammed the door upon me. His expression was quite calm, but I caught his eye.

I hate arguments. I decided that I would take his hint and become (to my own destruction) a Dramatic Critic. I walked slowly down the passage to Wembly. That Barnaby has a remarkable persuasive way. He has made few

suggestions during our very pleasant intercourse of four years that he has not ultimately won me round to adopting. It may be, of course, that I am of a yielding disposition; certainly I am too apt to take my colour from my circumstances. It is, indeed, to my unfortunate susceptibility to vivid impressions that all my misfortunes are due. I have already alluded to the slight stammer I had acquired from a schoolfellow in my youth. However, this is a digression. . . . I went home in a cab to dress.

I will not trouble the reader with my thoughts about the first-night audience, strange assembly as it is—those I reserve for my Memoirs—nor the humiliating story of how I got lost during the *entr'acte* in a lot of red plush passages, and saw the third act from the gallery. The only point upon which I wish to lay stress was the remarkable effect of the acting upon me. You must remember I had lived a quiet and retired life, and had never been to the theatre before, and that I am extremely sensitive to vivid impressions. At the risk of repetition I must insist upon these points.

The first effect was a profound amazement, not untinged by alarm. The phenomenal unnaturalness of acting is a thing discounted in the minds of most people by early visits to the theatre. They get used to the fantastic gestures, the flamboyant emotions, the weird mouthings, melodious snortings, agonising yelps, lip-gnawings, glaring horrors, and other emotional symbolism of the stage. It becomes at last a mere deaf-and-dumb language to them, which they read intelligently *pari passu* with the hearing of the dialogue. But all this was new to me. The thing was called a modern comedy, the people were supposed to be English and were dressed like fashionable Americans of the current epoch, and I fell into the natural error of supposing that the actors were trying to represent human beings. I looked round on my first-night audience with a kind of wonder, discovered—as all new Dramatic Critics do—that it rested with me to reform the Drama, and, after a supper choked with emotion, went off to the office to write a column, piebald with “new paragraphs” (as all my stuff is—it fills out so) and purple with indignation. Barnaby was delighted.

But I could not sleep that night. I dreamt of actors—actors glaring, actors smiting their chests, actors flinging out a handful of extended fingers, actors smiling bitterly, laughing despairingly, falling hopelessly, dying idiotically. I got up at eleven with a slight headache, read my notice in the *Fiery Cross*, breakfasted, and went back to my room to shave. (It's my habit to do so.) Then an odd thing happened. I could not find my razor. Suddenly it occurred to me that I had not unpacked it the day before.

“Ah!” said I, in front of the looking-glass. Then “Hallo!”

Quite involuntarily, when I had thought of my portmanteau, I had flung up the left arm (fingers fully extended) and clutched at my diaphragm with my right hand. I am an acutely self-conscious man at all times. The gesture struck me as absolutely novel for me. I repeated it, for my own satisfaction. "Odd!" Then (rather puzzled) I turned to my portmanteau.

After shaving, my mind reverted to the acting I had seen, and I entertained myself before the cheval glass with some imitations of Jafferay's more exaggerated gestures. "Really, one might think it a disease," I said—"Stage-Walkitis!" (There's many a truth spoken in jest.) Then, if I remember rightly, I went off to see Wembly, and afterwards lunched at the British Museum with Delia. We actually spoke about our prospects, in the light of my new appointment.

But that appointment was the beginning of my downfall. From that day I necessarily became a persistent theatre-goer, and almost insensibly I began to change. The next thing I noticed after the gesture about the razor was to catch myself bowing ineffably when I met Delia, and stooping in an old-fashioned, courtly way over her hand. Directly I caught myself, I straightened myself up and became very uncomfortable. I remember she looked at me curiously. Then, in the office, I found myself doing "nervous business," fingers on teeth, when Barnaby asked me a question I could not very well answer. Then, in some trifling difference with Delia, I clasped my hand to my brow. And I pranced through my social transactions at times singularly like an actor! I tried not to—no one could be more keenly alive to the arrant absurdity of the histrionic bearing. And I did!

It began to dawn on me what it all meant. The acting, I saw, was too much for my delicately-strung nervous system. I have always, I know, been too amenable to the suggestions of my circumstances. Night after night of concentrated attention to the conventional attitudes and intonation of the English stage was gradually affecting my speech and carriage. I was giving way to the infection of sympathetic imitation. Night after night my plastic nervous system took the print of some new amazing gesture, some new emotional exaggeration—and retained it. A kind of theatrical veneer threatened to plate over and obliterate my private individuality altogether. I saw myself in a kind of vision. Sitting by myself one night, my new self seemed to me to glide, posing and gesticulating, across the room. He clutched his throat, he opened his fingers, he opened his legs in walking like a high-class marionette. He went from attitude to attitude. He might have been clockwork. Directly after this I made an ineffectual attempt to resign my theatrical work. But Barnaby persisted in talking about the Polywhiddle



Divorce all the time I was with him, and I could get no opportunity of saying what I wished.

And then Delia's manner began to change towards me. The ease of our intercourse vanished. I felt she was learning to dislike me. I grinned, and capered, and scowled, and posed at her in a thousand ways, and knew—with what a voiceless agony!—that I did it all the time. I tried to resign again, and Barnaby talked about “X” and “Z” and “Y” in the *New Review*, and gave me a strong cigar to smoke, and so routed me. And then I walked up the Assyrian Gallery in the manner of Irving to meet Delia, and so precipitated the crisis.

“Ah!—*Dear!*” I said, with more sprightliness and emotion in my voice than had ever been in all my life before I became (to my own undoing) a Dramatic Critic.

She held out her hand rather coldly, scrutinising my face as she did so. I prepared, with a new-won grace, to walk by her side.

“Egbert,” she said, standing still, and thought. Then she looked at me.

I said nothing. I felt what was coming. I tried to be the old Egbert Craddock Cummins of shambling gait and stammering sincerity, whom she loved, but I felt even as I did so that I was a new thing, a thing of surging emotions and mysterious fixity—like no human being that every lived, except upon the stage. “Egbert,” she said, “you are not yourself.”

“Ah!” Involuntarily I clutched my diaphragm and averted my head (as is the way with them).

“There!” she said.

“*What do you mean?*” I said, whispering in vocal italics—you know how they do it—turning on her, perplexity on face, right hand down, left on brow. I knew quite well what she meant. I knew quite well the dramatic unreality of my behaviour. But I struggled against it in vain. “What do you mean?” I said, and, in a kind of hoarse whisper, “I don't understand!”

She really looked as though she disliked me. “What do you keep on posing for?” she said. “I don't like it. You didn't use to.”

“Didn't use to!” I said slowly, repeating this twice. I glared up and down the gallery with short sharp, glances. “We are alone,” I said swiftly. “*Listen!*” I poked my forefinger towards her, and glared at her. “I am under a curse.”

I saw her hand tighten upon her sunshade. “You are under some bad influence or other,” said Delia. “You should give it up. I never knew any one change as you have done.”

“Delia!” I said, lapsing into the pathetic. “Pity me. Augh! Delia! *Pit—* me!”

She eyed me critically. “*Why* you keep playing the fool like this I don’t know,” she said. “Anyhow, I really cannot go about with a man who behaves as you do. You made us both ridiculous on Wednesday. Frankly, I dislike you, as you are now. I met you here to tell you so—as it’s about the only place where we can be sure of being alone together——”

“Delia!” said I, with intensity, knuckles of clenched hands white. “You don’t mean——”

“I do,” said Delia. “A woman’s lot is sad enough at the best of times. But with you——”

I clapped my hand on my brow.

“So, good-bye,” said Delia, without emotion.

“Oh, Delia!” I said. “Not *this*?”

“Good-bye Mr. Cummins,” she said.

By a violent effort I controlled myself and touched her hand. I tried to say some word of explanation to her. She looked into my working face and winced. “I *must* do it,” she said hopelessly. Then she turned from me and began walking rapidly down the gallery.

Heavens! How the human agony cried within me! I loved Delia. But nothing found expression—I was already too deeply crusted with my acquired self.

“Good-baye!” I said at last, watching her retreating figure. How I hated myself for doing it! After she had vanished, I repeated in a dreamy way. “Good-baye!” looking hopelessly round me. Then, with a kind of heartbroken cry, I shook my clenched fists in the air, staggered to the pedestal of a winged figure, buried my face in her arms, and made my shoulders heave. Something within me said “Ass!” as I did so. (I had the greatest difficulty in persuading the Museum policeman, who was attracted by my cry of agony, that I was not intoxicated, but merely suffering from a transient indisposition.)

But even this great sorrow has not availed to save me from my fate. I see it; every one sees it: I grow more “theatrical” every day. And no one could be more painfully aware of the pungent silliness of theatrical ways. The quiet, nervous, but pleasing E. C. Cummins vanishes. I cannot save him. I am driven like a dead leaf before the winds of March. My tailor even enters into the spirit of my disorder. He has a peculiar sense of what is fitting. I tried to get a dull gray suit from him this spring, and he foisted a brilliant blue upon me, and I see he has put braid down the sides of my new dress trousers. My hairdresser insists upon giving me a “wave.”

I am beginning to associate with actors. I detest them, but it is only in their company that I can feel I am not glaringly conspicuous. Their talk infects me. I notice a growing tendency to dramatic brevity, to dashes and pauses in my style, to a punctuation of bows and attitudes. Barnaby has remarked it, too. I offended Wembly by calling him “Dear Boy” yesterday. I dread the end, but I cannot escape from it.

The fact is, I am being obliterated. Living a gray, retired life all my youth, I came to the theatre a delicate sketch of a man, a thing of tints and faint lines. Their gorgeous colouring has effaced me altogether. People forget how much mode of expression, method of movement, are a matter of contagion. I have heard of stage-struck people before, and thought it a figure of speech. I spoke of it jestingly, as a disease. It is no jest. It is a disease. And I have got it badly! Deep down within me I protest against the wrong done to my personality—unavailingly. For three hours or more a week I have to go and concentrate my attention on some fresh play, and the suggestions of the drama strengthen their awful hold upon me. My manners grow so flamboyant, my passions so professional, that I doubt, as I said at the outset, whether it is really myself that behaves in such a manner. I feel merely the core to this dramatic casing, that grows thicker and presses upon me—me and mine. I feel like King John’s abbot in his cope of lead.

I doubt, indeed, whether I should not abandon the struggle altogether—leave this sad world of ordinary life for which I am so ill fitted, abandon the name of Cummins for some professional pseudonym, complete my self-effacement, and—a thing of tricks and tatters, of posing and pretence—go upon the stage. It seems my only resort—“to hold the mirror up to Nature.” For in the ordinary life, I will confess, no one now seems to regard me as both sane and sober. Only upon the stage, I feel convinced, will people take me seriously. That will be the end of it. I *know* that will be the end of it. And yet . . . I will frankly confess . . . all that marks off your actor from your common man . . . I *detest*. I am still largely of my Aunt Charlotte’s opinion,

that play-acting is unworthy of a pure-minded man's attention, much more participation. Even now I would resign my dramatic criticism and try a rest. Only I can't get hold of Barnaby. Letters of resignation he never notices. He says it is against the etiquette of journalism to write to your Editor. And when I go to see him, he gives me another big cigar and some strong whisky and soda, and then something always turns up to prevent my explanation.

## A SLIP UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

Outside the laboratory windows was a watery-gray fog, and within a close warmth and the yellow light of the green-shaded gas lamps that stood two to each table down its narrow length. On each table stood a couple of glass jars containing the mangled vestiges of the crayfish, mussels, frogs, and guinea-pigs upon which the students had been working, and down the side of the room, facing the windows, were shelves bearing bleached dissections in spirits, surmounted by a row of beautifully executed anatomical drawings in white-wood frames and overhanging a row of cubical lockers. All the doors of the laboratory were panelled with blackboard, and on these were the half-erased diagrams of the previous day's work. The laboratory was empty, save for the demonstrator, who sat near the preparation-room door, and silent, save for a low, continuous murmur and the clicking of the rocker microtome at which he was working. But scattered about the room were traces of numerous students: hand-bags, polished boxes of instruments, in one place a large drawing covered by newspaper, and in another a prettily bound copy of *News from Nowhere*, a book oddly at variance with its surroundings. These things had been put down hastily as the students had arrived and hurried at once to secure their seats in the adjacent lecture theatre. Deadened by the closed door, the measured accents of the professor sounded as a featureless muttering.

Presently, faint through the closed windows came the sound of the Oratory clock striking the hour of eleven. The clicking of the microtome ceased, and the demonstrator looked at his watch, rose, thrust his hands into his pockets, and walked slowly down the laboratory towards the lecture theatre door. He stood listening for a moment, and then his eye fell on the little volume by William Morris. He picked it up, glanced at the title, smiled, opened it, looked at the name on the fly-leaf, ran the leaves through with his hand, and put it down. Almost immediately the even murmur of the lecturer ceased, there was a sudden burst of pencils rattling on the desks in the lecture theatre, a stirring, a scraping of feet, and a number of voices speaking together. Then a firm footfall approached the door, which began to open, and stood ajar, as some indistinctly heard question arrested the new-comer.

The demonstrator turned, walked slowly back past the microtome, and left the laboratory by the preparation-room door. As he did so, first one, and then several students carrying notebooks entered the laboratory from the

lecture theatre, and distributed themselves among the little tables, or stood in a group about the doorway. They were an exceptionally heterogeneous assembly, for while Oxford and Cambridge still recoil from the blushing prospect of mixed classes, the College of Science anticipated America in the matter years ago—mixed socially, too, for the prestige of the College is high, and its scholarships, free of any age limit, dredge deeper than do those of the Scotch universities. The class numbered one-and-twenty, but some remained in the theatre questioning the professor, copying the blackboard diagrams before they were washed off, or examining the special specimens he had produced to illustrate the day's teaching. Of the nine who had come into the laboratory three were girls, one of whom, a little fair woman, wearing spectacles and dressed in grayish-green, was peering out of the window at the fog, while the other two, both wholesome-looking, plain-faced schoolgirls, unrolled and put on the brown holland aprons they wore while dissecting. Of the men, two went down the laboratory to their places, one a pallid, dark-bearded man, who had once been a tailor; the other a pleasant-featured, ruddy young man of twenty, dressed in a well-fitting brown suit; young Wedderburn, the son of Wedderburn, the eye specialist. The others formed a little knot near the theatre door. One of these, a dwarfed, spectacled figure, with a hunchback, sat on a bent-wood stool; two others, one a short, dark youngster, and the other a flaxen-haired, reddish-complexioned young man, stood leaning side by side against the slate sink, while the fourth stood facing them, and maintained the large share of the conversation.

This last person was named Hill. He was a sturdily built young fellow, of the same age as Wedderburn; he had a white face, dark gray eyes, hair of an indeterminate colour, and prominent, irregular features. He talked rather louder than was needful, and thrust his hands deeply into his pockets. His collar was frayed and blue with the starch of a careless laundress, his clothes were evidently ready-made, and there was a patch on the side of his boot near the toe. And as he talked or listened to the others, he glanced now and again towards the lecture theatre door. They were discussing the depressing peroration of the lecture they had just heard, the last lecture it was in the introductory course in zoology. "From ovum to ovum is the goal of the higher vertebrata," the lecturer had said in his melancholy tones, and so had neatly rounded off the sketch of comparative anatomy he had been developing. The spectacled hunchback had repeated it, with noisy appreciation, had tossed it towards the fair-haired student with an evident provocation, and had started one of these vague, rambling discussions on generalities, so unaccountably dear to the student mind all the world over.

“That is our goal, perhaps—I admit it, as far as science goes,” said the fair-haired student, rising to the challenge. “But there are things above science.”

“Science,” said Hill confidently, “is systematic knowledge. Ideas that don’t come into the system—must anyhow—be loose ideas.” He was not quite sure whether that was a clever saying or a fatuity until his hearers took it seriously.

“The thing I cannot understand,” said the hunchback, at large, “is whether Hill is a materialist or not.”

“There is one thing above matter,” said Hill promptly, feeling he had a better thing this time; aware, too, of some one in the doorway behind him, and raising his voice a trifle for her benefit, “and that is, the delusion that there is something above matter.”

“So we have your gospel at last,” said the fair student. “It’s all a delusion, is it? All our aspirations to lead something more than dogs’ lives, all our work for anything beyond ourselves. But see how inconsistent you are. Your socialism, for instance. Why do you trouble about the interests of the race? Why do you concern yourself about the beggar in the gutter? Why are you bothering yourself to lend that book”—he indicated William Morris by a movement of the head—“to every one in the lab.?”

“Girl,” said the hunchback indistinctly, and glanced guiltily over his shoulder.

The girl in brown, with the brown eyes, had come into the laboratory, and stood on the other side of the table behind him, with her rolled-up apron in one hand, looking over her shoulder, listening to the discussion. She did not notice the hunchback, because she was glancing from Hill to his interlocutor. Hill’s consciousness of her presence betrayed itself to her only in his studious ignorance of the fact; but she understood that, and it pleased her. “I see no reason,” said he, “why a man should live like a brute because he knows of nothing beyond matter, and does not expect to exist a hundred years hence.”

“Why shouldn’t he?” said the fair-haired student.

“Why *should* he?” said Hill.

“What inducement has he?”

“That’s the way with all you religious people. It’s all a business of inducements. Cannot a man seek after righteousness for righteousness’

sake?”

There was a pause. The fair man answered, with a kind of vocal padding, “But—you see—inducement—when I said inducement,” to gain time. And then the hunchback came to his rescue and inserted a question. He was a terrible person in the debating society with his questions, and they invariably took one form—a demand for a definition. “What’s your definition of righteousness?” said the hunchback at this stage.

Hill experienced a sudden loss of complacency at this question, but even as it was asked, relief came in the person of Brooks, the laboratory attendant, who entered by the preparation-room door, carrying a number of freshly killed guinea-pigs by their hind legs. “This is the last batch of material this session,” said the youngster who had not previously spoken. Brooks advanced up the laboratory, smacking down a couple of guinea-pigs at each table. The rest of the class, scenting the prey from afar, came crowding in by the lecture theatre door, and the discussion perished abruptly as the students who were not already in their places hurried to them to secure the choice of a specimen. There was a noise of keys rattling on split rings as lockers were opened and dissecting instruments taken out. Hill was already standing by his table, and his box of scalpels was sticking out of his pocket. The girl in brown came a step towards him, and, leaning over his table, said softly, “Did you see that I returned your book, Mr. Hill?”

During the whole scene she and the book had been vividly present in his consciousness; but he made a clumsy pretence of looking at the book and seeing it for the first time. “Oh, yes,” he said, taking it up. “I see. Did you like it?”

“I want to ask you some questions about it—some time.”

“Certainly,” said Hill. “I shall be glad.” He stopped awkwardly. “You liked it?” he said.

“It’s a wonderful book. Only some things I don’t understand.”

Then suddenly the laboratory was hushed by a curious, braying noise. It was the demonstrator. He was at the blackboard ready to begin the day’s instruction, and it was his custom to demand silence by a sound midway between the “Er” of common intercourse and the blast of a trumpet. The girl in brown slipped back to her place: it was immediately in front of Hill’s, and Hill, forgetting her forthwith, took a notebook out of the drawer of his table, turned over its leaves hastily, drew a stumpy pencil from his pocket, and prepared to make a copious note of the coming demonstration. For



demonstrations and lectures are the sacred text of the College students. Books, saving only the Professor's own, you may—it is even expedient to—ignore.

Hill was the son of a Landport cobbler, and had been hooked by a chance blue paper the authorities had thrown out to the Landport Technical College. He kept himself in London on his allowance of a guinea a week, and found that, with proper care, this also covered his clothing allowance, an occasional water-proof collar, that is; and ink and needles and cotton, and such-like necessaries for a man about town. This was his first year and his first session, but the brown old man in Landport had already got himself detested in many public-houses by boasting of his son, “the Professor.” Hill was a vigorous youngster, with a serene contempt for the clergy of all denominations, and a fine ambition to reconstruct the world. He regarded his scholarship as a brilliant opportunity. He had begun to read at seven, and had read steadily whatever came in his way, good or bad, since then. His worldly experience had been limited to the island of Portsea, and acquired chiefly in the wholesale boot factory in which he had worked by day, after passing the seventh standard of the Board School. He had a considerable gift of speech, as the College Debating Society, which met amidst the crushing machines and mine models in the metallurgical theatre downstairs, already recognised—recognised by a violent battering of desks whenever he rose. And he was just at that fine emotional age when life opens at the end of a narrow pass like a broad valley at one's feet, full of the promise of wonderful discoveries and tremendous achievements. And his own limitations, save that he knew that he knew neither Latin nor French, were all unknown to him.

At first his interest had been divided pretty equally between his biological work at the College and social and theological theorising, an employment which he took in deadly earnest. Of a night, when the big museum library was not open, he would sit on the bed of his room in Chelsea with his coat and a muffler on, and write out the lecture notes and revise his dissection memoranda, until Thorpe called him out by a whistle—the landlady objected to open the door to attic visitors—and then the two would go prowling about the shadowy, shiny, gaslit streets, talking, very much in the fashion of the sample just given, of the God idea, and Righteousness, and Carlyle, and the Reorganisation of Society. And in the midst of it all, Hill, arguing not only for Thorpe, but for the casual passer-by, would lose the thread of his argument glancing at some pretty painted face that looked meaningly at him as he passed. Science and Righteousness! But

once or twice lately there had been signs that a third interest was creeping into his life, and he had found his attention wandering from the fate of the mesoblastic somites or the probable meaning of the blastopore, to the thought of the girl with the brown eyes who sat at the table before him.

She was a paying student; she descended inconceivable social altitudes to speak to him. At the thought of the education she must have had, and the accomplishments she must possess, the soul of Hill became abject within him. She had spoken to him first over a difficulty about the alisphenoid of a rabbit's skull, and he had found that, in biology at least, he had no reason for self-abasement. And from that, after the manner of young people starting from any starting-point, they got to generalities, and while Hill attacked her upon the question of socialism—some instinct told him to spare her a direct assault upon her religion—she was gathering resolution to undertake what she told herself was his aesthetic education. She was a year or two older than he, though the thought never occurred to him. The loan of *News from Nowhere* was the beginning of a series of cross loans. Upon some absurd first principle of his, Hill had never “wasted time” upon poetry, and it seemed an appalling deficiency to her. One day in the lunch hour, when she chanced upon him alone in the little museum where the skeletons were arranged, shamefully eating the bun that constituted his midday meal, she retreated, and returned to lend him, with a slightly furtive air, a volume of Browning. He stood sideways towards her and took the book rather clumsily, because he was holding the bun in the other hand. And in the retrospect his voice lacked the cheerful clearness he could have wished.

That occurred after the examination in comparative anatomy, on the day before the College turned out its students, and was carefully locked up by the officials, for the Christmas holidays. The excitement of cramming for the first trial of strength had for a little while dominated Hill, to the exclusion of his other interests. In the forecasts of the result in which every one indulged he was surprised to find that no one regarded him as a possible competitor for the Harvey Commemoration Medal, of which this and the two subsequent examinations disposed. It was about this time that Wedderburn, who so far had lived inconspicuously on the uttermost margin of Hill's perceptions, began to take on the appearance of an obstacle. By a mutual agreement, the nocturnal prowlings with Thorpe ceased for the three weeks before the examination, and his landlady pointed out that she really could not supply so much lamp oil at the price. He walked to and fro from the College with little slips of mnemonics in his hand, lists of crayfish appendages, rabbits' skull-bones, and vertebrate nerves, for example, and became a positive nuisance to foot passengers in the opposite direction.

But, by a natural reaction, Poetry and the girl with the brown eyes ruled the Christmas holiday. The pending results of the examination became such a secondary consideration that Hill marvelled at his father's excitement. Even had he wished it, there was no comparative anatomy to read in Landport, and he was too poor to buy books, but the stock of poets in the library was extensive, and Hill's attack was magnificently sustained. He saturated himself with the fluent numbers of Longfellow and Tennyson, and fortified himself with Shakespeare; found a kindred soul in Pope, and a master in Shelley, and heard and fled the siren voices of Eliza Cook and Mrs. Hemans. But he read no more Browning, because he hoped for the loan of other volumes from Miss Haysman when he returned to London.

He walked from his lodgings to the College with that volume of Browning in his shiny black bag, and his mind teeming with the finest general propositions about poetry. Indeed, he framed first this little speech and then that with which to grace the return. The morning was an exceptionally pleasant one for London; there was a clear, hard frost and undeniable blue in the sky, a thin haze softened every outline, and warm shafts of sunlight struck between the house blocks and turned the sunny side of the street to amber and gold. In the hall of the College he pulled off his glove and signed his name with fingers so stiff with cold that the characteristic dash under the signature he cultivated became a quivering line. He imagined Miss Haysman about him everywhere. He turned at the staircase, and there, below, he saw a crowd struggling at the foot of the notice-board. This, possibly, was the biology list. He forgot Browning and Miss Haysman for the moment, and joined the scrimmage. And at last, with his cheek flattened against the sleeve of the man on the step above him, he read the list—

## CLASS I

H. J. Somers Wedderburn  
William Hill

and thereafter followed a second class that is outside our present sympathies. It was characteristic that he did not trouble to look for Thorpe on the physics list, but backed out of the struggle at once, and in a curious, emotional state between pride over common second-class humanity and acute disappointment at Wedderburn's success, went on his way upstairs. At the top, as he was hanging up his coat in the passage, the zoological demonstrator, a young man from Oxford, who secretly regarded him as a

blatant “mugger” of the very worst type, offered his heartiest congratulations.

At the laboratory door Hill stopped for a second to get his breath, and then entered. He looked straight up the laboratory and saw all five girl students grouped in their places, and Wedderburn, the once retiring Wedderburn, leaning rather gracefully against the window, playing with the blind tassel and talking, apparently, to the five of them. Now, Hill could talk bravely enough and even overbearingly to one girl, and he could have made a speech to a roomful of girls, but this business of standing at ease and appreciating, fencing, and returning quick remarks round a group was, he knew, altogether beyond him. Coming up the staircase his feelings for Wedderburn had been generous, a certain admiration perhaps, a willingness to shake his hand conspicuously and heartily as one who had fought but the first round. But before Christmas Wedderburn had never gone up to that end of the room to talk. In a flash Hill’s mist of vague excitement condensed abruptly to a vivid dislike of Wedderburn. Possibly his expression changed. As he came up to his place, Wedderburn nodded carelessly to him, and the others glanced round. Miss Haysman looked at him and away again, the faintest touch of her eyes. “I can’t agree with you, Mr. Wedderburn,” she said.

“I must congratulate you on your first-class, Mr. Hill,” said the spectacled girl in green, turning round and beaming at him.

“It’s nothing,” said Hill, staring at Wedderburn and Miss Haysman talking together, and eager to hear what they talked about.

“We poor folks in the second class don’t think so,” said the girl in spectacles.

What was it Wedderburn was saying? Something about William Morris! Hill did not answer the girl in spectacles, and the smile died out of his face. He could not hear, and failed to see how he could “cut in.” Confound Wedderburn! He sat down, opened his bag, hesitated whether to return the volume of Browning forthwith, in the sight of all, and instead drew out his new notebooks for the short course in elementary botany that was now beginning, and which would terminate in February. As he did so, a fat, heavy man, with a white face and pale gray eyes—Bindon, the professor of botany, who came up from Kew for January and February—came in by the lecture theatre door, and passed, rubbing his hands together and smiling, in silent affability down the laboratory.

In the subsequent six weeks Hill experienced some very rapid and curiously complex emotional developments. For the most part he had Wedderburn in focus—a fact that Miss Haysman never suspected. She told Hill (for in the comparative privacy of the museum she talked a good deal to him of socialism and Browning and general propositions) that she had met Wedderburn at the house of some people she knew, and “he’s inherited his cleverness; for his father, you know, is the great eye-specialist.”

“My father is a cobbler,” said Hill, quite irrelevantly, and perceived the want of dignity even as he said it. But the gleam of jealousy did not offend her. She conceived herself the fundamental source of it. He suffered bitterly from a sense of Wedderburn’s unfairness, and a realisation of his own handicap. Here was this Wedderburn had picked up a prominent man for a father, and instead of his losing so many marks on the score of that advantage, it was counted to him for righteousness! And while Hill had to introduce himself and talk to Miss Haysman clumsily over mangled guinea-pigs in the laboratory, this Wedderburn, in some backstairs way, had access to her social altitudes, and could converse in a polished argot that Hill understood perhaps, but felt incapable of speaking. Not, of course, that he wanted to. Then it seemed to Hill that for Wedderburn to come there day after day with cuffs unfrayed, neatly tailored, precisely barbered, quietly perfect, was in itself an ill-bred, sneering sort of proceeding. Moreover, it was a stealthy thing for Wedderburn to behave insignificantly for a space, to mock modesty, to lead Hill to fancy that he himself was beyond dispute the man of the year, and then suddenly to dart in front of him, and incontinently to swell up in this fashion. In addition to these things, Wedderburn displayed an increasing disposition to join in any conversational grouping that included Miss Haysman, and would venture, and indeed seek occasion, to pass opinions derogatory to socialism and atheism. He goaded Hill to incivilities by neat, shallow, and exceedingly effective personalities about the socialist leaders, until Hill hated Bernard Shaw’s graceful egotisms, William Morris’s limited editions and luxurious wall-papers, and Walter Crane’s charmingly absurd ideal working men, about as much as he hated Wedderburn. The dissertations in the laboratory, that had been his glory in the previous term, became a danger, degenerated into inglorious tussels with Wedderburn, and Hill kept to them only out of an obscure perception that his honour was involved. In the debating society Hill knew quite clearly that, to a thunderous accompaniment of banged desks, he could have pulverised Wedderburn. Only Wedderburn never attended the debating society to be pulverised, because—nauseous affectation!—he “dined late.”

You must not imagine that these things presented themselves in quite such a crude form to Hill's perception. Hill was a born generaliser. Wedderburn to him was not so much an individual obstacle as a type, the salient angle of a class. The economic theories that, after infinite ferment, had shaped themselves in Hill's mind, became abruptly concrete at the contact. The world became full of easy-mannered, graceful, gracefully-dressed, conversationally dexterous, finally shallow Wedderburns, Bishops Wedderburn, Wedderburn M.P.'s, Professors Wedderburn, Wedderburn landlords, all with finger-bowl shibboleths and epigrammatic cities of refuge from a sturdy debater. And every one ill-clothed or ill-dressed, from the cobbler to the cab-runner, was a man and a brother, a fellow-sufferer, to Hill's imagination. So that he became, as it were, a champion of the fallen and oppressed albeit to outward seeming only a self-assertive, ill-mannered young man, and an unsuccessful champion at that. Again and again a skirmish over the afternoon tea that the girl students had inaugurated left Hill with flushed cheeks and a tattered temper, and the debating society noticed a new quality of sarcastic bitterness in his speeches.

You will understand now how it was necessary, if only in the interests of humanity, that Hill should demolish Wedderburn in the forthcoming examination and outshine him in the eyes of Miss Haysman; and you will perceive, too, how Miss Haysman fell into some common feminine misconceptions. The Hill-Wedderburn quarrel, for in his unostentatious way Wedderburn reciprocated Hill's ill-veiled rivalry, became a tribute to her indefinable charm; she was the Queen of Beauty in a tournament of scalpels and stumpy pencils. To her confidential friend's secret annoyance, it even troubled her conscience, for she was a good girl, and painfully aware, from Ruskin and contemporary fiction, how entirely men's activities are determined by women's attitudes. And if Hill never by any chance mentioned the topic of love to her, she only credited him with the finer modesty for that omission.

So the time came on for the second examination, and Hill's increasing pallor confirmed the general rumour that he was working hard. In the aerated bread shop near South Kensington Station you would see him, breaking his bun and sipping his milk, with his eyes intent upon a paper of closely written notes. In his bedroom there were propositions about buds and stems round his looking-glass, a diagram to catch his eye, if soap should chance to spare it, above his washing basin. He missed several meetings of the debating society, but he found the chance encounters with Miss Haysman in the spacious ways of the adjacent art museum, or in the little museum at the top of the College, or in the College corridors, more frequent

and very restful. In particular, they used to meet in a little gallery full of wrought-iron chests and gates, near the art library, and there Hill used to talk, under the gentle stimulus of her flattering attention, of Browning and his personal ambitions. A characteristic she found remarkable in him was his freedom from avarice. He contemplated quite calmly the prospect of living all his life on an income below a hundred pounds a year. But he was determined to be famous, to make, recognisably in his own proper person, the world a better place to live in. He took Bradlaugh and John Burns for his leaders and models, poor, even impecunious, great men. But Miss Haysman thought that such lives were deficient on the aesthetic side, by which, though she did not know it, she meant good wall-paper and upholstery, pretty books, tasteful clothes, concerts, and meals nicely cooked and respectfully served.

At last came the day of the second examination, and the professor of botany, a fussy, conscientious man, rearranged all the tables in a long narrow laboratory to prevent copying, and put his demonstrator on a chair on a table (where he felt, he said, like a Hindoo god), to see all the cheating, and stuck a notice outside the door, "Door closed," for no earthly reason that any human being could discover. And all the morning, from ten till one, the quill of Wedderburn shrieked defiance at Hill's, and the quills of the others chased their leaders in a tireless pack, and so also it was in the afternoon. Wedderburn was a little quieter than usual, and Hill's face was hot all day, and his overcoat bulged with textbooks and notebooks against the last moment's revision. And the next day, in the morning and in the afternoon, was the practical examination, when sections had to be cut and slides identified. In the morning Hill was depressed because he knew he had cut a thick section, and in the afternoon came the mysterious slip.

It was just the kind of thing that the botanical professor was always doing. Like the income-tax, it offered a premium to the cheat. It was a preparation under the microscope, a little glass slip, held in its place on the stage of the instrument by light steel clips, and the inscription set forth that the slip was not to be moved. Each student was to go in turn to it, sketch it, write in his book of answers what he considered it to be, and return to his place. Now, to move such a slip is a thing one can do by a chance movement of the finger, and in a fraction of a second. The professor's reason for decreeing that the slip should not be moved depended on the fact that the object he wanted identified was characteristic of a certain tree stem. In the position in which it was placed it was a difficult thing to recognise, but once the slip was moved so as to bring other parts of the preparation into view, its nature was obvious enough.

Hill came to this, flushed from a contest with staining re-agents, sat down on the little stool before the microscope, turned the mirror to get the best light, and then, out of sheer habit, shifted the slips. At once he remembered the prohibition, and, with an almost continuous motion of his hands, moved it back, and sat paralysed with astonishment at his action.

Then, slowly, he turned his head. The professor was out of the room; the demonstrator sat aloft on his impromptu rostrum, reading the *Q. Jour. Mi. Sci.*; the rest of the examinees were busy, and with their backs to him. Should he own up to the accident now? He knew quite clearly what the thing was. It was a lenticel, a characteristic preparation from the elder-tree. His eyes roved over his intent fellow-students, and Wedderburn suddenly glanced over his shoulder at him with a queer expression in his eyes. The mental excitement that had kept Hill at an abnormal pitch of vigour these two days gave way to a curious nervous tension. His book of answers was beside him. He did not write down what the thing was, but with one eye at the microscope he began making a hasty sketch of it. His mind was full of this grotesque puzzle in ethics that had suddenly been sprung upon him. Should he identify it? or should he leave this question unanswered? In that case Wedderburn would probably come out first in the second result. How could he tell now whether he might not have identified the thing without shifting it? It was possible that Wedderburn had failed to recognise it, of course. Suppose Wedderburn, too, had shifted the slide? He looked up at the clock. There were fifteen minutes in which to make up his mind. He gathered up his book of answers and the coloured pencils he used in illustrating his replies and walked back to his seat.

He read through his manuscript, and then sat thinking and gnawing his knuckle. It would look queer now if he owned up. He *must* beat Wedderburn. He forgot the examples of those starry gentlemen, John Burns and Bradlaugh. Besides, he reflected, the glimpse of the rest of the slip he had had was, after all, quite accidental, forced upon him by chance, a kind of providential revelation rather than an unfair advantage. It was not nearly so dishonest to avail himself of that as it was of Broome, who believed in the efficacy of prayer, to pray daily for a first-class. "Five minutes more," said the demonstrator, folding up his paper and becoming observant. Hill watched the clock hands until two minutes remained; then he opened the book of answers, and, with hot ears and an affectation of ease, gave his drawing of the lenticel its name.

When the second pass list appeared, the previous positions of Wedderburn and Hill were reversed, and the spectacled girl in green, who



knew the demonstrator in private life (where he was practically human), said that in the result of the two examinations taken together Hill had the advantage of a mark—167 to 166 out of a possible 200. Every one admired Hill in a way, though the suspicion of “mugging” clung to him. But Hill was to find congratulations and Miss Haysman’s enhanced opinion of him, and even the decided decline in the crest of Wedderburn, tainted by an unhappy memory. He felt a remarkable access of energy at first, and the note of a democracy marching to triumph—returned to his debating-society speeches; he worked at his comparative anatomy with tremendous zeal and effect, and he went on with his aesthetic education. But through it all, a vivid little picture was continually coming before his mind’s eye—of a sneakish person manipulating a slide.

No human being had witnessed the act, and he was cocksure that no higher power existed to see it; but for all that it worried him. Memories are not dead things but alive; they dwindle in disuse, but they harden and develop in all sorts of queer ways if they are being continually fretted. Curiously enough, though at the time he perceived clearly that the shifting was accidental, as the days wore on, his memory became confused about it, until at last he was not sure—although he assured himself that he *was* sure—whether the movement had been absolutely involuntary. Then it is possible that Hill’s dietary was conducive to morbid conscientiousness; a breakfast frequently eaten in a hurry, a midday bun, and, at such hours after five as chanced to be convenient, such meat as his means determined, usually in a chop-house in a back street off the Brompton Road. Occasionally he treated himself to threepenny or ninepenny classics, and they usually represented a suppression of potatoes or chops. It is indisputable that outbreaks of self-abasement and emotional revival have a distinct relation to periods of scarcity. But apart from this influence on the feelings, there was in Hill a distinct aversion to falsity that the blasphemous Landport cobbler had inculcated by strap and tongue from his earliest years. Of one fact about professed atheists I am convinced; they may be—they usually are—fools, void of subtlety, revilers of holy institutions, brutal speakers, and mischievous knaves, but they lie with difficulty. If it were not so, if they had the faintest grasp of the idea of compromise, they would simply be liberal churchmen. And, moreover, this memory poisoned his regard for Miss Haysman. For she now so evidently preferred him to Wedderburn that he felt sure he cared for her, and began reciprocating her attentions by timid marks of personal regard; at one time he even bought a bunch of violets, carried it about in his pocket, and produced it, with a stumbling explanation, withered and dead, in the gallery of old iron. It poisoned, too, the denunciation of

capitalist dishonesty that had been one of his life's pleasures. And, lastly, it poisoned his triumph in Wedderburn. Previously he had been Wedderburn's superior in his own eyes, and had raged simply at a want of recognition. Now he began to fret at the darker suspicion of positive inferiority. He fancied he found justifications for his position in Browning, but they vanished on analysis. At last—moved, curiously enough, by exactly the same motive forces that had resulted in his dishonesty—he went to Professor Bindon, and made a clean breast of the whole affair. As Hill was a paid student, Professor Bindon did not ask him to sit down, and he stood before the professor's desk as he made his confession.

"It's a curious story," said Professor Bindon, slowly realising how the thing reflected on himself, and then letting his anger rise—"a most remarkable story. I can't understand your doing it, and I can't understand this avowal. You're a type of student—Cambridge men would never dream—I suppose I ought to have thought—why *did* you cheat?"

"I didn't cheat," said Hill.

"But you have just been telling me you did."

"I thought I explained——"

"Either you cheated or you did not cheat."

"I said my motion was involuntary."

"I am not a metaphysician, I am a servant of science—of fact. You were told not to move the slip. You did move the slip. If that is not cheating——"

"If I was a cheat," said Hill, with the note of hysterics in his voice, "should I come here and tell you?"

"Your repentance, of course, does you credit," said Professor Bindon, "but it does not alter the original facts."

"No, sir," said Hill, giving in in utter self-abasement.

"Even now you cause an enormous amount of trouble. The examination list will have to be revised."

"I suppose so, sir."

"Suppose so? Of course it must be revised. And I don't see how I can conscientiously pass you."

"Not pass me?" said Hill. "Fail me?"

“It’s the rule in all examinations. Or where should we be? What else did you expect? You don’t want to shirk the consequences of your own acts?”

“I thought, perhaps——” said Hill. And then, “Fail me? I thought, as I told you, you would simply deduct the marks given for that slip.”

“Impossible!” said Bindon. “Besides, it would still leave you above Wedderburn. Deduct only the marks! Preposterous! The Departmental Regulations distinctly say——”

“But it’s my own admission, sir.”

“The Regulations say nothing whatever of the manner in which the matter comes to light. They simply provide——”

“It will ruin me. If I fail this examination, they won’t renew my scholarship.”

“You should have thought of that before.”

“But, sir, consider all my circumstances——”

“I cannot consider anything. Professors in this College are machines. The Regulations will not even let us recommend our students for appointments. I am a machine, and you have worked me. I have to do——”

“It’s very hard, sir.”

“Possibly it is.”

“If I am to be failed this examination, I might as well go home at once.”

“That is as you think proper.” Bindon’s voice softened a little; he perceived he had been unjust, and, provided he did not contradict himself, he was disposed to amelioration. “As a private person,” he said, “I think this confession of yours goes far to mitigate your offence. But you have set the machinery in motion, and now it must take its course. I—I am really sorry you gave way.”

A wave of emotion prevented Hill from answering. Suddenly, very vividly, he saw the heavily-lined face of the old Landport cobbler, his father. “Good God! What a fool I have been!” he said hotly and abruptly.

“I hope,” said Bindon, “that it will be a lesson to you.”

But, curiously enough, they were not thinking of quite the same indiscretion.

There was a pause.

“I would like a day to think, sir, and then I will let you know—about going home, I mean,” said Hill, moving towards the door.

The next day Hill’s place was vacant. The spectacled girl in green was, as usual, first with the news. Wedderburn and Miss Haysman were talking of a performance of *The Meistersingers* when she came up to them.

“Have you heard?” she said.

“Heard what?”

“There was cheating in the examination.”

“Cheating!” said Wedderburn, with his face suddenly hot. “How?”

“That slide——”

“Moved? Never!”

“It was. That slide that we weren’t to move——”

“Nonsense!” said Wedderburn. “Why! How could they find out? Who do they say——?”

“It was Mr. Hill.”

“*Hill!*”

“Mr. Hill!”

“Not—surely not the immaculate Hill?” said Wedderburn, recovering.

“I don’t believe it,” said Miss Haysman. “How do you know?”

“I *didn’t*,” said the girl in spectacles. “But I know it now for a fact. Mr. Hill went and confessed to Professor Bindon himself.”

“By Jove!” said Wedderburn. “Hill of all people. But I am always inclined to distrust these philanthropists-on-principle——”

“Are you quite sure?” said Miss Haysman, with a catch in her breath.

“Quite. It’s dreadful, isn’t it? But, you know, what can you expect? His father is a cobbler.”

Then Miss Haysman astonished the girl in spectacles.

“I don’t care. I will not believe it,” she said, flushing darkly under her warm-tinted skin. “I will not believe it until he has told me so himself—face

to face. I would scarcely believe it then,” and abruptly she turned her back on the girl in spectacles, and walked to her own place.

“It’s true, all the same,” said the girl in spectacles, peering and smiling at Wedderburn.

But Wedderburn did not answer her. She was indeed one of those people who seemed destined to make unanswered remarks.

## JIMMY GOGGLES THE GOD

“It isn’t every one who’s been a god,” said the sunburnt man. “But it’s happened to me—among other things.”

I intimated my sense of his condescension.

“It don’t leave much for ambition, does it?” said the sunburnt man.

“I was one of those men who were saved from the *Ocean Pioneer*. Gummy! how time flies! It’s twenty years ago. I doubt if you’ll remember anything of the *Ocean Pioneer*?”

The name was familiar, and I tried to recall when and where I had read it. The *Ocean Pioneer*? “Something about gold dust,” I said vaguely, “but the precise——”

“That’s it,” he said. “In a beastly little channel she hadn’t no business in—dodging pirates. It was before they’d put the kybosh on that business. And there’d been volcanoes or something and all the rocks was wrong. There’s places about by Soona where you fair have to follow the rocks about to see where they’re going next. Down she went in twenty fathoms before you could have dealt for whist, with fifty thousand pounds worth of gold aboard, it was said, in one form or another.”

“Survivors?”

“Three.”

“I remember the case now,” I said. “There was something about salvage \_\_\_\_\_”

But at the word salvage the sunburnt man exploded into language so extraordinarily horrible that I stopped aghast. He came down to more ordinary swearing, and pulled himself up abruptly. “Excuse me,” he said, “but—salvage!”

He leant over towards me. “I was in that job,” he said. “Tried to make myself a rich man, and got made a god instead. I’ve got my feelings——

“It ain’t all jam being a god,” said the sunburnt man, and for some time conversed by means of such pithy but unprogressive axioms. At last he took up his tale again.

“There was me,” said the sunburnt man, “and a seaman named Jacobs, and Always, the mate of the *Ocean Pioneer*. And him it was that set the whole thing going. I remember him now, when we was in the jolly-boat, suggesting it all to our minds just by one sentence. He was a wonderful hand at suggesting things. ‘There was forty thousand pounds,’ he said, ‘on that ship, and it’s for me to say just where she went down.’ It didn’t need much brains to tumble to that. And he was the leader from the first to the last. He got hold of the Sanderses and their brig; they were brothers, and the brig was the *Pride of Banya*, and he it was bought the diving dress—a second-hand one with a compressed air apparatus instead of pumping. He’d have done the diving too, if it hadn’t made him sick going down. And the salvage people were mucking about with a chart he’d cooked up, as solemn as could be, at Starr Race, a hundred and twenty miles away.

“I can tell you we was a happy lot aboard that brig, jokes and drink and bright hopes all the time. It all seemed so neat and clean and straightforward, and what rough chaps call a ‘cert.’ And we used to speculate how the other blessed lot, the proper salvagers, who’d started two days before us, were getting on, until our sides fairly ached. We all messed together in the Sanderses’ cabin—it was a curious crew, all officers and no men—and there stood the diving-dress waiting its turn. Young Sanders was a humorous sort of chap, and there certainly was something funny in the confounded thing’s great fat head and its stare, and he made us see it too. ‘Jimmy Goggles,’ he used to call it, and talk to it like a Christian. Asked if he was married, and how Mrs. Goggles was, and all the little Goggleses. Fit to make you split. And every blessed day all of us used to drink the health of Jimmy Goggles in rum, and unscrew his eye and pour a glass of rum in him, until, instead of that nasty mackintoshiness, he smelt as nice in his inside as a cask of rum. It was jolly times we had in those days, I can tell you—little suspecting, poor chaps! what was a-coming.

“We weren’t going to throw away our chances by any blessed hurry, you know, and we spent a whole day sounding our way towards where the *Ocean Pioneer* had gone down, right between two chunks of ropy gray rock—lava rocks that rose nearly out of the water. We had to lay off about half a mile to get a safe anchorage, and there was a thundering row who should stop on board. And there she lay just as she had gone down, so that you could see the top of the masts that was still standing perfectly distinctly. The row ending in all coming in the boat. I went down in the diving-dress on Friday morning directly it was light.

“What a surprise it was! I can see it all now quite distinctly. It was a queer looking place, and the light was just coming. People over here think every blessed place in the tropics is a flat shore and palm trees and surf, bless ’em! This place, for instance, wasn’t a bit that way. Not common rocks they were, undermined by waves; but great curved banks like ironwork cinder heaps, with green slime below, and thorny shrubs and things just waving upon them here and there, and the water glassy calm and clear, and showing you a kind of dirty gray black shine, with huge flaring red-brown weeds spreading motionless, and crawling and darting things going through it. And far away beyond the ditches and pools and the heaps was a forest on the mountain flank, growing again after the fires and cinder showers of the last eruption. And the other way forest, too, and a kind of broken—what is it?—amby theatre of black and rusty cinders rising out of it all, and the sea in a kind of bay in the middle.

“The dawn, I say, was just coming, and there wasn’t much colour about things, and not a human being but ourselves anywhere in sight up or down the channel. Except the *Pride of Banya*, lying out beyond a lump of rock towards the line of the sea.

“Not a human being in sight,” he repeated, and paused.

“I don’t know where they came from, not a bit. And we were feeling so safe that we were all alone that poor young Sanders was a-singing. I was in Jimmy Goggles, all except the helmet. ‘Easy,’ says Always, ‘there’s her mast.’ And after I’d had just one squint over the gunwale, I caught up the bogey, and almost tipped out as old Sanders brought the boat round. When the windows were screwed and everything was all right, I shut the valve from the air belt in order to help my sinking, and jumped overboard, feet foremost—for we hadn’t a ladder. I left the boat pitching, and all of them staring down into the water after me, as my head sank down into the weeds and blackness that lay about the mast. I suppose nobody, not the most cautious chap in the world, would have bothered about a lookout at such a desolate place. It stunk of solitude.

“Of course you must understand that I was a greenhorn at diving. None of us were divers. We’d had to muck about with the thing to get the way of it, and this was the first time I’d been deep. It feels damnable. Your ears hurt beastly. I don’t know if you’ve ever hurt yourself yawning or sneezing, but it takes you like that, only ten times worse. And a pain over the eyebrows here—splitting—and a feeling like influenza in the head. And it isn’t all heaven in your lungs and things. And going down feels like the beginning of a lift, only it keeps on. And you can’t turn your head to see what’s above you, and



you can't get a fair squint at what's happening to your feet without bending down something painful. And being deep it was dark, let alone the blackness of the ashes and mud that formed the bottom. It was like going down out of the dawn back into the night, so to speak.

"The mast came up like a ghost out of the black, and then a lot of fishes, and then a lot of flapping red seaweed, and then whack I came with a kind of dull bang on the deck of the *Ocean Pioneer*, and the fishes that had been feeding on the dead rose about me like a swarm of flies from road stuff in summer time. I turned on the compressed air again—for the suit was a bit thick and mackintoshery after all, in spite of the rum—and stood recovering myself. It struck coolish down there, and that helped take off the stuffiness a bit.

"When I began to feel easier, I started looking about me. It was an extraordinary sight. Even the light was extraordinary, a kind of reddy coloured twilight, on account of the streamers of seaweed that floated up on either side of the ship. And far overhead just a moony, deep green blue. The deck of the ship, except for a slight list to starboard, was level, and lay all dark and long between the weeds, clear except where the masts had snapped when she rolled, and vanishing into black night towards the forecastle. There wasn't any dead on the decks, most were in the weeds alongside, I suppose; but afterwards I found two skeletons lying in the passengers' cabins, where death had come to them. It was curious to stand on that deck and recognise it all, bit by bit; a place against the rail where I'd been fond of smoking by starlight, and the corner where an old chap from Sydney used to flirt with a widow we had aboard. A comfortable couple they'd been, only a month ago, and now you couldn't have got a meal for a baby crab off either of them.

"I've always had a bit of a philosophical turn, and I dare say I spent the best part of five minutes in such thoughts before I went below to find where the blessed dust was stored. It was slow work hunting, feeling it was for the most part, pitchy dark, with confusing blue gleams down the companion. And there were things moving about, a dab at my glass once, and once a pinch at my leg. Crabs, I expect. I kicked a lot of loose stuff that puzzled me, and stooped and picked up something all knobs and spikes. What do you think? Backbone! But I never had any particular feeling for bones. We had talked the affair over pretty thoroughly, and Always knew just where the stuff was stowed. I found it that trip. I lifted a box one end an inch or more."

He broke off in his story. "I've lifted it," he said, "as near as that! Forty thousand pounds' worth of pure gold! Gold! I shouted inside my helmet as a

kind of cheer, and hurt my ears. I was getting confounded stuffy and tired by this time—I must have been down twenty-five minutes or more—and I thought this was good enough. I went up the companion again, and as my eyes came up flush with the deck, a thundering great crab gave a kind of hysterical jump and went scuttling off sideways. Quite a start it gave me. I stood up clear on deck and shut the valve behind the helmet to let the air accumulate to carry me up again—I noticed a kind of whacking from above, as though they were hitting the water with an oar, but I didn't look up. I fancied they were signalling me to come up.

“And then something shot down by me—something heavy, and stood a quiver in the planks. I looked, and there was a long knife I'd seen young Sanders handling. Thinks I, he's dropped it, and I was still calling him this kind of fool and that—for it might have hurt me serious—when I began to lift and drive up towards the daylight. Just about the level of the top spars of the *Ocean Pioneer*, whack! I came against something sinking down, and a boot knocked in front of my helmet. Then something else, struggling frightful. It was a big weight atop of me, whatever it was, and moving and twisting about. I'd have thought it a big octopus, or some such thing, if it hadn't been for the boot. But octopuses don't wear boots. It was all in a moment, of course, I felt myself sinking down again, and I threw my arms about to keep steady, and the whole lot rolled free of me and shot down as I went up——”

He paused.

“I saw young Sanders's face, over a naked black shoulder, and a spear driven clean through his neck, and out of his mouth and neck what looked like spirits of pink smoke in the water. And down they went clutching one another, and turning over, and both too far gone to leave go. And in another second my helmet came a whack, fit to split, against the nigger's canoe. It was niggers! Two canoes full.

“It was lively times I tell you? Overboard came Always with three spears in him. There was the legs of three or four black chaps kicking about me in the water. I couldn't see much, but I saw the game was up at a glance, gave my valve a tremendous twist, and went bubbling down again after poor Always, in as awful a state of scare and astonishment as you can well imagine. I passed young Sanders and the nigger going up again and struggling still a bit, and in another moment I was standing in the dim again on the deck of the *Ocean Pioneer*.

“Gummy, thinks I, here’s a fix! Niggers? At first I couldn’t see anything for it but Stifle below or Stabs above. I didn’t properly understand how much air there was to last me out, but I didn’t feel like standing very much more of it down below. I was hot and frightfully heady, quite apart from the blue funk I was in. We’d never reckoned with these beastly natives, filthy Papuan beasts. It wasn’t any good coming up where I was, but I had to do something. On the spur of the moment, I clambered over the side of the brig and landed among the weeds, and set off through the darkness as fast as I could. I just stopped once and knelt, and twisted back my head in the helmet and had a look up. It was a most extraordinary bright green blue above, and the two canoes and the boat floating there very small and distant like a kind of twisted H. And it made me feel sick to squint up at it, and think what the pitching and swaying of the three meant.

“It was just about the most horrible ten minutes I ever had, blundering about in that darkness—pressure something awful, like being buried in sand, pain across the chest, sick with funk, and breathing nothing as it seemed but the smell of rum and mackintosh. Gummy! After a bit, I found myself going up a steepish sort of slope. I had another squint to see if anything was visible of the canoes and boats, and then kept on. I stopped with my head a foot from the surface, and tried to see where I was going, but, of course, nothing was to be seen but the reflection of the bottom. Then out I dashed, like knocking my head through a mirror. Directly I got my eyes out of the water, I saw I’d come up a kind of beach near the forest. I had a look round, but the natives and the brig were both hidden by a big hummucky heap of twisted lava. The born fool in me suggested a run for the woods. I didn’t take the helmet off, but I eased open one of the windows, and, after a bit of a pant, went on out of the water. You’d hardly imagine how clean and light the air tasted.

“Of course, with four inches of lead in your boot soles, and your head in a copper knob the size of a football, and been thirty-five minutes under water, you don’t break any records running. I ran like a ploughboy going to work. And half-way to the trees I saw a dozen niggers or more, coming out in a gaping, astonished sort of way to meet me.

“I just stopped dead, and cursed myself for all the fools out of London. I had about as much chance of cutting back to the water as a turned turtle. I just screwed up my window again to leave my hands free, and waited for them. There wasn’t anything else for me to do.

“But they didn’t come on very much. I began to suspect why. ‘Jimmy Goggles,’ I says, ‘it’s your beauty does it.’ I was inclined to be a little light-

headed, I think, with all these dangers about and the change in the pressure of the blessed air. ‘Who’re ye staring at?’ I said, as if the savages could hear me. ‘What d’ye take me for? I’m hanged if I don’t give you something to stare at,’ I said, and with that I screwed up the escape valve and turned on the compressed air from the belt, until I was swelled out like a blown frog. Regular imposing it must have been. I’m blessed if they’d come on a step; and presently one and then another went down on their hands and knees. They didn’t know what to make of me, and they was doing the extra polite, which was very wise and reasonable of them. I had half a mind to edge back seaward and cut and run, but it seemed too hopeless. A step back and they’d have been after me. And out of sheer desperation I began to march towards them up the beach, with slow, heavy steps, and waving my blown-out arms about, in a dignified manner. And inside of me I was singing as small as a tomtit.

“But there’s nothing like a striking appearance to help a man over a difficulty—I’ve found that before and since. People like ourselves, who’re up to diving-dresses by the time we’re seven, can scarcely imagine the effect of one on a simple-minded savage. One or two of these niggers cut and run, the others started in a great hurry trying to knock their brains out on the ground. And on I went as slow and solemn and silly-looking and artful as a jobbing plumber. It was evident they took me for something immense.

“Then up jumped one and began pointing, making extraordinary gestures to me as he did so, and all the others began sharing their attention between me and something out at sea. ‘What’s the matter now?’ I said. I turned slowly on account of my dignity, and there I saw, coming round a point, the poor old *Pride of Banya* towed by a couple of canoes. The sight fairly made me sick. But they evidently expected some recognition, so I waved my arms in a striking sort of non-committal manner. And then I turned and stalked on towards the trees again. At that time I was praying like mad, I remember, over and over again: ‘Lord help me through with it! Lord help me through with it!’ It’s only fools who know nothing of danger can afford to laugh at praying.

“But these niggers weren’t going to let me walk through and away like that. They started a kind of bowing dance about me, and sort of pressed me to take a pathway that lay through the trees. It was clear to me they didn’t take me for a British citizen, whatever else they thought of me, and for my own part I was never less anxious to own up to the old country.

“You’d hardly believe it, perhaps, unless you’re familiar with savages, but these poor, misguided, ignorant creatures took me straight to their kind

of joss place to present me to the blessed old black stone there. By this time I was beginning to sort of realise the depth of their ignorance, and directly I set eyes on this deity I took my cue. I started a baritone howl, ‘wow wow,’ very long on one note, and began waving my arms about a lot, and then very slowly and ceremoniously turned their image over on its side and sat down on it. I wanted to sit down badly, for diving dresses ain’t much wear in the tropics. Or, to put it different like, they’re a sight too much. It took away their breath, I could see, my sitting on their joss, but in less time than a minute they made up their minds and were hard at work worshipping me. And I can tell you I felt a bit relieved to see things turning out so well, in spite of the weight on my shoulders and feet.

“But what made me anxious was what the chaps in the canoes might think when they came back. If they’d seen me in the boat before I went down, and without the helmet on—for they might have been spying and hiding since over night—they would very likely take a different view from the others. I was in a deuce of a stew about that for hours, as it seemed, until the shindy of the arrival began.

“But they took it down—the whole blessed village took it down. At the cost of sitting up stiff and stern, as much like those sitting Egyptian images one sees as I could manage, for pretty nearly twelve hours, I should guess at least, on end, I got over it. You’d hardly think what it meant in that heat and stink. I don’t think any of them dreamt of the man inside. I was just a wonderful leathery great joss that had come up with luck out of the water. But the fatigue! the heat! the beastly closeness! the mackintoshiness and the rum! and the fuss! They lit a stinking fire on a kind of lava slab there was before me, and brought in a lot of gory muck—the worst parts of what they were feasting on outside, the Beasts—and burnt it all in my honour. I was getting a bit hungry, but I understand now how gods manage to do without eating, what with the smell of burnt offerings about them. And they brought in a lot of the stuff they’d got off the brig and, among other stuff, what I was a bit relieved to see, the kind of pneumatic pump that was used for the compressed air affair, and then a lot of chaps and girls came in and danced about me something disgraceful. It’s extraordinary the different ways different people have of showing respect. If I’d had a hatchet handy I’d have gone for the lot of them—they made me feel that wild. All this time I sat as stiff as company, not knowing anything better to do. And at last, when nightfall came, and the wattle joss-house place got a bit too shadowy for their taste—all these here savages are afraid of the dark, you know—and I started a sort of ‘Moo’ noise, they built big bonfires outside and left me

alone in peace in the darkness of my hut, free to unscrew my windows a bit and think things over, and feel just as bad as I liked. And Lord! I was sick.

“I was weak and hungry, and my mind kept on behaving like a beetle on a pin, tremendous activity and nothing done at the end of it. Come round just where it was before. There was sorrowing for the other chaps, beastly drunkards certainly, but not deserving such a fate, and young Sanders with the spear through his neck wouldn’t go out of my mind. There was the treasure down there in the *Ocean Pioneer*, and how one might get it and hide it somewhere safer, and get away and come back for it. And there was the puzzle where to get anything to eat. I tell you I was fair rambling. I was afraid to ask by signs for food, for fear of behaving too human, and so there I sat and hungered until very near the dawn. Then the village got a bit quiet, and I couldn’t stand it any longer, and I went out and got some stuff like artichokes in a bowl and some sour milk. What was left of these I put away among the other offerings, just to give them a hint of my tastes. And in the morning they came to worship, and found me sitting up stiff and respectable on their previous god, just as they’d left me overnight. I’d got my back against the central pillar of the hut, and, practically, I was asleep. And that’s how I became a god among the heathen—a false god, no doubt, and blasphemous, but one can’t always pick and choose.

“Now, I don’t want to crack myself up as a god beyond my merits, but I must confess that while I was god to these people they was extraordinary successful. I don’t say there’s anything in it, mind you. They won a battle with another tribe—I got a lot of offerings I didn’t want through it—they had wonderful fishing, and their crop of pourra was exceptional fine. And they counted the capture of the brig among the benefits I brought ’em. I must say I don’t think that was a poor record for a perfectly new hand. And, though perhaps you’d scarcely credit it, I was the tribal god of those beastly savages for pretty nearly four months. . . .

“What else could I do, man? But I didn’t wear that diving-dress all the time. I made ’em rig me up a sort of holy of holies, and a deuce of a time I had too making them understand what it was I wanted them to do. That indeed was the great difficulty—making them understand my wishes. I couldn’t let myself down by talking their lingo badly, even if I’d been able to speak at all, and I couldn’t go flapping a lot of gestures at them. So I drew pictures in sand and sat down beside them and hooted like one o’clock. Sometimes they did the things I wanted all right, and sometimes they did them all wrong. They was always very willing, certainly. All the while I was puzzling how I was to get the confounded business settled. Every night

before the dawn I used to march out in full rig and go off to a place where I could see the channel in which the *Ocean Pioneer* lay sunk, and once even, one moonlight night, I tried to walk out to her, but the weeds and rocks and dark clean beat me. I didn't get back till full day, and then I found all those silly niggers out on the beach praying their sea-god to return to them. I was that vexed and tired, messing and tumbling about, and coming up and going down again, I could have punched their silly heads all round when they started rejoicing. Hanged if I like so much ceremony.

“And then came the missionary. That missionary! *What a Guy! Gummy!* It was in the afternoon, and I was sitting in state in my outer temple place, sitting on the old black stone of theirs, when he came. I heard a row outside and jabbering, and then his voice speaking to an interpreter. ‘They worship stocks and stones,’ he said, and I knew what was up, in a flash. I had one of my windows out for comfort, and I sang out straight away on the spur of the moment. ‘Stocks and stones!’ I says. ‘You come inside,’ I says, ‘and I’ll punch your blooming Exeter Hall of a head.’

“There was a kind of silence and more jabbering, and in he came, Bible in hand, after the manner of them—a little sandy chap in specks and a pith helmet. I flatter myself that me sitting there in the shadows, with my copper head and my big goggles, struck him a bit of a heap at first. ‘Well,’ I says, ‘how’s the trade in scissors?’ for I don’t hold with missionaries.

“I had a lark with that missionary. He was a raw hand, and quite outclassed by a man like me. He gasped out who was I, and I told him to read the inscription at my feet if he wanted to know. There wasn’t no inscription; why should there be? but down he goes to read, and his interpreter, being of course as superstitious as any of them, more so by reason of his seeing missionary close to, took it for an act of worship and plumped down like a shot. All my people gave a howl of triumph, and there wasn’t any more business to be done in my village after that journey, not by the likes of him.

“But, of course, I was a fool to choke him off like that. If I’d had any sense I should have told him straight away of the treasure and taken him into Co. I’ve no doubt he’d have come into Co. A child, with a few hours to think it over, could have seen the connection between my diving dress and the loss of the *Ocean Pioneer*. A week after he left I went out one morning and saw the *Motherhood*, the salver’s ship from Starr Race, towing up the channel and sounding. The whole blessed game was up, and all my trouble thrown away. Gummy! How wild I felt! And guying it in that stinking silly dress! Four months!”

The sunburnt man's story degenerated again. "Think of it," he said, when he emerged to linguistic purity once more. "Forty thousand pounds' worth of gold."

"Did the little missionary come back?" I asked.

"Oh, yes! bless him! And he pledged his reputation there was a man inside the god, and started out to see as much with tremendous ceremony. But there wasn't—he got sold again. I always did hate scenes and explanations, and long before he came I was out of it all—going home to Banya along the coast, hiding in bushes by day, and thieving food from the villages by night. Only weapon, a spear. No clothes, no money. Nothing. My face, my fortune, as the saying is. And just a squeak of eight thousand pounds of gold—fifth share. But the natives cut up rusty, thank goodness, because they thought it was him had driven their luck away."



## MISS WINCHELSEA'S HEART

Miss Winchelsea was going to Rome. The matter had filled her mind for a month or more, and had overflowed so abundantly into her conversation that quite a number of people who were not going to Rome, and who were not likely to go to Rome, had made it a personal grievance against her. Some indeed had attempted quite unavailingly to convince her that Rome was not nearly such a desirable place as it was reported to be, and others had gone so far as to suggest behind her back that she was dreadfully "stuck up" about "that Rome of hers." And little Lily Hardhurst had told her friend Mr. Binns that so far as she was concerned Miss Winchelsea might "go to her old Rome and stop there; *she* (Miss Lily Hardhurst) wouldn't grieve." And the way in which Miss Winchelsea put herself upon terms of personal tenderness with Horace and Benvenuto Cellini and Raphael and Shelley and Keats—if she had been Shelley's widow she could not have professed a keener interest in his grave—was a matter of universal astonishment. Her dress was a triumph of tactful discretion, sensible, but not too "touristy"—Miss Winchelsea had a great dread of being "touristy"—and her Baedeker was carried in a cover of gray to hide its glaring red. She made a prim and pleasant little figure on the Charing Cross platform, in spite of her swelling pride, when at last the great day dawned, and she could start for Rome. The day was bright, the Channel passage would be pleasant, and all the omens promised well. There was the gayest sense of adventure in this unprecedented departure.

She was going with two friends who had been fellow-students with her at the training college, nice honest girls, both, though not so good at history and literature as Miss Winchelsea. They both looked up to her immensely, though physically they had to look down, and she anticipated some pleasant times to be spent in "stirring them up" to her own pitch of aesthetic and historical enthusiasm. They had secured seats already, and welcomed her effusively at the carriage door. In the instant criticism of the encounter she noted that Fanny had a slightly "touristy" leather strap, and that Helen had succumbed to a serge jacket with side pockets, into which her hands were thrust. But they were much too happy with themselves and the expedition for their friend to attempt any hint at the moment about these things. As soon as the first ecstasies were over—Fanny's enthusiasm was a little noisy and crude, and consisted mainly in emphatic repetitions of "Just *fancy!* we're going to Rome, my dear!—Rome!"—they gave their attention to their

fellow-travellers. Helen was anxious to secure a compartment to themselves, and, in order to discourage intruders, got out and planted herself firmly on the step. Miss Winchelsea peeped out over her shoulder, and made sly little remarks about the accumulating people on the platform, at which Fanny laughed gleefully.

They were travelling with one of Mr. Thomas Gunn's parties—fourteen days in Rome for fourteen pounds. They did not belong to the personally-conducted party, of course—Miss Winchelsea had seen to that—but they travelled with it because of the convenience of that arrangement. The people were the oddest mixture, and wonderfully amusing. There was a vociferous red-faced polyglot personal conductor in a pepper-and-salt suit, very long in the arms and legs and very active. He shouted proclamations. When he wanted to speak to people he stretched out an arm and held them until his purpose was accomplished. One hand was full of papers, tickets, counterfoils of tourists. The people of the personally-conducted party were, it seemed, of two sorts; people the conductor wanted and could not find, and people he did not want and who followed him in a steadily growing tail up and down the platform. These people seemed, indeed, to think that their one chance of reaching Rome lay in keeping close to him. Three little old ladies were particularly energetic in his pursuit, and at last maddened him to the pitch of clapping them into a carriage and daring them to emerge again. For the rest of the time, one, two, or three of their heads protruded from the window wailing inquiries about “a little wicker-work box” whenever he drew near. There was a very stout man with a very stout wife in shiny black; there was a little old man like an aged hostler.

“What *can* such people want in Rome?” asked Miss Winchelsea. “What can it mean to them?” There was a very tall curate in a very small straw hat, and a very short curate encumbered by a long camera stand. The contrast amused Fanny very much. Once they heard some one calling for “Snooks.” “I always thought that name was invented by novelists,” said Miss Winchelsea. “Fancy! Snooks. I wonder which *is* Mr. Snooks.” Finally they picked out a very stout and resolute little man in a large check suit. “If he isn't Snooks, he ought to be,” said Miss Winchelsea.

Presently the conductor discovered Helen's attempt at a corner in carriages. “Room for five,” he bawled with a parallel translation on his fingers. A party of four together—mother, father, and two daughters—blundered in, all greatly excited. “It's all right, Ma—you let me,” said one of the daughters, hitting her mother's bonnet with a handbag she struggled to put in the rack. Miss Winchelsea detested people who banged about and

called their mother “Ma.” A young man travelling alone followed. He was not at all “touristy” in his costume, Miss Winchelsea observed; his Gladstone bag was of good pleasant leather with labels reminiscent of Luxembourg and Ostend, and his boots, though brown, were not vulgar. He carried an overcoat on his arm. Before these people had properly settled in their places, came an inspection of tickets and a slamming of doors, and behold! they were gliding out of Charing Cross Station on their way to Rome.

“Fancy!” cried Fanny, “we are going to Rome, my dear! Rome! I don’t seem to believe it, even now.”

Miss Winchelsea suppressed Fanny’s emotions with a little smile, and the lady who was called “Ma” explained to people in general why they had “cut it so close” at the station. The two daughters called her “Ma” several times, toned her down in a tactless, effective way, and drove her at last to the muttered inventory of a basket of travelling requisites. Presently she looked up. “Lor!” she said, “I didn’t bring *them!*” Both the daughters said “Oh, Ma!” But what “them” was did not appear. Presently Fanny produced Hare’s *Walks in Rome*, a sort of mitigated guidebook very popular among Roman visitors; and the father of the two daughters began to examine his books of tickets minutely, apparently in a search after English words. When he had looked at the tickets for a long time right way up, he turned them upside down. Then he produced a fountain pen and dated them with considerable care. The young man having completed an unostentatious survey of his fellow-travellers produced a book and fell to reading. When Helen and Fanny were looking out of the window at Chislehurst—the place interested Fanny because the poor dear Empress of the French used to live there—Miss Winchelsea took the opportunity to observe the book the young man held. It was not a guidebook but a little thin volume of poetry—*bound*. She glanced at his face—it seemed a refined, pleasant face to her hasty glance. He wore a little gilt *pince-nez*. “Do you think she lives there now?” said Fanny, and Miss Winchelsea’s inspection came to an end.

For the rest of the journey Miss Winchelsea talked little, and what she said was as agreeable and as stamped with refinement as she could make it. Her voice was always low and clear and pleasant, and she took care that on this occasion it was particularly low and clear and pleasant. As they came under the white cliffs the young man put his book of poetry away, and when at last the train stopped beside the boat, he displayed a graceful alacrity with the impedimenta of Miss Winchelsea and her friends. Miss Winchelsea “hated nonsense,” but she was pleased to see the young man perceived at

once that they were ladies, and helped them without any violent geniality; and how nicely he showed that his civilities were to be no excuse for further intrusions. None of her little party had been out of England before, and they were all excited and a little nervous at the Channel passage. They stood in a little group in a good place near the middle of the boat—the young man had taken Miss Winchelsea’s carry-all there and had told her it was a good place—and they watched the white shores of Albion recede and quoted Shakespeare and made quiet fun of their fellow-travellers in the English way.

They were particularly amused at the precautions the bigger-sized people had taken against the little waves—cut lemons and flasks prevailed, one lady lay full length in a deck chair with a handkerchief over her face, and a very broad resolute man in a bright brown “touristy” suit walked all the way from England to France along the deck, with his legs as widely apart as Providence permitted. These were all excellent precautions, and nobody was ill. The personally-conducted party pursued the conductor about the deck with inquiries, in a manner that suggested to Helen’s mind the rather vulgar image of hens with a piece of bacon rind, until at last he went into hiding below. And the young man with the thin volume of poetry stood at the stern watching England receding, looking rather lonely and sad to Miss Winchelsea’s eye.

And then came Calais and tumultuous novelties, and the young man had not forgotten Miss Winchelsea’s hold-all and the other little things. All three girls, though they had passed Government examinations in French to any extent, were stricken with a dumb shame of their accents, and the young man was very useful. And he did not intrude. He put them in a comfortable carriage and raised his hat and went away. Miss Winchelsea thanked him in her best manner—a pleasing, cultivated manner—and Fanny said he was “nice” almost before he was out of earshot. “I wonder what he can be,” said Helen. “He’s going to Italy, because I noticed green tickets in his book.” Miss Winchelsea almost told them of the poetry, and decided not to do so. And presently the carriage windows seized hold upon them and the young man was forgotten. It made them feel that they were doing an educated sort of thing to travel through a country whose commonest advertisements were in idiomatic French, and Miss Winchelsea made unpatriotic comparisons because there were weedy little sign-board advertisements by the rail side instead of the broad hoardings that deface the landscape in our land. But the north of France is really uninteresting country, and after a time Fanny reverted to Hare’s *Walks*, and Helen initiated lunch. Miss Winchelsea awoke out of a happy reverie; she had been trying to realise, she said, that she was

actually going to Rome, but she perceived at Helen's suggestion that she was hungry, and they lunched out of their baskets very cheerfully. In the afternoon they were tired and silent until Helen made tea. Miss Winchelsea might have dozed, only she knew Fanny slept with her mouth open; and as their fellow-passengers were two rather nice, critical-looking ladies of uncertain age—who knew French well enough to talk it—she employed herself in keeping Fanny awake. The rhythm of the train became insistent, and the streaming landscape outside became at last quite painful to the eye. They were already dreadfully tired of travelling before their night's stoppage came.

The stoppage for the night was brightened by the appearance of the young man, and his manners were all that could be desired and his French quite serviceable. His coupons availed for the same hotel as theirs, and by chance, as it seemed, he sat next to Miss Winchelsea at the *table d'hôte*. In spite of her enthusiasm for Rome, she had thought out some such possibility very thoroughly, and when he ventured to make a remark upon the tediousness of travelling—he let the soup and fish go by before he did this—she did not simply assent to his proposition, but responded with another. They were soon comparing their journeys, and Helen and Fanny were cruelly overlooked in the conversation. It was to be the same journey, they found; one day for the galleries at Florence—"from what I hear," said the young man, "it is barely enough,"—and the rest at Rome. He talked of Rome very pleasantly; he was evidently quite well read, and he quoted Horace about Soracte. Miss Winchelsea had "done" that book of Horace for her matriculation, and was delighted to cap his quotation. It gave a sort of tone to things, this incident—a touch of refinement to mere chatting. Fanny expressed a few emotions, and Helen interpolated a few sensible remarks, but the bulk of the talk on the girls' side naturally fell to Miss Winchelsea.

Before they reached Rome this young man was tacitly of their party. They did not know his name nor what he was, but it seemed he taught, and Miss Winchelsea had a shrewd idea he was an extension lecturer. At any rate he was something of that sort, something gentlemanly and refined without being opulent and impossible. She tried once or twice to ascertain whether he came from Oxford or Cambridge, but he missed her timid opportunities. She tried to get him to make remarks about those places to see if he would say "come up" to them instead of "go down,"—she knew that was how you told a 'Varsity man. He used the word "'Varsity"—not university—in quite the proper way.

They saw as much of Mr. Ruskin's Florence as the brief time permitted; he met them in the Pitti Gallery and went round with them, chatting brightly, and evidently very grateful for their recognition. He knew a great deal about art, and all four enjoyed the morning immensely. It was fine to go round recognising old favourites and finding new beauties, especially while so many people fumbled helplessly with Baedeker. Nor was he a bit of a prig, Miss Winchelsea said, and indeed she detested prigs. He had a distinct undertone of humour, and was funny, for example, without being vulgar, at the expense of the quaint work of Beato Angelico. He had a grave seriousness beneath it all, and was quick to seize the moral lessons of the pictures. Fanny went softly among these masterpieces; she admitted "she knew so little about them," and she confessed that to her they were "all beautiful." Fanny's "beautiful" inclined to be a little monotonous, Miss Winchelsea thought. She had been quite glad when the last sunny Alp had vanished, because of the staccato of Fanny's admiration. Helen said little, but Miss Winchelsea had found her a trifle wanting on the aesthetic side in the old days and was not surprised; sometimes she laughed at the young man's hesitating delicate little jests, and sometimes she seemed quite lost to the art about them in the contemplation of the dresses of the other visitors.

At Rome the young man was with them intermittently. A rather "touristy" friend of his took him away at times. He complained comically to Miss Winchelsea. "I have only two short weeks in Rome," he said, "and my friend Leonard wants to spend a whole day at Tivoli looking at a waterfall."

"What is your friend Leonard?" asked Miss Winchelsea abruptly.

"He's the most enthusiastic pedestrian I ever met," the young man replied—amusingly, but a little unsatisfactorily, Miss Winchelsea thought.

They had some glorious times, and Fanny could not think what they would have done without him. Miss Winchelsea's interest and Fanny's enormous capacity for admiration were insatiable. They never flagged—through pictures and sculpture galleries, immense crowded churches, ruins and museums, Judas trees and prickly pears, wine carts and palaces, they admired their way unflinchingly. They never saw a stone pine or a eucalyptus but they named and admired it; they never glimpsed Soracte but they exclaimed. Their common ways were made wonderful by imaginative play. "Here Caesar may have walked," they would say. "Raphael may have seen Soracte from this very point." They happened on the tomb of Bibulus. "Old Bibulus," said the young man. "The oldest monument of Republican Rome!" said Miss Winchelsea.

“I’m dreadfully stupid,” said Fanny, “but who *was* Bibulus?”

There was a curious little pause.

“Wasn’t he the person who built the wall?” said Helen.

The young man glanced quickly at her and laughed. “That was Balbus,” he said. Helen reddened, but neither he nor Miss Winchelsea threw any light upon Fanny’s ignorance about Bibulus.

Helen was more taciturn than the other three, but then she was always taciturn, and usually she took care of the tram tickets and things like that, or kept her eye on them if the young man took them, and told him where they were when he wanted them. Glorious times they had, these young people, in that pale brown cleanly city of memories that was once the world. Their only sorrow was the shortness of the time. They said indeed that the electric trams and the ’70 buildings, and that criminal advertisement that glares upon the Forum, outraged their aesthetic feelings unspeakably; but that was only part of the fun. And indeed Rome is such a wonderful place that it made Miss Winchelsea forget some of her most carefully prepared enthusiasms at times, and Helen, taken unawares, would suddenly admit the beauty of unexpected things. Yet Fanny and Helen would have liked a shop window or so in the English quarter if Miss Winchelsea’s uncompromising hostility to all other English visitors had not rendered that district impossible.

The intellectual and aesthetic fellowship of Miss Winchelsea and the scholarly young man passed insensibly towards a deeper feeling. The exuberant Fanny did her best to keep pace with their recondite admiration by playing her “beautiful” with vigour, and saying “Oh! *let’s* go,” with enormous appetite whenever a new place of interest was mentioned. But Helen developed a certain want of sympathy towards the end that disappointed Miss Winchelsea a little. She refused to see “anything” in the face of Beatrice Cenci—Shelley’s Beatrice Cenci!—in the Barberini Gallery; and one day, when they were deploring the electric trams, she said rather snappishly that “people must get about somehow, and it’s better than torturing horses up these horrid little hills.” She spoke of the Seven Hills of Rome as “horrid little hills!”

And the day they went on the Palatine—though Miss Winchelsea did not know this—she remarked suddenly to Fanny, “Don’t hurry like that, my dear; *they* don’t want us to overtake them. And we don’t say the right things for them when we *do* get near.”

“I wasn’t trying to overtake them,” said Fanny, slackening her excessive pace; “I wasn’t indeed.” And for a minute she was short of breath.

But Miss Winchelsea had come upon happiness. It was only when she came to look back across an intervening tragedy that she quite realised how happy she had been pacing among the cypress shadowed ruins and exchanging the very highest class of information the human mind can possess, the most refined impressions it is possible to convey. Insensibly emotion crept into their intercourse, sunning itself openly and pleasantly at last when Helen’s modernity was not too near. Insensibly their interest drifted from the wonderful associations about them to their more intimate and personal feelings. In a tentative way information was supplied; she spoke allusively of her school, of her examination successes, of her gladness that the days of “Cram” were over. He made it quite clear that he also was a teacher. They spoke of the greatness of their calling, of the necessity of sympathy to face its irksome details, of a certain loneliness they sometimes felt.

That was in the Colosseum, and it was as far as they got that day, because Helen returned with Fanny—she had taken her into the upper galleries. Yet the private dreams of Miss Winchelsea, already vivid and concrete enough, became now realistic in the highest degree. She figured that pleasant young man lecturing in the most edifying way to his students, herself modestly prominent as his intellectual mate and helper; she figured a refined little home, with two bureaus, with white shelves of high-class books, and autotypes of the pictures of Rossetti and Burne Jones, with Morris’s wall-papers and flowers in pots of beaten copper. Indeed she figured many things. On the Pincio the two had a few precious moments together, while Helen marched Fanny off to see the *muro Torto*, and he spoke at once plainly. He said he hoped their friendship was only beginning, that he already found her company very precious to him, that indeed it was more than that.

He became nervous, thrusting at his glasses with trembling fingers as though he fancied his emotions made them unstable. “I should, of course,” he said, “tell you things about myself. I know it is rather unusual my speaking to you like this. Only our meeting has been so accidental—or providential—and I am snatching at things. I came to Rome expecting a lonely tour . . . and I have been so very happy, so very happy. Quite recently I have found myself in a position—I have dared to think—— And——”

He glanced over his shoulder and stopped. He said “Demn!” quite distinctly—and she did not condemn him for that manly lapse into profanity.



She looked and saw his friend Leonard advancing. He drew nearer; he raised his hat to Miss Winchelsea, and his smile was almost a grin. "I've been looking for you everywhere, Snooks," he said. "You promised to be on the Piazza steps half an hour ago."

Snooks! The name struck Miss Winchelsea like a blow in the face. She did not hear his reply. She thought afterwards that Leonard must have considered her the vaguest-minded person. To this day she is not sure whether she was introduced to Leonard or not, nor what she said to him. A sort of mental paralysis was upon her. Of all offensive surnames—Snooks!

Helen and Fanny were returning, there were civilities, and the young men were receding. By a great effort she controlled herself to face the inquiring eyes of her friends. All that afternoon she lived the life of a heroine under the indescribable outrage of that name, chatting, observing, with "Snooks" gnawing at her heart. From the moment that it first rang upon her ears, the dream of her happiness was prostrate in the dust. All the refinement she had figured was ruined and defaced by that cognomen's unavoidable vulgarity.

What was that refined little home to her now, spite of autotypes, Morris papers, and bureaus? Athwart it in letters of fire ran an incredible inscription: "Mrs. Snooks." That may seem a little thing to the reader, but consider the delicate refinement of Miss Winchelsea's mind. Be as refined as you can and then think of writing yourself down:—"Snooks." She conceived herself being addressed as Mrs. Snooks by all the people she liked least, conceived the patronymic touched with a vague quality of insult. She figured a card of gray and silver bearing "Winchelsea" triumphantly effaced by an arrow, Cupid's arrow, in favour of "Snooks." Degrading confession of feminine weakness! She imagined the terrible rejoicings of certain girl friends, of certain grocer cousins from whom her growing refinement had long since estranged her. How they would make it sprawl across the envelope that would bring their sarcastic congratulations. Would even his pleasant company compensate her for that? "It is impossible," she muttered; "impossible! *Snooks!*"

She was sorry for him, but not so sorry as she was for herself. For him she had a touch of indignation. To be so nice, so refined, while all the time he was "Snooks," to hide under a pretentious gentility of demeanour the badge sinister of his surname seemed a sort of treachery. To put it in the language of sentimental science she felt he had "led her on."

There were, of course, moments of terrible vacillation, a period even when something almost like passion bid her throw refinement to the winds. And there was something in her, an unexpurgated vestige of vulgarity that made a strenuous attempt at proving that Snooks was not so very bad a name after all. Any hovering hesitation flew before Fanny's manner, when Fanny came with an air of catastrophe to tell that she also knew the horror. Fanny's voice fell to a whisper when she said *Snooks*. Miss Winchelsea would not give him any answer when at last, in the Borghese, she could have a minute with him; but she promised him a note.

She handed him that note in the little book of poetry he had lent her, the little book that had first drawn them together. Her refusal was ambiguous, allusive. She could no more tell him why she rejected him than she could have told a cripple of his hump. He, too, must feel something of the unspeakable quality of his name. Indeed he had avoided a dozen chances of telling it, she now perceived. So she spoke of "obstacles she could not reveal"—"reasons why the thing he spoke of was impossible." She addressed the note with a shiver, "E. K. Snooks."

Things were worse than she had dreaded; he asked her to explain. How *could* she explain? Those last two days in Rome were dreadful. She was haunted by his air of astonished perplexity. She knew she had given him intimate hopes, she had not the courage to examine her mind thoroughly for the extent of her encouragement. She knew he must think her the most changeable of beings. Now that she was in full retreat, she would not even perceive his hints of a possible correspondence. But in that matter he did a thing that seemed to her at once delicate and romantic. He made a go-between of Fanny. Fanny could not keep the secret, and came and told her that night under a transparent pretext of needed advice. "Mr. Snooks," said Fanny, "wants to write to me. Fancy! I had no idea. But should I let him?" They talked it over long and earnestly, and Miss Winchelsea was careful to keep the veil over her heart. She was already repenting his disregarded hints. Why should she not hear of him sometimes—painful though his name must be to her? Miss Winchelsea decided it might be permitted, and Fanny kissed her good-night with unusual emotion. After she had gone Miss Winchelsea sat for a long time at the window of her little room. It was moonlight, and down the street a man sang "Santa Lucia" with almost heart-dissolving tenderness. . . . She sat very still.

She breathed a word very softly to herself. The word was "*Snooks*." Then she got up with a profound sigh, and went to bed. The next morning he said to her meaningly, "I shall hear of you through your friend."

Mr. Snooks saw them off from Rome with that pathetic interrogative perplexity still on his face, and if it had not been for Helen he would have retained Miss Winchelsea's hold-all in his hand as a sort of encyclopaedic keepsake. On their way back to England Miss Winchelsea, on six separate occasions, made Fanny promise to write to her the longest of long letters. Fanny, it seemed, would be quite near Mr. Snooks. Her new school—she was always going to new schools—would be only five miles from Steely Bank, and it was in the Steely Bank Polytechnic, and one or two first-class schools, that Mr. Snooks did his teaching. He might even see her at times. They could not talk much of him—she and Fanny always spoke of “him,” never of Mr. Snooks—because Helen was apt to say unsympathetic things about him. Her nature had coarsened very much, Miss Winchelsea perceived, since the old Training College days; she had become hard and cynical. She thought he had a weak face, mistaking refinement for weakness as people of her stamp are apt to do, and when she heard his name was Snooks, she said she had expected something of the sort. Miss Winchelsea was careful to spare her own feelings after that, but Fanny was less circumspect.

The girls parted in London, and Miss Winchelsea returned, with a new interest in life, to the Girls' High School in which she had been an increasingly valuable assistant for the last three years. Her new interest in life was Fanny as a correspondent, and to give her a lead she wrote her a lengthy descriptive letter within a fortnight of her return. Fanny answered, very disappointingly. Fanny indeed had no literary gift, but it was new to Miss Winchelsea to find herself deploring the want of gifts in a friend. That letter was even criticised aloud in the safe solitude of Miss Winchelsea's study, and her criticism, spoken with great bitterness, was “Twaddle!” It was full of just the things Miss Winchelsea's letter had been full of, particulars of the school. And of Mr. Snooks, only this much: “I have had a letter from Mr. Snooks, and he has been over to see me on two Saturday afternoons running. He talked about Rome and you; we both talked about you. Yours ears must have burnt, my dear. . . .”

Miss Winchelsea repressed a desire to demand more explicit information, and wrote the sweetest, long letter again. “Tell me all about yourself, dear. That journey has quite refreshed our ancient friendship, and I do so want to keep in touch with you.” About Mr. Snooks she simply wrote on the fifth page that she was glad Fanny had seen him, and that if he *should* ask after her, she was to be remembered to him *very kindly* (underlined). And Fanny replied most obtusely in the key of that “ancient friendship,”

reminding Miss Winchelsea of a dozen foolish things of those old school-girl days at the Training College, and saying not a word about Mr. Snooks!

For nearly a week Miss Winchelsea was so angry at the failure of Fanny as a go-between that she could not write to her. And then she wrote less effusively, and in her letter she asked point-blank, "Have you seen Mr. Snooks?" Fanny's letter was unexpectedly satisfactory. "I *have* seen Mr. Snooks," she wrote, and having once named him she kept on about him; it was all Snooks—Snooks this and Snooks that. He was to give a public lecture, said Fanny, among other things. Yet Miss Winchelsea, after the first glow of gratification, still found this letter a little unsatisfactory. Fanny did not report Mr. Snooks as saying anything about Miss Winchelsea, nor as looking a little white and worn, as he ought to have been doing. And behold! before she had replied, came a second letter from Fanny on the same theme, quite a gushing letter, and covering six sheets with her loose feminine hand.

And about this second letter was a rather odd little thing that Miss Winchelsea only noticed as she re-read it the third time. Fanny's natural femininity had prevailed even against the round and clear traditions of the Training College; she was one of those she-creatures born to make all her *m*'s and *n*'s and *u*'s and *r*'s and *e*'s alike, and to leave her *o*'s and *a*'s open and her *i*'s undotted. So that it was only after an elaborate comparison of word with word that Miss Winchelsea felt assured Mr. Snooks was not really "Mr. Snooks" at all! In Fanny's first letter of gush he was Mr. "Snooks," in her second the spelling was changed to Mr. "Senoks." Miss Winchelsea's hand positively trembled as she turned the sheet over—it meant so much to her. For it had already begun to seem to her that even the name of Mrs. Snooks might be avoided at too great a price, and suddenly—this possibility! She turned over the six sheets, all dappled with that critical name, and everywhere the first letter had the form of an *e*! For a time she walked the room with a hand pressed upon her heart.

She spent a whole day pondering this change, weighing a letter of inquiry that should be at once discreet and effectual; weighing, too, what action she should take after the answer came. She was resolved that if this altered spelling was anything more than a quaint fancy of Fanny's, she would write forthwith to Mr. Snooks. She had now reached a stage when the minor refinements of behaviour disappear. Her excuse remained uninvented, but she had the subject of her letter clear in her mind, even to the hint that "circumstances in my life have changed very greatly since we talked together." But she never gave that hint. There came a third letter from that

fitful correspondent Fanny. The first line proclaimed her “the happiest girl alive.”

Miss Winchelsea crushed the letter in her hand—the rest unread—and sat with her face suddenly very still. She had received it just before morning school, and had opened it when the junior mathematicians were well under way. Presently she resumed reading with an appearance of great calm. But after the first sheet she went on reading the third without discovering the error:—“told him frankly I did not like his name,” the third sheet began. “He told me he did not like it himself—you know that sort of sudden, frank way he has”—Miss Winchelsea did know. “So I said, ‘couldn’t you change it?’ He didn’t see it at first. Well, you know, dear, he had told me what it really meant; it means Sevenoaks, only it has got down to Snooks—both Snooks and Noaks, dreadfully vulgar surnames though they be, are really worn forms of Sevenoaks. So I said—even I have my bright ideas at times—‘If it got down from Sevenoaks to Snooks, why not get it back from Snooks to Sevenoaks?’ And the long and short of it is, dear, he couldn’t refuse me, and he changed his spelling there and then to Senoks for the bills of the new lecture. And afterwards, when we are married, we shall put in the apostrophe and make it Se’noks. Wasn’t it kind of him to mind that fancy of mine, when many men would have taken offence? But it is just like him all over; he is as kind as he is clever. Because he knew as well as I did that I would have had him in spite of it, had he been ten times Snooks. But he did it all the same.”

The class was startled by the sound of paper being viciously torn, and looked up to see Miss Winchelsea white in the face and with some very small pieces of paper clenched in one hand. For a few seconds they stared at her stare, and then her expression changed back to a more familiar one. “Has any one finished number three?” she asked in an even tone. She remained calm after that. But impositions ruled high that day. And she spent two laborious evenings writing letters of various sorts to Fanny, before she found a decent congratulatory vein. Her reason struggled hopelessly against the persuasion that Fanny had behaved in an exceedingly treacherous manner.

One may be extremely refined and still capable of a very sore heart. Certainly Miss Winchelsea’s heart was very sore. She had moods of sexual hostility, in which she generalised uncharitably about mankind. “He forgot himself with me,” she said. “But Fanny is pink and pretty and soft and a fool—a very excellent match for a Man.” And by way of a wedding present she sent Fanny a gracefully bound volume of poetry by George Meredith, and Fanny wrote back a grossly happy letter to say that it was “*all* beautiful.” Miss Winchelsea hoped that some day Mr. Senoks might take up that slim

book and think for a moment of the donor. Fanny wrote several times before and about her marriage, pursuing that fond legend of their “ancient friendship,” and giving her happiness in the fullest detail. And Miss Winchelsea wrote to Helen for the first time after the Roman journey, saying nothing about the marriage, but expressing very cordial feelings.

They had been in Rome at Easter, and Fanny was married in the August vacation. She wrote a garrulous letter to Miss Winchelsea, describing her home-coming and the astonishing arrangements of their “teeny, weeny” little house. Mr. Se’noks was now beginning to assume a refinement in Miss Winchelsea’s memory out of all proportion to the facts of the case, and she tried in vain to imagine his cultured greatness in a “teeny weeny” little house. “Am busy enamelling a cosy corner,” said Fanny, sprawling to the end of her third sheet, “so excuse more.” Miss Winchelsea answered in her best style, gently poking fun at Fanny’s arrangements, and hoping intensely that Mr. Se’noks might see the letter. Only this hope enabled her to write at all, answering not only that letter but one in November and one at Christmas.

The two latter communications contained urgent invitations for her to come to Steely Bank on a visit during the Christmas holidays. She tried to think that *he* had told her to ask that, but it was too much like Fanny’s opulent good-nature. She could not but believe that he must be sick of his blunder by this time; and she had more than a hope that he would presently write her a letter beginning “Dear Friend.” Something subtly tragic in the separation was a great support to her, a sad misunderstanding. To have been jilted would have been intolerable. But he never wrote that letter beginning “Dear Friend.”

For two years Miss Winchelsea could not go to see her friends, in spite of the reiterated invitations of Mrs. Sevenoaks—it became full Sevenoaks in the second year. Then one day near the Easter rest she felt lonely and without a soul to understand her in the world, and her mind ran once more on what is called Platonic friendship. Fanny was clearly happy and busy in her new sphere of domesticity, but no doubt *he* had his lonely hours. Did he ever think of those days in Rome, gone now beyond recalling? No one had understood her as he had done; no one in all the world. It would be a sort of melancholy pleasure to talk to him again, and what harm could it do? Why should she deny herself? That night she wrote a sonnet, all but the last two lines of the octave—which would not come; and the next day she composed a graceful little note to tell Fanny she was coming down.

And so she saw him again.

Even at the first encounter it was evident he had changed; he seemed stouter and less nervous, and it speedily appeared that his conversation had already lost much of its old delicacy. There even seemed a justification for Helen's description of weakness in his face—in certain lights it *was* weak. He seemed busy and preoccupied about his affairs, and almost under the impression that Miss Winchelsea had come for the sake of Fanny. He discussed his dinner with Fanny in an intelligent way. They only had one good long talk together, and that came to nothing. He did not refer to Rome, and spent some time abusing a man who had stolen an idea he had had for a text-book. It did not seem a very wonderful idea to Miss Winchelsea. She discovered he had forgotten the names of more than half the painters whose work they had rejoiced over in Florence.

It was a sadly disappointing week, and Miss Winchelsea was glad when it came to an end. Under various excuses she avoided visiting them again. After a time the visitor's room was occupied by their two little boys, and Fanny's invitations ceased. The intimacy of her letters had long since faded away.

## FILMER

In truth the mastery of flying was the work of thousands of men—this man a suggestion and that an experiment, until at last only one vigorous intellectual effort was needed to finish the work. But the inexorable injustice of the popular mind has decided that of all these thousands, one man, and that a man who never flew, should be chosen as the discoverer, just as it has chosen to honour Watt as the discoverer of steam and Stephenson of the steam-engine. And surely of all honoured names none is so grotesquely and tragically honoured as poor Filmer's, the timid, intellectual creature who solved the problem over which the world had hung perplexed and a little fearful for so many generations, the man who pressed the button that has changed peace and warfare and wellnigh every condition of human life and happiness. Never has that recurring wonder of the littleness of the scientific man in the face of the greatness of his science found such an amazing exemplification. Much concerning Filmer is, and must remain, profoundly obscure—Filmers attract no Boswells—but the essential facts and the concluding scene are clear enough, and there are letters, and notes, and casual allusions to piece the whole together. And this is the story one makes, putting this thing with that, of Filmer's life and death.

The first authentic trace of Filmer on the page of history is a document in which he applies for admission as a paid student in physics to the Government laboratories at South Kensington, and therein he describes himself as the son of a "military bootmaker" ("cobbler" in the vulgar tongue) of Dover, and lists his various examination proofs of a high proficiency in chemistry and mathematics. With a certain want of dignity he seeks to enhance these attainments by a profession of poverty and disadvantages, and he writes of the laboratory as the "goal" of his ambitions, a slip which reinforces his claim to have devoted himself exclusively to the exact sciences. The document is endorsed in a manner that shows Filmer was admitted to this coveted opportunity; but until quite recently no traces of his success in the Government institution could be found.

It has now, however, been shown that in spite of his professed zeal for research, Filmer, before he had held this scholarship a year, was tempted by the possibility of a small increase in his immediate income, to abandon it in order to become one of the ninepence-an-hour computers employed by a well-known Professor in his vicarious conduct of those extensive researches of his in solar physics—researches which are still a matter of perplexity to



astronomers. Afterwards, for the space of seven years, save for the pass lists of the London University, in which he is seen to climb slowly to a double first-class B.Sc., in mathematics and chemistry, there is no evidence of how Filmer passed his life. No one knows how or where he lived, though it seems highly probable that he continued to support himself by teaching while he prosecuted the studies necessary for this distinction. And then, oddly enough, one finds him mentioned in the correspondence of Arthur Hicks, the poet.

“You remember Filmer,” Hicks writes to his friend Vance; “well, *he* hasn’t altered a bit, the same hostile mumble and the nasty chin—how *can* a man contrive to be always three days from shaving?—and a sort of furtive air of being engaged in sneaking in front of one; even his coat and that frayed collar of his show no further signs of the passing of years. He was writing in the library and I sat down beside him in the name of God’s charity, whereupon he deliberately insulted me by covering up his memoranda. It seems he has some brilliant research on hand that he suspects me of all people—with a Bodley Booklet a-printing!—of stealing. He has taken remarkable honours at the University—he went through them with a sort of hasty slobber, as though he feared I might interrupt him before he had told me all—and he spoke of taking his D.Sc. as one might speak of taking a cab. And he asked what I was doing—with a sort of comparative accent, and his arm was spread nervously, positively a protecting arm, over the paper that hid the precious idea—his one hopeful idea.

“‘Poetry,’ he said, ‘poetry. And what do you profess to teach in it, Hicks?’

“The thing’s a provincial professorling in the very act of budding, and I thank the Lord devoutly that but for the precious gift of indolence I also might have gone this way to D.Sc. and destruction . . .”

A curious little vignette that I am inclined to think caught Filmer in or near the very birth of his discovery.

Hicks was wrong in anticipating a provincial professorship for Filmer. Out next glimpse of him is lecturing on “rubber and rubber substitutes,” to the Society of Arts—he had become manager to a great plastic-substance manufactory—and at that time, it is now known, he was a member of the Aeronautical Society, albeit he contributed nothing to the discussions of that body, preferring no doubt to mature his great conception without external assistance. And within two years of that paper before the Society of Arts he was hastily taking out a number of patents and proclaiming in various

undignified ways the completion of the divergent inquiries which made his flying machine possible. The first definite statement to that effect appeared in a halfpenny evening paper through the agency of a man who lodged in the same house with Filmer. His final haste after his long laborious secret patience seems to have been due to a needless panic, Bootle, the notorious American scientific quack, having made an announcement that Filmer interpreted wrongly as an anticipation of his idea.

Now what precisely was Filmer's idea? Really a very simple one. Before his time the pursuit of aeronautics had taken two divergent lines, and had developed on the one hand balloons—large apparatus lighter than air, easy in ascent, and comparatively safe in descent, but floating helplessly before any breeze that took them; and on the other, flying machines that flew only in theory—vast flat structures heavier than air, propelled and kept up by heavy engines and for the most part smashing at the first descent. But, neglecting the fact that the inevitable final collapse rendered them impossible, the weight of the flying machines gave them this theoretical advantage, that they could go through the air against a wind, a necessary condition if aerial navigation was to have any practical value. It is Filmer's particular merit that he perceived the way in which the contrasted and hitherto incompatible merits of balloon and heavy flying machine might be combined in one apparatus, which should be at choice either heavier or lighter than air. He took hints from the contractile bladders of fish and the pneumatic cavities of birds. He devised an arrangement of contractile and absolutely close balloons which when expanded could lift the actual flying apparatus with ease, and when retracted by the complicated "musculature" he wove about them, were withdrawn almost completely into the frame; and he built the large framework which these balloons sustained, of hollow, rigid tubes, the air in which, by an ingenious contrivance, was automatically pumped out as the apparatus fell, and which then remained exhausted so long as the aeronaut desired. There were no wings or propellers to his machine, such as there had been to all previous aeroplanes, and the only engine required was the compact and powerful little appliance needed to contract the balloons. He perceived that such an apparatus as he had devised might rise with frame exhausted and balloons expanded to a considerable height, might then contract its balloons and let the air into its frame, and by an adjustment of its weights slide down the air in any desired direction. As it fell it would accumulate velocity and at the same time lose weight, and the momentum accumulated by its down-rush could be utilised by means of a shifting of its weights to drive it up in the air again as the balloons expanded. This conception, which is still the structural conception of all

successful flying machines, needed, however, a vast amount of toil upon its details before it could actually be realised, and such toil Filmer—as he was accustomed to tell the numerous interviewers who crowded upon him in the heyday of his fame—“ungrudgingly and unsparingly gave.” His particular difficulty was the elastic lining of the contractile balloon. He found he needed a new substance, and in the discovery and manufacture of the new substance he had, as he never failed to impress upon the interviewers, “performed a far more arduous work than even in the actual achievement of my seemingly greater discovery.”

But it must not be imagined that these interviews followed hard upon Filmer’s proclamation of his invention. An interval of nearly five years elapsed during which he timidly remained at his rubber factory—he seems to have been entirely dependent on his small income from this source—making misdirected attempts to assure a quite indifferent public that he really *had* invented what he had invented. He occupied the greater part of his leisure in the composition of letters to the scientific and daily press, and so forth, stating precisely the net result of his contrivances, and demanding financial aid. That alone would have sufficed for the suppression of his letters. He spent such holidays as he could arrange in unsatisfactory interviews with the door-keepers of leading London papers—he was singularly not adapted for inspiring hall-porters with confidence—and he positively attempted to induce the War Office to take up his work with him. There remains a confidential letter from Major-General Volleyfire to the Earl of Frogs. “The man’s a crank and a bounder to boot,” says the Major-General in his bluff, sensible, army way, and so left it open for the Japanese to secure, as they subsequently did, the priority in this side of warfare—a priority they still to our great discomfort retain.

And then by a stroke of luck the membrane Filmer had invented for his contractile balloon was discovered to be useful for the valves of a new oil-engine, and he obtained the means for making a trial model of his invention. He threw up his rubber factory appointment, desisted from all further writing, and, with a certain secrecy that seems to have been an inseparable characteristic of all his proceedings, set to work upon the apparatus. He seems to have directed the making of its parts and collected most of it in a room in Shoreditch, but its final putting together was done at Dymchurch, in Kent. He did not make the affair large enough to carry a man, but he made an extremely ingenious use of what were then called the Marconi rays to control its flight. The first flight of this first practicable flying machine took place over some fields near Burford Bridge, near Hythe, in Kent, and Filmer

followed and controlled its flight upon a specially constructed motor tricycle.

The flight was, considering all things, an amazing success. The apparatus was brought in a cart from Dymchurch to Burford Bridge, ascended there to a height of nearly three hundred feet, swooped thence very nearly back to Dymchurch, came about in its sweep, rose again, circled, and finally sank uninjured in a field behind the Burford Bridge Inn. At its descent a curious thing happened. Filmer got off his tricycle, scrambled over the intervening dyke, advanced perhaps twenty yards towards his triumph, threw out his arms in a strange gesticulation, and fell down in a dead faint. Every one could then recall the ghastliness of his features and all the evidences of extreme excitement they had observed throughout the trial, things they might otherwise have forgotten. Afterwards in the inn he had an unaccountable gust of hysterical weeping.

Altogether there were not twenty witnesses of this affair, and those for the most part uneducated men. The New Romney doctor saw the ascent but not the descent, his horse being frightened by the electrical apparatus on Filmer's tricycle and giving him a nasty spill. Two members of the Kent constabulary watched the affair from a cart in an unofficial spirit, and a grocer calling round the Marsh for orders and two lady cyclists seem almost to complete the list of educated people. There were two reporters present, one representing a Folkestone paper and the other being a fourth-class interviewer and "symposium" journalist, whose expenses down, Filmer, anxious as ever for adequate advertisement—and now quite realising the way in which adequate advertisement may be obtained—had paid. The latter was one of those writers who can throw a convincing air of unreality over the most credible events, and his half-facetious account of the affair appeared in the magazine page of a popular journal. But, happily for Filmer, this person's colloquial methods were more convincing. He went to offer some further screed upon the subject to Banghurst, the proprietor of the *New Paper*, and one of the ablest and most unscrupulous men in London journalism, and Banghurst instantly seized upon the situation. The interviewer vanishes from the narrative, no doubt very doubtfully remunerated, and Banghurst, Banghurst himself, double chin, gray twill suit, abdomen, voice, gestures and all appears at Dymchurch, following his large, unrivalled journalistic nose. He had seen the whole thing at a glance, just what it was and what it might be.

At his touch, as it were, Filmer's long-pent investigations exploded into fame. He instantly and most magnificently was a Boom. One turns over the

files of the journals of the year 1907 with a quite incredulous recognition of how swift and flaming the boom of those days could be. The July papers know nothing of flying, see nothing in flying, state by a most effective silence that men never would, could, or should fly. In August flying and Filmer and flying and parachutes and aerial tactics and the Japanese Government and Filmer and again flying, shouldered the war in Yunnan and the gold mines of Upper Greenland off the leading page. And Banghurst had given ten thousand pounds, and, further, Banghurst was giving five thousand pounds, and Banghurst had devoted his well-known, magnificent (but hitherto sterile) private laboratories and several acres of land near his private residence on the Surrey Hills to the strenuous and violent completion—Banghurst fashion—of the life-size practicable flying machine. Meanwhile, in the sight of privileged multitudes in the walled-garden of the Banghurst town residence in Fulham, Filmer was exhibited at weekly garden parties putting the working model through its paces. At enormous initial cost, but with a final profit, the *New Paper* presented its readers with a beautiful photographic souvenir of the first of these occasions.

Here again the correspondence of Arthur Hicks and his friend Vance comes to our aid.

“I saw Filmer in his glory,” he writes, with just the touch of envy natural to his position as a poet *passé*. “The man is brushed and shaved, dressed in the fashion of a Royal-Institution-Afternoon Lecturer, the very newest shape in frock-coats and long patent shoes, and altogether in a state of extraordinary streakiness between an owlish great man and a scared abashed self-conscious bounder cruelly exposed. He hasn’t a touch of colour in the skin of his face, his head juts forward, and those queer little dark amber eyes of his watch furtively round him for his fame. His clothes fit perfectly and yet sit upon him as though he had bought them ready-made. He speaks in a mumble still, but he says, you perceive indistinctly, enormous self-assertive things, he backs into the rear of groups by instinct if Banghurst drops the line for a minute, and when he walks across Banghurst’s lawn one perceives him a little out of breath and going jerky, and that his weak white hands are clenched. His is a state of tension—horrible tension. And he is the Greatest Discoverer of This or Any Age—the Greatest Discoverer of This or Any Age! What strikes one so forcibly about him is that he didn’t somehow quite expect it ever, at any rate, not at all like this. Banghurst is about everywhere, the energetic M.C. of his great little catch, and I swear he will have every one down on his lawn there before he has finished with the engine; he had bagged the prime minister yesterday, and he, bless his heart! didn’t look particularly outsize, on the very first occasion. Conceive it! Filmer! Our

obscure unwashed Filmer, the Glory of British science! Duchesses crowd upon him, beautiful, bold peeresses say in their beautiful, clear loud voices—have you noticed how penetrating the great lady is becoming nowadays?—‘Oh, Mr. Filmer, how *did* you do it?’

“Common men on the edge of things are too remote for the answer. One imagines something in the way of that interview, ‘toil ungrudgingly and unsparingly given, Madam, and, perhaps—I don’t know—but perhaps a little special aptitude.’”

So far Hicks, and the photographic supplement to the *New Paper* is in sufficient harmony with the description. In one picture the machine swings down towards the river, and the tower of Fulham church appears below it through a gap in the elms, and in another, Filmer sits at his guiding batteries, and the great and beautiful of the earth stand around him, with Banghurst massed modestly but resolutely in the rear. The grouping is oddly apposite. Occluding much of Banghurst, and looking with a pensive, speculative expression at Filmer, stands the Lady Mary Elkinghorn, still beautiful, in spite of the breath of scandal and her eight-and-thirty years, the only person whose face does not admit a perception of the camera that was in the act of snapping them all.

So much for the exterior facts of the story, but, after all, they are very exterior facts. About the real interest of the business one is necessarily very much in the dark. How was Filmer feeling at the time? How much was a certain unpleasant anticipation present inside that very new and fashionable frock-coat? He was in the halfpenny, penny, sixpenny, and more expensive papers alike, and acknowledged by the whole world as “the Greatest Discoverer of This or Any Age.” He had invented a practicable flying machine, and every day down among the Surrey hills the life-sized model was getting ready. And when it was ready, it followed as a clear inevitable consequence of his having invented and made it—everybody in the world, indeed, seemed to take it for granted; there wasn’t a gap anywhere in that serried front of anticipation—that he would proudly and cheerfully get aboard it, ascend with it, and fly.

But we know now pretty clearly that simple pride and cheerfulness in such an act were singularly out of harmony with Filmer’s private constitution. It occurred to no one at the time, but there the fact is. We can guess with some confidence now that it must have been drifting about in his mind a great deal during the day, and, from a little note to his physician complaining of persistent insomnia, we have the soundest reason for supposing it dominated his nights—the idea that it would be after all, in

spite of his theoretical security, an abominably sickening, uncomfortable, and dangerous thing for him to flap about in nothingness a thousand feet or so in the air. It must have dawned upon him quite early in the period of being the Greatest Discoverer of This or Any Age, the vision of doing this and that with an extensive void below. Perhaps somewhen in his youth he had looked down a great height or fallen down in some excessively uncomfortable way; perhaps some habit of sleeping on the wrong side had resulted in that disagreeable falling nightmare one knows, and given him his horror; of the strength of that horror there remains now not a particle of doubt.

Apparently he had never weighed this duty of flying in his earlier days of research; the machine had been his end, but now things were opening out beyond his end, and particularly this giddy whirl up above there. He was a Discoverer and he had Discovered. But he was not a Flying Man, and it was only now that he was beginning to perceive clearly that he was expected to fly. Yet, however much the thing was present in his mind he gave no expression to it until the very end, and meanwhile he went to and fro from Banghurst's magnificent laboratories, and was interviewed and lionised, and wore good clothes, and ate good food, and lived in an elegant flat, enjoying a very abundant feast of such good, coarse, wholesome Fame and Success as a man, starved for all his years as he had been starved, might be reasonably expected to enjoy.

After a time, the weekly gatherings in Fulham ceased. The model had failed one day just for a moment to respond to Filmer's guidance, or he had been distracted by the compliments of an archbishop. At any rate, it suddenly dug its nose into the air just a little too steeply as the archbishop was sailing through a Latin quotation for all the world like an archbishop in a book, and it came down in the Fulham Road within three yards of a bus horse. It stood for a second perhaps, astonishing and in its attitude astonished, then it crumpled, shivered into pieces, and the bus horse was incidentally killed.

Filmer lost the end of the archiepiscopal compliment. He stood up and stared as his invention swooped out of sight and reach of him. His long, white hands still gripped his useless apparatus. The archbishop followed his skyward stare with an apprehension unbecoming in an archbishop.

Then came the crash and the shouts and uproar from the road to relieve Filmer's tension. "My God!" he whispered, and sat down.

Every one else almost was staring to see where the machine had vanished, or rushing into the house.

The making of the big machine progressed all the more rapidly for this. Over its making presided Filmer, always a little slow and very careful in his manner, always with a growing preoccupation in his mind. His care over the strength and soundness of the apparatus was prodigious. The slightest doubt, and he delayed everything until the doubtful part could be replaced. Wilkinson, his senior assistant, fumed at some of these delays, which, he insisted, were for the most part unnecessary. Banghurst magnified the patient certitude of Filmer in the *New Paper*, and reviled it bitterly to his wife, and MacAndrew, the second assistant, approved Filmer's wisdom. "We're not wanting a *fiasco*, man," said MacAndrew. "He's perfectly well advised."

And whenever an opportunity arose Filmer would expound to Wilkinson and MacAndrew just exactly how every part of the flying machine was to be controlled and worked, so that in effect they would be just as capable, and even more capable, when at last the time came, of guiding it through the skies.

Now I should imagine that if Filmer had seen fit at this stage to define just what he was feeling, and to take a definite line in the matter of his ascent, he might have escaped that painful ordeal quite easily. If he had had it clearly in his mind he could have done endless things. He would surely have found no difficulty with a specialist to demonstrate a weak heart, or something gastric or pulmonary, to stand in his way—that is the line I am astonished he did not take—or he might, had he been man enough, have declared simply and finally that he did not intend to do the thing. But the fact is, though the dread was hugely present in his mind, the thing was by no means sharp and clear. I fancy that all through this period he kept telling himself that when the occasion came he would find himself equal to it. He was like a man just gripped by a great illness, who says he feels a little out of sorts, and expects to be better presently. Meanwhile he delayed the completion of the machine, and let the assumption that he was going to fly it take root and flourish exceedingly about him. He even accepted anticipatory compliments on his courage. And, barring this secret squeamishness, there can be no doubt he found all the praise and distinction and fuss he got a delightful and even intoxicating draught.

The Lady Mary Elkinghorn made things a little more complicated for him.



How *that* began was a subject of inexhaustible speculation to Hicks. Probably in the beginning she was just a little “nice” to him with that impartial partiality of hers, and it may be that to her eyes, standing out conspicuously as he did ruling his monster in the upper air, he had a distinction that Hicks was not disposed to find. And somehow they must have had a moment of sufficient isolation, and the great Discoverer a moment of sufficient courage for something just a little personal to be mumbled or blurted. However it began, there is no doubt that it did begin, and presently became quite perceptible to a world accustomed to find in the proceedings of the Lady Mary Elkinghorn a matter of entertainment. It complicated things, because the state of love in such a virgin mind as Filmer’s would brace his resolution, if not sufficiently, at any rate considerably, towards facing a danger he feared, and hampered him in such attempts at evasion as would otherwise be natural and congenial.

It remains a matter for speculation just how the Lady Mary felt for Filmer and just what she thought of him. At thirty-eight one may have gathered much wisdom and still be not altogether wise, and the imagination still functions actively enough in creating glammers and effecting the impossible. He came before her eyes as a very central man, and that always counts, and he had powers, unique powers as it seemed, at any rate in the air. The performance with the model had just a touch of the quality of a potent incantation, and women have ever displayed an unreasonable disposition to imagine that when a man has powers he must necessarily have Power. Given so much, and what was not good in Filmer’s manner and appearance became an added merit. He was modest, he hated display, but given an occasion where *true* qualities are needed, then—then one would see!

The late Mrs. Bampton thought it wise to convey to Lady Mary her opinion that Filmer, all things considered, was rather a “grub.” “He’s certainly not a sort of man I have ever met before,” said the Lady Mary, with a quite unruffled serenity. And Mrs. Bampton, after a swift, imperceptible glance at that serenity, decided that so far as saying anything to Lady Mary went, she had done as much as could be expected of her. But she said a great deal to other people.

And at last, without any undue haste or unseemliness, the day dawned, the great day, when Banghurst had promised his public—the world in fact—that flying should be finally attained and overcome. Filmer saw it dawn, watched even in the darkness before it dawned, watched its stars fade and the gray and pearly pinks give place at last to the clear blue sky of a sunny, cloudless day. He watched it from the window of his bedroom in the new-

built wing of Banghurst's Tudor house. And as the stars were overwhelmed and the shapes and substances of things grew into being out of the amorphous dark, he must have seen more and more distinctly the festive preparations beyond the beech clumps near the green pavilion in the outer park, the three stands for the privileged spectators, the raw, new fencing of the enclosure, the sheds and workshops, the Venetian masts and fluttering flags that Banghurst had considered essential, black and limp in the breezeless dawn, and amidst all these things a great shape covered with tarpauling. A strange and terrible portent for humanity was that shape, a beginning that must surely spread and widen and change and dominate all the affairs of men, but to Filmer it is very doubtful whether it appeared in anything but a narrow and personal light. Several people heard him pacing in the small hours—for the vast place was packed with guests by a proprietor editor who, before all things, understood compression. And about five o'clock, if not before, Filmer left his room and wandered out of the sleeping house into the park, alive by that time with sunlight and birds and squirrels and the fallow deer. MacAndrew, who was also an early riser, met him near the machine, and they went and had a look at it together.

It is doubtful if Filmer took any breakfast, in spite of the urgency of Banghurst. So soon as the guests began to be about in some number he seems to have retreated to his room. Thence about ten he went into the shrubbery, very probably because he had seen the Lady Mary Elkinghorn there. She was walking up and down, engaged in conversation with her old school friend, Mrs. Brewis-Craven, and although Filmer had never met the latter lady before, he joined them and walked beside them for some time. There were several silences in spite of the Lady Mary's brilliance. The situation was a difficult one, and Mrs. Brewis-Craven did not master its difficulty. "He struck me," she said afterwards with a luminous self-contradiction, "as a very unhappy person who had something to say, and wanted before all things to be helped to say it. But how was one to help him when one didn't know what it was?"

At half-past eleven the enclosures for the public in the outer park were crammed, there was an intermittent stream of equipages along the belt which circles the outer park, and the house party was dotted over the lawn and shrubbery and the corner of the inner park, in a series of brilliantly attired knots, all making for the flying machine. Filmer walked in a group of three with Banghurst, who was supremely and conspicuously happy, and Sir Theodore Hickle, the president of the Aeronautical Society. Mrs. Banghurst was close behind with the Lady Mary Elkinghorn, Georgina Hickle, and the Dean of Stays. Banghurst was large and copious in speech, and such

interstices as he left were filled in by Hickle with complimentary remarks to Filmer. And Filmer walked between them saying not a word except by way of unavoidable reply. Behind, Mrs. Banghurst listened to the admirably suitable and shapely conversation of the Dean with that fluttered attention to the ampler clergy ten years of social ascent and ascendancy had not cured in her; and the Lady Mary watched, no doubt with an entire confidence in the world's disillusionment, the drooping shoulders of the sort of man she had never met before.

There was some cheering as the central party came into view of the enclosures, but it was not very unanimous nor invigorating cheering. They were within fifty yards of the apparatus when Filmer took a hasty glance over his shoulder to measure the distance of the ladies behind them, and decided to make the first remark he had initiated since the house had been left.

His voice was just a little hoarse, and he cut in on Banghurst in mid-sentence on Progress.

"I say, Banghurst," he said, and stopped.

"Yes," said Banghurst.

"I wish——" He moistened his lips. "I'm not feeling well."

Banghurst stopped dead. "Eh?" he shouted.

"A queer feeling." Filmer made to move on, but Banghurst was immovable. "I don't know. I may be better in a minute. If not—perhaps. . . . MacAndrew——"

"You're not feeling *well*?" said Banghurst, and stared at his white face.

"My dear!" he said, as Mrs. Banghurst came up with them, "Filmer says he isn't feeling *well*."

"A little queer," exclaimed Filmer, avoiding the Lady Mary's eyes. "It may pass off——"

There was a pause.

It came to Filmer that he was the most isolated person in the world.

"In any case," said Banghurst, "the ascent must be made. Perhaps if you were to sit down somewhere for a moment——"

"It's the crowd, I think," said Filmer.

There was a second pause. Banghurst's eye rested in scrutiny on Filmer, and then swept the sample of public in the enclosure.

"It's unfortunate," said Sir Theodore Hickle; "but still—I suppose—— Your assistants—— Of course, if you feel out of condition and disinclined——"

"I don't think Mr. Filmer would permit *that* for a moment," said the Lady Mary.

"But if Mr. Filmer's nerve is run—— It might even be dangerous for him to attempt——" Hickle coughed.

"It's just because it's dangerous," began the Lady Mary, and felt she had made her point of view and Filmer's plain enough.

Conflicting motives struggled for Filmer.

"I feel I ought to go up," he said, regarding the ground. He looked up and met the Lady Mary's eyes. "I want to go up," he said, and smiled whitely at her. He turned towards Banghurst. "If I could just sit down somewhere for a moment out of the crowd and sun——"

Banghurst, at least, was beginning to understand the case. "Come into my little room in the green pavilion," he said. "It's quite cool there." He took Filmer by the arm.

Filmer turned his face to the Lady Mary Elkinghorn again. "I shall be all right in five minutes," he said. "I'm tremendously sorry——"

The Lady Mary Elkinghorn smiled at him. "I couldn't think," he said to Hickle, and obeyed the compulsion of Banghurst's pull.

The rest remained watching the two recede.

"He is so fragile," said the Lady Mary.

"He's certainly a highly nervous type," said the Dean, whose weakness it was to regard the whole world, except married clergymen with enormous families, as "neurotic."

"Of course," said Hickle, "it isn't absolutely necessary for him to go up because he has invented——"

"How *could* he avoid it?" asked the Lady Mary, with the faintest shadow of scorn.

"It's certainly most unfortunate if he's going to be ill now," said Mrs. Banghurst a little severely.

“He’s not going to be ill,” said the Lady Mary, and certainly she had met Filmer’s eye.

“*You’ll* be all right,” said Banghurst, as they went towards the pavilion. “All you want is a nip of brandy. It ought to be you, you know. You’ll be—you’d get it rough, you know, if you let another man——”

“Oh, I want to go,” said Filmer. “I shall be all right. As a matter of fact I’m almost inclined *now*——No! I think I’ll have that nip of brandy first.”

Banghurst took him into the little room and routed out an empty decanter. He departed in search of a supply. He was gone perhaps five minutes.

The history of those five minutes cannot be written. At intervals Filmer’s face could be seen by the people on the easternmost of the stands erected for spectators, against the window pane peering out, and then it would recede and fade. Banghurst vanished shouting behind the grand stand, and presently the butler appeared going pavilion-ward with a tray.

The apartment in which Filmer came to his last resolution was a pleasant little room very simply furnished with green furniture and an old bureau—for Banghurst was simple in all his private ways. It was hung with little engravings after Morland and it had a shelf of books. But as it happened, Banghurst had left a rook rifle he sometimes played with on the top of the desk, and on the corner of the mantelshelf was a tin with three or four cartridges remaining in it. As Filmer went up and down the room wrestling with his intolerable dilemma he went first towards the neat little rifle athwart the blotting-pad and then towards the neat little red label

“.22 LONG.”

The thing must have jumped into his mind in a moment.

Nobody seems to have connected the report with him, though the gun, being fired in a confined space, must have sounded loud, and there were several people in the billiard-room, separated from him only by a lath-and-plaster partition. But directly Banghurst’s butler opened the door and smelt the sour smell of the smoke, he knew, he says, what had happened. For the servants at least of Banghurst’s household had guessed something of what was going on in Filmer’s mind.

All through that trying afternoon Banghurst behaved as he held a man should behave in the presence of hopeless disaster, and his guests for the most part succeeded in not insisting upon the fact—though to conceal their perception of it altogether was impossible—that Banghurst had been pretty

elaborately and completely swindled by the deceased. The public in the enclosure, Hicks told me, dispersed “like a party that has been ducking a welsher,” and there wasn’t a soul in the train to London, it seems, who hadn’t known all along that flying was a quite impossible thing for man. “But he might have tried it,” said many, “after carrying the thing so far.”

In the evening, when he was comparatively alone, Banghurst broke down and went on like a man of clay. I have been told he wept, which must have made an imposing scene, and he certainly said Filmer had ruined his life, and offered and sold the whole apparatus to MacAndrew for half-a-crown. “I’ve been thinking——” said MacAndrew at the conclusion of the bargain, and stopped.

The next morning the name of Filmer was, for the first time, less conspicuous in the *New Paper* than in any other daily paper in the world. The rest of the world’s instructors, with varying emphasis, according to their dignity and the degree of competition between themselves and the *New Paper*, proclaimed the “Entire Failure of the New Flying Machine,” and “Suicide of the Imposter.” But in the district of North Surrey the reception of the news was tempered by a perception of unusual aerial phenomena.

Overnight Wilkinson and MacAndrew had fallen into violent argument on the exact motives of their principal’s rash act.

“The man was certainly a poor, cowardly body, but so far as his science went he was *no* imposter,” said MacAndrew, “and I’m prepared to give that proposition a very practical demonstration, Mr. Wilkinson, so soon as we’ve got the place a little more to ourselves. For I’ve no faith in all this publicity for experimental trials.”

And to that end, while all the world was reading of the certain failure of the new flying machine, MacAndrew was soaring and curvetting with great amplitude and dignity over the Epsom and Wimbledon divisions; and Banghurst, restored once more to hope and energy, and regardless of public security and the Board of Trade, was pursuing his gyrations and trying to attract his attention, on a motor-car and in his pyjamas—he had caught sight of the ascent when pulling up the blind of his bedroom window—equipped, among other things, with a film camera that was subsequently discovered to be jammed.

And Filmer was lying on the billiard table in the green pavilion with a sheet about his body.

## MR. LEDBETTER'S VACATION

My friend, Mr. Ledbetter, is a round-faced little man, whose natural mildness of eye is gigantically exaggerated when you catch the beam through his glasses, and whose deep, deliberate voice irritates irritable people. A certain elaborate clearness of enunciation has come with him to his present vicarage from his scholastic days, an elaborate clearness of enunciation and a certain nervous determination to be firm and correct upon all issues, important and unimportant alike. He is a sacerdotalist and a chess player, and suspected by many of the secret practice of the higher mathematics—credible rather than interesting things. His conversation is copious and given much to needless detail. By many, indeed, his intercourse is condemned, to put it plainly, as “boring,” and such have even done me the compliment to wonder why I countenance him. But, on the other hand, there is a large faction who marvel at his countenancing such a dishevelled, discreditable acquaintance as myself. Few appear to regard our friendship with equanimity. But that is because they do not know of the link that binds us, of my amiable connection *via* Jamaica with Mr. Ledbetter's past.

About that past he displays an anxious modesty. “I do not know *what* I should do if it became known,” he says; and repeats, impressively, “I do not know *what* I should do.” As a matter of fact, I doubt if he would do anything except get very red about the ears. But that will appear later; nor will I tell here of our first encounter, since, as a general rule—though I am prone to break it—the end of a story should come after, rather than before, the beginning. And the beginning of the story goes a long way back; indeed, it is now nearly twenty years since Fate, by a series of complicated and startling manoeuvres, brought Mr. Ledbetter, so to speak, into my hands.

In those days I was living in Jamaica, and Mr. Ledbetter was a schoolmaster in England. He was in orders, and already recognisably the same man that he is to-day: the same rotundity of visage, the same or similar glasses, and the same faint shadow of surprise in his resting expression. He was, of course, dishevelled when I saw him, and his collar less of a collar than a wet bandage, and that may have helped to bridge the natural gulf between us—but of that, as I say later.

The business began at Hithergate-on-Sea, and simultaneously with Mr. Ledbetter's summer vacation. Thither he came for a greatly needed rest, with a bright brown portmanteau marked “F. W. L.,” a new white and black

straw hat, and two pairs of white flannel trousers. He was naturally exhilarated at his release from school—for he was not very fond of the boys he taught. After dinner he fell into a discussion with a talkative person established in the boarding-house to which, acting on the advice of his aunt, he had resorted. This talkative person was the only other man in the house. Their discussion concerned the melancholy disappearance of wonder and adventure in these latter days, the prevalence of globe-trotting, the abolition of distance by steam and electricity, the vulgarity of advertisement, the degradation of men by civilisation, and many such things. Particularly was the talkative person eloquent on the decay of human courage through security, a security Mr. Ledbetter rather thoughtlessly joined him in deploring. Mr. Ledbetter, in the first delight of emancipation from “duty,” and being anxious, perhaps, to establish a reputation for manly conviviality, partook, rather more freely than was advisable, of the excellent whisky the talkative person produced. But he did not become intoxicated, he insists.

He was simply eloquent beyond his sober wont, and with the finer edge gone from his judgment. And after that long talk of the brave old days that were past for ever, he went out into moonlit Hithergate alone and up the cliff road where the villas cluster together.

He had bewailed, and now as he walked up the silent road he still bewailed, the fate that had called him to such an uneventful life as a pedagogue’s. What a prosaic existence he led, so stagnant, so colourless! Secure, methodical, year in year out, what call was there for bravery? He thought enviously of those roving, mediaeval days, so near and so remote, of quests and spies and condottieri and many a risky blade-drawing business. And suddenly came a doubt, a strange doubt, springing out of some chance thought of tortures, and destructive altogether of the position he had assumed that evening.

Was he—Mr. Ledbetter—really, after all, so brave as he assumed? Would he really be so pleased to have railways, policemen, and security vanish suddenly from the earth?

The talkative man had spoken enviously of crime.

“The burglar,” he said, “is the only true adventurer left on earth. Think of his single-handed fight—against the whole civilised world!” And Mr. Ledbetter had echoed his envy. “They *do* have some fun out of life,” Mr. Ledbetter had said. “And about the only people who do. Just think how it must feel to wire a lawn!” And he had laughed wickedly. Now, in this franker intimacy of self-communion he found himself instituting a



comparison between his own brand of courage and that of the habitual criminal. He tried to meet these insidious questionings with blank assertion. "I could do all that," said Mr. Ledbetter. "I long to do all that. Only I do not give way to my criminal impulses. My moral courage restrains me." But he doubted, even while he told himself these things.

Mr. Ledbetter passed a large villa standing by itself. Conveniently situated above a quiet, practicable balcony was a window, gaping black, wide open. At the time he scarcely marked it, but the picture of it came with him, wove into his thoughts. He figured himself climbing up that balcony, crouching—plunging into that dark, mysterious interior. "Bah! You would not dare," said the Spirit of Doubt. "My duty to my fellow-men forbids," said Mr. Ledbetter's self-respect.

It was nearly eleven, and the little seaside town was already very still. The whole world slumbered under the moonlight. Only one warm oblong of window-blind far down the road spoke of waking life. He turned and came back slowly towards the villa of the open window. He stood for a time outside the gate, a battlefield of motives. "Let us put things to the test," said Doubt. "For the satisfaction of these intolerable doubts, show that you dare go into that house. Commit a burglary in blank. That, at any rate, is no crime." Very softly he opened and shut the gate and slipped into the shadow of the shrubbery. "This is foolish," said Mr. Ledbetter's caution. "I expected that," said Doubt. His heart was beating fast, but he was certainly not afraid. He was *not* afraid. He remained in that shadow for some considerable time.

The ascent of the balcony, it was evident, would have to be done in a rush, for it was all in clear moonlight, and visible from the gate into the avenue. A trellis thinly set with young, ambitious climbing roses made the ascent ridiculously easy. There, in that black shadow by the stone vase of flowers, one might crouch and take a closer view of this gaping breach in the domestic defences, the open window. For a while Mr. Ledbetter was as still as the night, and then that insidious whisky tipped the balance. He dashed forward. He went up the trellis with quick, convulsive movements, swung his legs over the parapet of the balcony, and dropped panting in the shadow even as he had designed. He was trembling violently, short of breath, and his heart pumped noisily, but his mood was exultation. He could have shouted to find he was so little afraid.

A happy line that he had learnt from Wills's "Mephistopheles" came into his mind as he crouched there. "I feel like a cat on the tiles," he whispered to himself. It was far better than he had expected—this adventurous exhilaration. He was sorry for all poor men to whom burglary was unknown.

Nothing happened. He was quite safe. And he was acting in the bravest manner!

And now for the window, to make the burglary complete! Must he dare do that? Its position above the front door defined it as a landing or passage, and there were no looking-glasses or any bedroom signs about it, or any other window on the first floor, to suggest the possibility of a sleeper within. For a time he listened under the ledge, then raised his eyes above the sill and peeped in. Close at hand, on a pedestal, and a little startling at first, was a nearly life-size gesticulating bronze. He ducked, and after some time he peered again. Beyond was a broad landing, faintly gleaming; a flimsy fabric of bead curtain, very black and sharp, against a further window; a broad staircase, plunging into a gulf of darkness below; and another ascending to the second floor. He glanced behind him, but the stillness of the night was unbroken. "Crime," he whispered, "crime," and scrambled softly and swiftly over the sill into the house. His feet fell noiselessly on a mat of skin. He was a burglar indeed!

He crouched for a time, all ears and peering eyes. Outside was a scampering and rustling, and for a moment he repented of his enterprise. A short "miaow," a spitting, and a rush into silence, spoke reassuringly of cats. His courage grew. He stood up. Every one was abed, it seemed. So easy is it to commit a burglary, if one is so minded. He was glad he had put it to the test. He determined to take some petty trophy, just to prove his freedom from any abject fear of the law, and depart the way he had come.

He peered about him, and suddenly the critical spirit arose again. Burglars did far more than such mere elementary entrance as this: they went into rooms, they forced safes. Well—he was not afraid. He could not force safes, because that would be a stupid want of consideration for his hosts. But he would go into rooms—he would go upstairs. More: he told himself that he was perfectly secure; an empty house could not be more reassuringly still. He had to clench his hands, nevertheless, and summon all his resolution before he began very softly to ascend the dim staircase, pausing for several seconds between each step. Above was a square landing with one open and several closed doors; and all the house was still. For a moment he stood wondering what would happen if some sleeper woke suddenly and emerged. The open door showed a moonlit bedroom, the coverlet white and undisturbed. Into this room he crept in three interminable minutes and took a piece of soap for his plunder—his trophy. He turned to descend even more softly than he had ascended. It was as easy as—Hist! . . .

Footsteps! On the gravel outside the house—and then the noise of a latchkey, the yawn and bang of a door, and the spitting of a match in the hall below. Mr. Ledbetter stood petrified by the sudden discovery of the folly upon which he had come. “How on earth am I to get out of this?” said Mr. Ledbetter.

The hall grew bright with a candle flame, some heavy object bumped against the umbrella-stand, and feet were ascending the staircase. In a flash Mr. Ledbetter realised that his retreat was closed. He stood for a moment, a pitiful figure of penitent confusion. “My goodness! What a *fool* I have been!” he whispered, and then darted swiftly across the shadowy landing into the empty bedroom from which he had just come. He stood listening—quivering. The footsteps reached the first-floor landing.

Horrible thought! This was possibly the latecomer’s room! Not a moment was to be lost! Mr. Ledbetter stooped beside the bed, thanked Heaven for a valance, and crawled within its protection not ten seconds too soon. He became motionless on hands and knees. The advancing candle-light appeared through the thinner stitches of the fabric, the shadows ran wildly about, and became rigid as the candle was put down.

“Lord, what a day!” said the new-comer, blowing noisily, and it seemed he deposited some heavy burthen on what Mr. Ledbetter, judging by the feet, decided to be a writing-table. The unseen then went to the door and locked it, examined the fastenings of the windows carefully and pulled down the blinds, and returning sat down upon the bed with startling ponderosity.

“*What a day!*” he said. “Good Lord!” and blew again, and Mr. Ledbetter inclined to believe that the person was mopping his face. His boots were good stout boots; the shadows of his legs upon the valance suggested a formidable stoutness of aspect. After a time he removed some upper garments—a coat and waistcoat, Mr. Ledbetter inferred—and casting them over the rail of the bed remained breathing less noisily, and as it seemed cooling from a considerable temperature. At intervals he muttered to himself, and once he laughed softly. And Mr. Ledbetter muttered to himself, but he did not laugh. “Of all the foolish things,” said Mr. Ledbetter. “What on earth am I to do now?”

His outlook was necessarily limited. The minute apertures between the stitches of the fabric of the valance admitted a certain amount of light, but permitted no peeping. The shadows upon this curtain, save for those sharply defined legs, were enigmatical, and intermingled confusingly with the florid patterning of the chintz. Beneath the edge of the valance a strip of carpet

was visible, and, by cautiously depressing his eye, Mr. Ledbetter found that this strip broadened until the whole area of the floor came into view. The carpet was a luxurious one, the room spacious, and, to judge by the castors and so forth of the furniture, well equipped.

What he should do he found it difficult to imagine. To wait until this person had gone to bed, and then, when he seemed to be sleeping, to creep to the door, unlock it, and bolt headlong for that balcony seemed the only possible thing to do. Would it be possible to jump from the balcony? The danger of it! When he thought of the chances against him, Mr. Ledbetter despaired. He was within an ace of thrusting forth his head beside the gentleman's legs, coughing if necessary to attract his attention, and then, smiling, apologising and explaining his unfortunate intrusion by a few well-chosen sentences. But he found these sentences hard to choose. "No doubt, sir, my appearance is peculiar," or, "I trust, sir, you will pardon my somewhat ambiguous appearance from beneath you," was about as much as he could get.

Grave possibilities forced themselves on his attention. Suppose they did not believe him, what would they do to him? Would his unblemished high character count for nothing? Technically he was a burglar, beyond dispute. Following out this train of thought, he was composing a lucid apology for "this technical crime I have committed," to be delivered before sentence in the dock, when the stout gentleman got up and began walking about the room. He locked and unlocked drawers, and Mr. Ledbetter had a transient hope that he might be undressing. But, no! He seated himself at the writing-table, and began to write and then tear up documents. Presently the smell of burning creamlaid paper mingled with the odour of cigars in Mr. Ledbetter's nostrils.

"The position I had assumed," said Mr. Ledbetter when he told me of these things, "was in many respects an ill-advised one. A transverse bar beneath the bed depressed my head unduly, and threw a disproportionate share of my weight upon my hands. After a time, I experienced what is called, I believe, a crick in the neck. The pressure of my hands on the coarsely-stitched carpet speedily became painful. My knees, too, were painful, my trousers being drawn tightly over them. At that time I wore rather higher collars than I do now—two and a half inches, in fact—and I discovered what I had not remarked before, that the edge of the one I wore was frayed slightly under the chin. But much worse than these things was an itching of my face, which I could only relieve by violent grimacing—I tried to raise my hand, but the rustle of the sleeve alarmed me. After a time I had

to desist from this relief also, because—happily in time—I discovered that my facial contortions were shifting my glasses down my nose. Their fall would, of course, have exposed me, and as it was they came to rest in an oblique position of by no means stable equilibrium. In addition I had a slight cold, and an intermittent desire to sneeze or sniff caused me inconvenience. In fact, quite apart from the extreme anxiety of my position, my physical discomfort became in a short time very considerable indeed. But I had to stay there motionless, nevertheless.”

After an interminable time, there began a chinking sound. This deepened into a rhythm: chink, chink, chink—twenty-five chinks—a rap on the writing-table, and a grunt from the owner of the stout legs. It dawned upon Mr. Ledbetter that this chinking was the chinking of gold. He became incredulously curious as it went on. His curiosity grew. Already, if that was the case, this extraordinary man must have counted some hundreds of pounds. At last Mr. Ledbetter could resist it no longer, and he began very cautiously to fold his arms and lower his head to the level of the floor, in the hope of peeping under the valance. He moved his feet, and one made a slight scraping on the floor. Suddenly the chinking ceased. Mr. Ledbetter became rigid. After a while the chinking was resumed. Then it ceased again, and everything was still, except Mr. Ledbetter’s heart—that organ seemed to him to be beating like a drum.

The stillness continued. Mr. Ledbetter’s head was now on the floor, and he could see the stout legs as far as the shins. They were quite still. The feet were resting on the toes and drawn back, as it seemed, under the chair of the owner. Everything was quite still, everything continued still. A wild hope came to Mr. Ledbetter that the unknown was in a fit or suddenly dead, with his head upon the writing-table. . . .

The stillness continued. What had happened? The desire to peep became irresistible. Very cautiously Mr. Ledbetter shifted his hand forward, projected a pioneer finger, and began to lift the valance immediately next his eye. Nothing broke the stillness. He saw now the stranger’s knees, saw the back of the writing-table, and then—he was staring at the barrel of a heavy revolver pointed over the writing-table at his head.

“Come out of that, you scoundrel!” said the voice of the stout gentleman in a tone of quiet concentration. “Come out. This side, and now. None of your hanky-panky—come right out, now.”

Mr. Ledbetter came right out, a little reluctantly perhaps, but without any hanky-panky, and at once, even as he was told.

“Kneel,” said the stout gentleman. “And hold up your hands.”

The valance dropped again behind Mr. Ledbetter, and he rose from all fours and held up his hands. “Dressed like a parson,” said the stout gentleman. “I’m blest if he isn’t! A little chap, too! You *scoundrel!* What the deuce possessed you to come here to-night? What the deuce possessed you to get under my bed?”

He did not appear to require an answer, but proceeded at once to several very objectionable remarks upon Mr. Ledbetter’s personal appearance. He was not a very big man, but he looked strong to Mr. Ledbetter: he was as stout as his legs had promised, he had rather delicately-chiselled small features distributed over a considerable area of whitish face, and quite a number of chins. And the note of his voice had a sort of whispering undertone.

“What the deuce, I say, possessed you to get under my bed?”

Mr. Ledbetter, by an effort, smiled a wan, propitiatory smile. He coughed. “I can quite understand——” he said.

“Why! What on earth . . .? It’s *soap!* No!—you scoundrel. Don’t you move that hand.”

“It’s soap,” said Mr. Ledbetter. “From your washstand. No doubt if——”

“Don’t talk,” said the stout man. “I see it’s soap. Of all incredible things.”

“If I might explain——”

“Don’t explain. It’s sure to be a lie, and there’s no time for explanations. What was I going to ask you? Ah! Have you any mates?”

“In a few minutes, if you——”

“Have you any mates? Curse you. If you start any soapy palaver I’ll shoot. Have you any mates?”

“No,” said Mr. Ledbetter.

“I suppose it’s a lie,” said the stout man. “But you’ll pay for it if it is. Why the deuce didn’t you floor me when I came upstairs? You won’t get a chance to now, anyhow. Fancy getting under the bed! I reckon it’s a fair cop, anyhow, so far as you are concerned.”

“I don’t see how I could prove an *alibi*,” remarked Mr. Ledbetter, trying to show by his conversation that he was an educated man. There was a

pause. Mr. Ledbetter perceived that on a chair beside his captor was a large black bag on a heap of crumpled papers, and that there were torn and burnt papers on the table. And in front of these, and arranged methodically along the edge, were rows and rows of little yellow rouleaux—a hundred times more gold than Mr. Ledbetter had seen in all his life before. The light of two candles, in silver candlesticks, fell upon these. The pause continued. “It is rather fatiguing holding up my hands like this,” said Mr. Ledbetter, with a deprecatory smile.

“That’s all right,” said the fat man. “But what to do with you I don’t exactly know.”

“I know my position is ambiguous.”

“Lord!” said the fat man, “ambiguous! And goes about with his own soap, and wears a thundering great clerical collar! You *are* a blooming burglar, you are—if ever there was one!”

“To be strictly accurate,” said Mr. Ledbetter, and suddenly his glasses slipped off and clattered against his vest buttons.

The fat man changed countenance, a flash of savage resolution crossed his face, and something in the revolver clicked. He put his other hand to the weapon. And then he looked at Mr. Ledbetter, and his eye went down to the dropped *pince-nez*.

“Full-cock now, anyhow,” said the fat man, after a pause, and his breath seemed to catch. “But I’ll tell you, you’ve never been so near death before. Lord! *I’m* almost glad. If it hadn’t been that the revolver wasn’t cocked, you’d be lying dead there now.”

Mr. Ledbetter said nothing, but he felt that the room was swaying.

“A miss is as good as a mile. It’s lucky for both of us it wasn’t. Lord!” He blew noisily. “There’s no need for you to go pale-green for a little thing like that.”

“I can assure you, sir——,” said Mr. Ledbetter, with an effort.

“There’s only one thing to do. If I call in the police, I’m bust—a little game I’ve got on is bust. That won’t do. If I tie you up and leave you—again, the thing may be out to-morrow. To-morrow’s Sunday, and Monday’s Bank Holiday—I’ve counted on three clear days. Shooting you’s murder—and hanging; and besides, it will bust the whole blooming kernooze. I’m hanged if I can think what to do—I’m hanged if I can.”

“Will you permit me——”

“You gas as much as if you were a real parson, I’m blessed if you don’t. Of all the burglars you are the—— Well! No—I *won’t* permit you. There isn’t time. If you start off jawing again, I’ll shoot right in your stomach. See? But I know now—I know now! What we’re going to do first, my man, is an examination for concealed arms—an examination for concealed arms. And look here! When I tell you to do a thing, don’t start off at a gabble—do it brisk.”

And with many elaborate precautions, and always pointing the pistol at Mr. Ledbetter’s head, the stout man stood up and searched him for weapons. “Why, you *are* a burglar!” he said. “You’re a perfect amateur. You haven’t even a pistol-pocket in the back of your breeches. No, you don’t! Shut up, now.”

So soon as the issue was decided, the stout man made Mr. Ledbetter take off his coat and roll up his shirt sleeves, and, with the revolver at one ear, proceed with the packing his appearance had interrupted. From the stout man’s point of view that was evidently the only possible arrangement, for if he had packed, he would have had to put down the revolver. So that even the gold on the table was handled by Mr. Ledbetter. This nocturnal packing was peculiar. The stout man’s idea was evidently to distribute the weight of the gold as unostentatiously as possible through his luggage. It was by no means an inconsiderable weight. There was, Mr. Ledbetter says, altogether nearly £18,000 in gold in the black bag and on the table. There were also many little rolls of £5 bank-notes. Each rouleau of £25 was wrapped by Mr. Ledbetter in paper. These rouleaux were then put neatly in cigar-boxes and distributed between a travelling trunk, a Gladstone bag, and a hat-box. About £600 went in a tobacco tin in a dressing-bag. £10 in gold and a number of £5 notes the stout man pocketed. Occasionally he objurgated Mr. Ledbetter’s clumsiness, and urged him to hurry, and several times he appealed to Mr. Ledbetter’s watch for information.

Mr. Ledbetter strapped the trunk and bag, and returned the stout man the keys. It was then ten minutes to twelve, and until the stroke of midnight the stout man made him sit on the Gladstone bag, while he sat at a reasonably safe distance on the trunk and held the revolver handy and waited. He appeared to be now in a less aggressive mood, and having watched Mr. Ledbetter for some time, he offered a few remarks.

“From your accent I judge you are a man of some education,” he said, lighting a cigar. “No—*don’t* begin that explanation of yours. I know it will be long-winded from your face, and I am much too old a liar to be interested



in other men's lying. You are, I say a person of education. You do well to dress as a curate. Even among educated people you might pass as a curate."

"I *am* a curate," said Mr. Ledbetter, "or, at least——"

"You are trying to be. I know. But you didn't ought to burgle. You are not the man to burgle. You are, if I may say it—the thing will have been pointed out to you before—a coward."

"Do you know," said Mr. Ledbetter, trying to get a final opening, "it was that very question——"

The stout man waved him into silence.

"You waste your education in burglary. You should do one of two things. Either you should forge or you should embezzle. For my own part, I embezzle. Yes; I embezzle. What do you think a man could be doing with all this gold but that? Ah! Listen! Midnight! . . . Ten. Eleven. Twelve. There is something very impressive to me in that slow beating of the hours. Time—space; what mysteries they are! What mysteries. . . . It's time for us to be moving. Stand up!"

And then kindly, but firmly, he induced Mr. Ledbetter to sling the dressing-bag over his back by a string across his chest, to shoulder the trunk, and, over-ruling a gasping protest, to take the Gladstone bag in his disengaged hand. So encumbered, Mr. Ledbetter struggled perilously downstairs. The stout gentleman followed with an overcoat, the hat-box, and the revolver, making derogatory remarks about Mr. Ledbetter's strength, and assisting him at the turnings of the stairs.

"The back door," he directed, and Mr. Ledbetter staggered through a conservatory, leaving a wake of smashed flower-pots behind him. "Never mind the crockery," said the stout man; "it's good for trade. We wait here until a quarter past. You can put those things down. You have!"

Mr. Ledbetter collapsed panting on the trunk. "Last night," he gasped, "I was asleep in my little room, and I no more dreamt——"

"There's no need for you to incriminate yourself," said the stout gentleman, looking at the lock of the revolver. He began to hum. Mr. Ledbetter made to speak, and thought better of it.

There presently came the sound of a bell, and Mr. Ledbetter was taken to the back door and instructed to open it. A fair-haired man in yachting costume entered. At the sight of Mr. Ledbetter he started violently and

clapped his hand behind him. Then he saw the stout man. "Bingham!" he cried, "who's this?"

"Only a little philanthropic do of mine—burglar I'm trying to reform. Caught him under my bed just now. He's all right. He's a frightful ass. He'll be useful to carry some of our things."

The new-comer seemed inclined to resent Mr. Ledbetter's presence at first, but the stout man reassured him.

"He's quite alone. There's not a gang in the world would own him. No——! don't start talking, for goodness' sake."

They went out into the darkness of the garden, with the trunk still bowing Mr. Ledbetter's shoulders. The man in yachting costume walked in front with the Gladstone bag and a pistol; then came Mr. Ledbetter like Atlas; Mr. Bingham followed with the hat-box, coat, and revolver as before. The house was one of those that have their gardens right up to the cliff. At the cliff was a steep wooden stairway, descending to a bathing tent dimly visible on the beach. Below was a boat pulled up, and a silent little man with a black face stood beside it. "A few moments' explanation," said Mr. Ledbetter; "I can assure you——" somebody kicked him, and he said no more.

They made him wade to the boat carrying the trunk, they pulled him aboard by the shoulders and hair, they called him no better name than "scoundrel" and "burglar" all that night. But they spoke in undertones so that the general public was happily unaware of his ignominy. They hauled him aboard a yacht manned by strange, unsympathetic Orientals, and partly they thrust him and partly he fell down a gangway into a noisome, dark place, where he was to remain many days—how many he does not know, because he lost count among other things when he was seasick. They fed him on biscuits and incomprehensible words; they gave him water to drink mixed with unwished-for rum. And there were cockroaches where they put him—night and day there were cockroaches, and in the night-time there were rats. The Orientals emptied his pockets and took his watch—but Mr. Bingham being appealed to, took that himself. And five or six times the five Lascars—if they were Lascars—and the Chinaman and the negro who constituted the crew, fished him out and took him aft to Bingham and his friend to play cribbage and euchre and three-handed whist, and to listen to their stories and boastings in an interested manner.

Then these principals would talk to him as men talk to those who have lived a life of crime. Explanations they would never permit, though they

made it abundantly clear to him that he was the rummiest burglar they had ever set eyes on. They said as much again and again. The fair man was of a taciturn disposition and irascible at play; but Mr. Bingham, now that the evident anxiety of his departure from England was assuaged, displayed a vein of genial philosophy. He enlarged upon the mystery of space and time, and quoted Kant and Hegel—or, at least, he said he did. Several times Mr. Ledbetter got as far as: “My position under your bed, you know——” but then he always had to cut, or pass the whisky, or do some such intervening thing. After his third failure, the fair man got quite to look for this opening, and whenever Mr. Ledbetter began after that, he would roar with laughter and hit him violently on the back, “Same old start, same old story; good old burglar!” the fair-haired man would say.

So Mr. Ledbetter suffered for many days, twenty perhaps; and one evening he was taken, together with some tinned provisions, over the side and put ashore on a rocky little island with a spring. Mr. Bingham came in the boat with him, giving him good advice all the way, and waving his last attempts at an explanation aside. “I am really *not* a burglar,” said Mr. Ledbetter.

“You never will be,” said Mr. Bingham. “You’ll never make a burglar. I’m glad you are beginning to see it. In choosing a profession a man must study his temperament. If you don’t, sooner or later you will fail. Compare myself, for example. All my life I have been in banks—I have got on in banks. I have even been a bank manager. But was I happy? No. Why wasn’t I happy? Because it did not suit my temperament. I am too adventurous—too versatile. Practically I have thrown it over. I do not suppose I shall ever manage a bank again. They would be glad to get me, no doubt; but I have learnt the lesson of my temperament—at last. . . . No! I shall never manage a bank again.

“Now, your temperament unfits you for crime—just as mine unfits me for respectability. I know you better than I did, and now I do not even recommend forgery. Go back to respectable courses, my man. *Your* lay is the philanthropic lay—that is your lay. With that voice—the Association for the Promotion of Snivelling among the Young—something in that line. You think it over.

“The island we are approaching has no name apparently—at least, there is none on the chart. You might think out a name for it while you are there—while you are thinking about all these things. It has quite drinkable water, I understand. It is one of the Grenadines—one of the Windward Islands. Yonder, dim and blue, are others of the Grenadines. There are quantities of

Grenadines, but the majority are out of sight. I have often wondered what these islands are for—now, you see, I am wiser. This one at least is for you. Sooner or later some simple native will come along and take you off. Say what you like about us then—abuse us, if you like—we shan't care a solitary Grenadine! And here—here is half a sovereign's worth of silver. Do not waste that in foolish dissipation when you return to civilisation. Properly used, it may give you a fresh start in life. And do not——Don't beach her, you beggars, he can wade!——Do not waste the precious solitude before you in foolish thoughts. Properly used it may be a turning-point in your career. Waste neither money nor time. You will die rich. I'm sorry, but I must ask you to carry your tucker to land in your arms. No; it's not deep. Curse that explanation of yours! There's not time. No, no, no! I won't listen. Overboard you go!"

And the falling night found Mr. Ledbetter—the Mr. Ledbetter who had complained that adventure was dead—sitting beside his cans of food, his chin resting upon his drawn-up knees, staring through his glasses in dismal mildness over the shining, vacant sea.

He was picked up in the course of three days by a negro fisherman and taken to St. Vincent's, and from St. Vincent's he got, by the expenditure of his last coins, to Kingston, in Jamaica. And there he might have foundered. Even nowadays he is not a man of affairs, and then he was a singularly helpless person. He had not the remotest idea what he ought to do. The only thing he seems to have done was to visit all the ministers of religion he could find in the place to borrow a passage home. But he was much too dirty and incoherent—and his story far too incredible for them. I met him quite by chance. It was close upon sunset, and I was walking out after my siesta on the road to Dunn's Battery, when I met him—I was rather bored, and with a whole evening on my hands—luckily for him. He was trudging dismally towards the town. His woebegone face and the quasi-clerical cut of his dust-stained, filthy costume caught my humour. Our eyes met. He hesitated. "Sir," he said, with a catching of the breath, "could you spare a few minutes for what I fear will seem an incredible story?"

"Incredible!" I said.

"Quite," he answered eagerly. "No one will believe it, alter it though I may. Yet I can assure you, sir——"

He stopped hopelessly. The man's tone tickled me. He seemed an odd character. "I am," he said, "one of the most unfortunate beings alive."

"Among other things, you haven't dined?" I said, struck with an idea.

“I have not,” he said solemnly, “for many days.”

“You’ll tell it better after that,” I said; and without more ado led the way to a low place I knew, where such a costume as his was unlikely to give offence. And there—with certain omissions which he subsequently supplied, I got his story. At first I was incredulous, but as the wine warmed him, and the faint suggestion of cringing which his misfortunes had added to his manner disappeared, I began to believe. At last, I was so far convinced of his sincerity that I got him a bed for the night, and next day verified the banker’s reference he gave me through my Jamaica banker. And that done, I took him shopping for underwear and such-like equipments of a gentleman at large. Presently came the verified reference. His astonishing story was true. I will not amplify our subsequent proceedings. He started for England in three days’ time.

“I do not know how I can possibly thank you enough,” began the letter he wrote me from England, “for all your kindness to a total stranger,” and proceeded for some time in a similar strain. “Had it not been for your generous assistance, I could certainly never have returned in time for the resumption of my scholastic duties, and my few minutes of reckless folly would, perhaps, have proved my ruin. As it is, I am entangled in a tissue of lies and evasions, of the most complicated sort, to account for my sunburnt appearance and my whereabouts. I have rather carelessly told two or three different stories, not realising the trouble this would mean for me in the end. The truth I dare not tell. I have consulted a number of law books in the British Museum, and there is not the slightest doubt that I have connived at and abetted and aided a felony. That scoundrel Bingham was the Hithergate bank manager, I find, and guilty of the most flagrant embezzlement. Please, please burn this letter when read—I trust you implicitly. The worst of it is, neither my aunt nor her friend who kept the boarding-house at which I was staying seem altogether to believe a guarded statement I have made them—practically of what actually happened. They suspect me of some discreditable adventure, but what sort of discreditable adventure they suspect me of, I do not know. My aunt says she would forgive me if I told her everything. I have—I have told her *more* than everything, and still she is not satisfied. It would never do to let them know the truth of the case, of course, and so I represent myself as having been waylaid and gagged upon the beach. My aunt wants to know *why* they waylaid and gagged me, *why* they took me away in their yacht. I do not know. Can you suggest any reason? I can think of nothing. If, when you wrote, you could write on *two* sheets so that I could show her one, and on that one if you could show clearly that I really *was* in Jamaica this summer, and had come there by

being removed from a ship, it would be of great service to me. It would certainly add to the load of my obligation to you—a load that I fear I can never fully repay. Although if gratitude. . . .” And so forth. At the end he repeated his request for me to burn the letter.

So the remarkable story of Mr. Ledbetter’s Vacation ends. That breach with his aunt was not of long duration. The old lady had forgiven him before she died.

## MR. BRISHER'S TREASURE

"You can't be *too* careful *who* you marry," said Mr. Brisher, and pulled thoughtfully with a fat-wristed hand at the lank moustache that hides his want of chin.

"That's why——" I ventured.

"Yes," said Mr. Brisher, with a solemn light in his bleary, blue-gray eyes, moving his head expressively and breathing alcohol intimately at me. "There's lots as 'ave 'ad a try at me—many as I could name in *this* town—but none 'ave done it—none."

I surveyed the flushed countenance, the equatorial expansion, the masterly carelessness of his attire, and heaved a sigh to think that by reason of the unworthiness of women he must needs be the last of his race.

"I was a smart young chap when I was younger," said Mr. Brisher. "I 'ad my work cut out. But I was very careful—very. And I got through . . ."

He leant over the tap-room table and thought visibly on the subject of my trustworthiness. I was relieved at last by his confidence.

"I was engaged once," he said at last, with a reminiscent eye on the shuv-a'penny board.

"So near as that?"

He looked at me. "So near as that. Fact is——" He looked about him, brought his face close to mine, lowered his voice, and fenced off an unsympathetic world with a grimy hand. "If she ain't dead or married to some one else or anything—I'm engaged still. Now." He confirmed this statement with nods and facial contortions. "*Still*," he said, ending the pantomime, and broke into a reckless smile at my surprise. "*Me!*"

"Run away," he explained further, with coruscating eyebrows. "Come 'ome."

"That ain't all."

"You'd 'ardly believe it," he said, "but I found a treasure. Found a regular treasure."

I fancied this was irony, and did not, perhaps, greet it with proper surprise. "Yes," he said, "I found a treasure. And come 'ome. I tell you I

could surprise you with things that has happened to me.” And for some time he was content to repeat that he had found a treasure—and left it.

I made no vulgar clamour for a story, but I became attentive to Mr. Brisher’s bodily needs, and presently I led him back to the deserted lady.

“She was a nice girl,” he said—a little sadly, I thought. “*And respectable.*”

He raised his eyebrows and tightened his mouth to express extreme respectability—beyond the likes of us elderly men.

“It was a long way from ’ere. Essex, in fact. Near Colchester. It was when I was up in London—in the buildin’ trade. I was a smart young chap then, I can tell you. Slim. ’Ad best clo’es ’s good as anybody. ’At—*silk* ’at, mind you.” Mr. Brisher’s hand shot above his head towards the infinite to indicate a silk hat of the highest. “Umbrella—nice umbrella with a ’orn ’andle. Savin’s. Very careful I was. . . .”

He was pensive for a little while, thinking, as we must all come to think sooner or later, of the vanished brightness of youth. But he refrained, as one may do in tap-rooms, from the obvious moral.

“I got to know ’er through a chap what was engaged to ’er sister. She was stopping in London for a bit with an aunt that ’ad a ’am an’ beef shop. This aunt was very particular—they was all very particular people, all ’er people was—and wouldn’t let ’er sister go out with this fellow except ’er other sister, *my* girl that is, went with them. So ’e brought me into it, sort of to ease the crowding. We used to go walks in Battersea Park of a Sunday afternoon. Me in my topper, and ’im in ’is; and the girls—well—stylish. There wasn’t many in Battersea Park ’ad the larf of us. She wasn’t what you’d call pretty, but a nicer girl I never met. *I* liked ’er from the start, and, well—though I say it who shouldn’t—she liked me. You know ’ow it is *I* dessay?”

I pretended I did.

“And when this chap married ’er sister—’im and me was great friends—what must ’e do but arst me down to Colchester, close by where She lived. Naturally I was introjuced to ’er people, and well, very soon, her and me was engaged.”

He repeated “engaged.”

“She lived at ’ome with ’er father and mother, quite the lady, in a very nice little ’ouse with a garden—and remarkable respectable people they was.



Rich you might call 'em a'most. They owned their own 'ouse—got it out of the Building Society, and cheap because the chap who 'ad it before was a burglar and in prison—and they 'ad a bit of free 'old land and, some cottages and money 'nvested—all nice and tight: they was what you'd call snug and warm. I tell you, I was On. Furniture too. Why! They 'ad a pianner. Jane—'er name was Jane—used to play it Sundays, and very nice she played too. There wasn't 'ardly a 'im toon in the book she *couldn't* play. . . .

“Many's the evenin' we've met and sung 'ims there, me and 'er and the family.

“'Er father was quite a leadin' man in chapel. You should ha' seen him Sundays, interruptin' the minister and givin' out 'ims. He had gold spectacles, I remember, and used to look over 'em at you while he sang hearty—he was always great on singing 'earty to the Lord—and when *he* got out o' toon 'arf the people went after 'im—always. 'E was that sort of man. And to walk be'ind 'im in 'is nice black clo'es—'is 'at was a brimmer—made one regular proud to be engaged to such a father-in-law. And when the summer came I went down there and stopped a fortnight.

“Now, you know there was a sort of Itch,” said Mr. Brisher. “We wanted to marry, me and Jane did, and get things settled. But 'E said I 'ad to get a proper position first. Consequently there was a Itch. Consequently, when I went down there, I was anxious to show that I was a good useful sort of chap like. Show I could do pretty nearly everything like. See?”

I made a sympathetic noise.

“And down at the bottom of their garden was a bit of wild part like. So I says to 'im, ‘Why don't you 'ave a rockery 'ere?’ I says. ‘It 'ud look nice.’

“‘Too much expense,’ he says.

“‘Not a penny,’ says I. ‘I'm a dab at rockeries. Lemme make you one.’ You see, I'd 'elped my brother make a rockery in the beer garden be'ind 'is tap, so I knew 'ow to do it to rights. ‘Lemme make you one,’ I says. ‘It's 'olidays, but I'm that sort of chap, I 'ate doing nothing,’ I says. ‘I'll make you one to rights.’ And the long and short of it was, he said I might.

“And that's 'ow I come on the treasure.”

“What treasure?” I asked.

“Why!” said Mr. Brisher, “the treasure I'm telling you about, what's the reason why I never married.”

“What!—a treasure—dug up?”

“Yes—buried wealth—treasure trove. Come out of the ground. What I kept on saying—regular treasure. . . .” He looked at me with unusual disrespect.

“It wasn’t more than a foot deep, not the top of it,” he said. “I’d ’ardly got thirsty like, before I come on the corner.”

“Go on,” I said. “I didn’t understand.”

“Why! Directly I ’it the box I knew it was treasure. A sort of instinct told me. Something seemed to shout inside of me—‘Now’s your chance—lie low.’ It’s lucky I knew the laws of treasure trove or I’d ’ave been shoutin’ there and then. I dare say you know——?”

“Crown bags it,” I said, “all but one per cent. Go on. It’s a shame. What did you do?”

“Uncovered the top of the box. There wasn’t anybody in the garden or about like. Jane was ’elping ’er mother do the ’ouse. I *was* excited—I tell you. I tried the lock and then gave a whack at the hinges. Open it came. Silver coins—full! Shining. It made me tremble to see ’em. And jest then—I’m blessed if the dustmen didn’t come round the back of the ’ouse. It pretty nearly gave me ’eart disease to think what a fool I was to ’ave that money showing. And directly after I ’eard that chap next door—’e was ’olidaying too—I ’eard him watering ’is beans. If only ’e’d looked over the fence!”

“What did you do?”

“Kicked the lid on again and covered it up like a shot, and went on digging about a yard away from it like mad. And my face, so to speak, was laughing on its own account till I had it hid. I tell you I was regular scared like at my luck. I jest thought that it ’ad to be kep’ close and that was all. ‘Treasure,’ I kep’ whisperin’ to myself, ‘Treasure,’ and ‘ ’undreds of pounds, ’undreds, ’undreds of pounds.’ Whispering to myself like, and digging like blazes. It seemed to me the box was regular sticking out and showing, like your legs do under the sheets in bed, and I went and put all the earth I’d got out of my ’ole for the rockery slap on top of it. I *was* in a sweat. And in the midst of it all out toddles ’er father. He didn’t say anything to me, jest stood behind me and stared, but Jane tole me afterwards when he went indoors, ’e says, ‘That there jackanapes of yours, Jane’—he always called me a jackanapes some’ow—‘knows ’ow to put ’is back into it after all.’ Seemed quite impressed by it, ’e did.”

“How long was the box?” I asked suddenly.

“ ’Ow long?” said Mr. Brisher.

“Yes—in length?”

“Oh! ’bout so—by so.” Mr. Brisher indicated a moderate-sized trunk.

“*Full?*” said I.

“Full up of silver coins—arf-crowns, I believe.”

“Why!” I cried, “that would mean—hundreds of pounds.”

“Thousands,” said Mr. Brisher, in a sort of sad calm. “I calc’lated it out.”

“But how did they get there?”

“All I know is what I found. What I thought at the time was this. The chap who’d owned the ’ouse before ’er father ’d been a regular slap-up burglar. What you’d call a ’igh-class criminal. Used to drive ’is trap—like Peace did.” Mr. Brisher meditated on the difficulties of narration and embarked on a complicated parenthesis. “I don’t know if I told you it’d been a burglar’s ’ouse before it was my girl’s father’s, and I knew ’e’d robbed a mail train once, I did know that. It seemed to me——”

“That’s very likely,” I said “But what did you do?”

“Sweated,” said Mr. Brisher. “Regular run orf me. All that morning,” said Mr. Brisher, “I was at it pretending to make that rockery and wondering what I should do. I’d ’ave told ’er father p’r’aps, only I was doubtful of ’is honesty—I was afraid he might rob me of it like and give it up to the authorities—and besides, considering I was marrying into the family, I thought it would be nicer like if it came through me. Put me on a better footing, so to speak. Well, I ’ad three days before me left of my ’olidays, so there wasn’t no hurry, so I covered it up and went on digging, and tried to puzzle out ’ow I was to make sure of it. Only I couldn’t.

“I thought,” said Mr. Brisher, “*and* I thought. Once I got regular doubtful whether I’d seen it or not, and went down to it and ’ad it uncovered again, just as her ma came out to ’ang up a bit of washing she’d done. Jumps again! Afterwards I was just thinking I’d ’ave another go at it, when Jane comes to tell me dinner was ready. ‘You’ll want it,’ she said, ‘seeing all the ’ole you’ve dug.’

“I was in a regular daze all dinner, wondering whether that chap next door wasn’t over the fence and filling ’is pockets. But in the afternoon I got easier in my mind—it seemed to me it must ’ave been there so long it was

pretty sure to stop a bit longer—and I tried to get up a bit of a discussion to dror out the old man and see what 'e thought of treasure trove."

Mr. Brisher paused, and affected amusement at the memory.

"The old man was a scorcher," he said; "a regular scorcher."

"What!" said I; "did he——?"

"It was like this," explained Mr. Brisher, laying a friendly hand on my arm and breathing into my face to calm me. "Just to dror 'im out, I told a story of a chap I said I knew—pretendin', you know—who'd found a sovring in a novercoat 'e'd borrowed. I said 'e stuck to it, but I said I wasn't sure whether that was right or not. And then the old man began. Lor! 'e *did* let me 'ave it!" Mr. Brisher affected an insincere amusement. "'E was, well—— what you might call a rare 'and at snacks. Said that was the sort of friend 'e'd naturally expect me to 'ave. Said 'e'd naturally expect that from the friend of a out-of-work loafer who took up with daughters who didn't belong to 'im. There! I couldn't tell you 'arf 'e said. 'E went on most outrageous. I stood up to 'im about it, just to dror 'im out. 'Wouldn't you stick to a 'arf-sov', not if you found it in the street?' I says. 'Certainly not,' 'e says; 'certainly I wouldn't.' 'What! not if you found it as a sort of treasure?' 'Young man,' 'e says, 'there's 'i'er 'thority than mine—"Render unto Caesar"'—what is it? Yes. Well, he fetched up that. A rare 'and at 'itting you over the 'ed with the Bible, was the old man. And so he went on. 'E got to such Snacks about me at last I couldn't stand it. I'd promised Jane not to answer 'im back, but it got a bit *too* thick. I—I give it 'im. . . ."

Mr. Brisher, by means of enigmatical facework, tried to make me think he had had the best of that argument, but I knew better.

"I went out in a 'uff at last. But not before I was pretty sure I 'ad to lift that treasure by myself. The only thing that kept me was thinking 'ow I'd take it out of 'im when I 'ad the cash. . . ."

There was a lengthy pause.

"Now, you'd 'ardly believe it, but all them three days I never 'ad a chance at the blessed treasure, never got out not even a 'arf-crown. There was always a Somethink—always.

"'Stonishing thing it isn't thought of more," said Mr. Brisher. "Finding treasure's no great shakes. It's gettin' it. I don't suppose I slep' a wink any of those nights, thinking where I was to take it, what I was to do with it, 'ow I was to explain it. It made me regular ill. And days I was that dull, it made Jane regular 'uffy. 'You ain't the same chap you was in London,' she says,

several times. I tried to lay it on 'er father and 'is Snacks, but bless you, she knew better. What must she 'ave but that I'd got another girl on my mind! Said I wasn't True. Well, we had a bit of a row. But I was that set on the Treasure, I didn't seem to mind a bit Anything she said.

“Well, at last I got a sort of plan. I was always a bit good at planning, though carrying out isn't so much in my line. I thought it all out and settled on a plan. First, I was going to take all my pockets full of these 'ere 'arf-crowns—see?—and afterwards——as I shall tell.

“Well, I got to that state I couldn't think of getting at the Treasure again in the daytime, so I waited until the night before I had to go, and then, when everything was still, up I gets and slips down to the back door, meaning to get my pockets full. What must I do in the scullery but fall over a pail? Up gets 'er father with a gun—'e was a light sleeper was 'er father, and very suspicious—and there was me: 'ad to explain I'd come down to the pump for a drink because my water-bottle was bad. 'E didn't let me off a Snack or two over that bit, you lay a bob.”

“And you mean to say——” I began.

“Wait a bit,” said Mr. Brisher. “I say, I'd made my plan. That put the kybosh on one bit, but it didn't 'urt the general scheme not a bit. I went and I finished that rockery next day, as though there wasn't a Snack in the world; cemented over the stones, I did, dabbed it green and everythink. I put a dab of green just to show where the box was. They all came and looked at it, and said 'ow nice it was—even 'e was a bit softer like to see it, and all he said was, 'it's a pity you can't always work like that, then you might get something definite to do,' he says.

“‘Yes,’ I says—I couldn't 'elp it—‘I put a lot in that rockery,’ I says, like that. See? ‘I put a lot in that rockery’—meaning——”

“I see,” said I—for Mr. Brisher is apt to over-elaborate his jokes.

“'E didn't,” said Mr. Brisher. “Not then, anyhow.

“Ar'ever—after all that was over, off I set for London. . . . Orf I set for London. . . .”

Pause.

“On'y I wasn't going to no London,” said Mr. Brisher, with sudden animation, and thrusting his face into mine. “No fear! What do *you* think?

“I didn't go no further than Colchester—not a yard.

“I’d left the spade just where I could find it. I’d got everything planned and right. I ’ired a little trap in Colchester, and pretended I wanted to go to Ipswich and stop the night, and come back next day, and the chap I ’ired it from made me leave two sovrings on it right away, and off I set.

“I didn’t go to no Ipswich neither.

“Midnight the ’orse and trap was ’itched by the little road that ran by the cottage where ’e lived—not sixty yards off, it wasn’t—and I was at it like a good ’un. It was jest the night for such games—overcast—but a trifle too ’ot, and all round the sky there was summer lightning and presently a thunderstorm. Down it came. First big drops in a sort of fizzle, then ’ail. I kep’ on. I whacked at it—I didn’t dream the old man would ’ear. I didn’t even trouble to go quiet with the spade, and the thunder and lightning and ’ail seemed to excite me like. I shouldn’t wonder if I was singing. I got so ’ard at it I clean forgot the thunder and the ’orse and trap. I precious soon got the box showing, and started to lift it. . . .”

“Heavy?” I said.

“I couldn’t no more lift it than fly. I *was* sick. I’d never thought of that! I got regular wild—I tell you, I cursed. I got sort of outrageous. I didn’t think of dividing it like for the minute, and even then I couldn’t ’ave took money about loose in a trap. I hoisted one end sort of wild like, and over the whole show went with a tremenjous noise. Perfek smash of silver. And then right on the heels of that, Flash! Lightning like the day! and there was the back door open and the old man coming down the garden with ’is blooming old gun. He wasn’t not a ’undred yards away!

“I tell you I was that upset—I didn’t think what I was doing. I never stopped—not even to fill my pockets. I went over the fence like a shot, and ran like one o’clock for the trap, cussing and swearing as I went. I *was* in a state. . . .

“And will you believe me, when I got to the place where I’d left the ’orse and trap, they’d gone. Orf! When I saw that I ’adn’t a cuss left for it. I jest danced on the grass, and when I’d danced enough I started off to London. . . . I was done.”

Mr. Brisher was pensive for an interval. “I was done,” he repeated, very bitterly.

“Well?” I said.

“That’s all,” said Mr. Brisher.

“You didn’t go back?”

“No fear. I’d ’ad enough of *that* blooming treasure, any’ow for a bit. Besides, I didn’t know what was done to chaps who tried to collar a treasure trove. I started off for London there and then. . . .”

“And you never went back?”

“Never.”

“But about Jane? Did you write?”

“Three times, fishing like. And no answer. We’d parted in a bit of a ’uff on account of ’er being jealous. So that I couldn’t make out for certain what it meant.

“I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t even know whether the old man knew it was me. I sort of kep’ an eye open on papers to see when he’d give up that treasure to the Crown, as I hadn’t a doubt ’e would considering ’ow respectable he’d always been.”

“And did he?”

Mr. Brisher pursed his mouth and moved his head slowly from side to side. “Not *’im*,” he said.

“Jane was a nice girl,” he said, “a thorough nice girl mind you, *if* jealous, and there’s no knowing I mightn’t ’ave gone back to ’er after a bit. I thought if he didn’t give up the treasure I might ’ave a sort of ’old on ’im. . . . Well, one day I looks as usual under Colchester—and there I saw ’is name. What for d’yer think?”

I could not guess.

Mr. Brisher’s voice sank to a whisper, and once more he spoke behind his hand. His manner was suddenly suffused with a positive joy. “Issuing counterfeit coins,” he said. “Counterfeit coins!”

“You don’t mean to say——?”

“Yes—It. Bad. Quite a long case they made of it. But they got ’im, though he dodged tremenjous. Traced ’is ’aving passed, oh!—nearly a dozen bad ’arf-crowns.”

“And you didn’t——?”

“No fear. And it didn’t do *’im* much good to say it was treasure trove.”

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[The end of *Tales of Life and Adventure* by H. G. Wells]