

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada Ebook ***

This ebook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the ebook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the ebook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: The Bindles on the Rocks. Some Further Incidents in the Life of Mr and Mrs Bindle.

Author: Jenkins, Herbert George (1876-1923)

Date of first publication: 1924

Edition used as base for this ebook: London: Herbert Jenkins, undated, but certainly published no later than 1926.

["Third printing completing 40,378 copies."]

Date first posted: 5 January 2011

Date last updated: October 14, 2014

Faded Page ebook#20141075

This ebook was produced by Al Haines

THE BINDLES ON THE ROCKS

SOME FURTHER INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF MR AND MRS BINDLE

**BY
HERBERT JENKINS**

**HERBERT JENKINS LIMITED
3 YORK STREET LONDON S.W.1**

A HERBERT JENKINS' BOOK

Third printing completing 40,378 copies.

Printed in Great Britain by Butler & Tanner Ltd., Frome and London

WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

Poor old Bindle struck an unlucky patch and lost his job. For weeks he had been out of work and for weeks he had tramped London from early morning until late at night without food, beer or tobacco. He suffered considerable pain from what he called his "various" veins; but Joseph Bindle was a great-hearted little man, who realised to the full his domestic responsibilities and, with the aid of his friends, he pulled through.

In this volume reappear gloomy Ginger, Dick Little, Mr. and Mrs. Hearty, and many others. It tells how Bindle stops a "Prohibition" meeting, pays a visit to the "Zoo," with Mrs. Bindle as militant as ever.

BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

BINDLE
JOHN DENE OF TORONTO
THE NIGHT CLUB
THE ADVENTURES OF BINDLE

MRS. BINDLE
MALCOLM SAGE, DETECTIVE
PATRICIA BRENT, SPINSTER
THE RAIN-GIRL
THE RETURN OF ALFRED

CONTENTS

CHAP.

- I. [THE BINDLES ON THE ROCKS](#)
- II. [BINDLE GOES TO CHAPEL](#)
- III. [THE PUSSYFOOT MEETING](#)
- IV. [THE FLITTING OF MR. MAURICE CRANE](#)
- V. [THE BINDLES AT THE ZOO](#)
- VI. [MRS. BINDLE TAKES TO HER HEELS](#)
- VII. [MRS. BINDLE FETCHES A POLICEMAN](#)
- VIII. [MRS. BINDLE DRESSES IN MUSLIN](#)
- IX. [MRS. BINDLE MEETS HER MATCH](#)
- X. [MRS. BINDLE KEEPS CHICKENS](#)
- XI. [MRS. BINDLE'S REVENGE](#)
- XII. [THE PROMOTION OF COMPANY SERGEANT-MAJOR HIGGS](#)
- XIII. [THE MUTINY OF THE *SYBIL*](#)
- XIV. [MR. HEARTY LOSES HIS TROUSERS](#)

THE BINDLES ON THE ROCKS

CHAPTER I

THE BINDLES ON THE ROCKS

I

"They've cut the water off!"

Mrs. Bindle made the announcement as if she found in it a relief to her feelings.

Bindle received the news in silence, then, as if feeling that the tension of the situation required relieving, he remarked:

"Well, well, you can't 'ave everythink."

"And how am I going to cook?" she demanded.

"There ain't been much wantin' cookin' lately," he retorted; but there was no bitterness in his tone. It was rather a statement of fact.

Mrs. Bindle eyed him keenly. For weeks past she had noted the hard, drawn expression of his face.

The Government dole of a pound a week was little enough on which to live, particularly when a pound sterling possessed the purchasing power of some eight shillings before the War, a circumstance which Mrs. Bindle seemed never tired of emphasising.

"The gas'll go next," she announced, as if anxious to squeeze from the situation every drop of drama it contained.

"Well, there won't be anythink else to take after they get that," said Bindle, with a grin that was a ghost of its former self, "unless they takes me," he added.

"I suppose you've forgotten the house," was Mrs. Bindle's acid retort.

"Speakin' as man to woman, I 'ad," was the reply, as he drew from his pocket his beloved clay pipe, gazed at it for a moment, and then returned it once more to where of late it seemed exclusively to belong. It was five days since it had received what Bindle called "a feed," and then it had been due to a mate's hospitality.

"Well, well," he sighed, as he dropped into a chair, "as I was jest sayin', you can't 'ave every think."

There were times when he found the struggle against depression almost too much for his philosophy.

"Got a job?"

Bindle had been anticipating the question ever since he entered; yet he winced. He never could hear that interrogation without wincing.

"Not yet, Lizzie," he said with forced cheerfulness; "but I'll get somethink soon."

Mrs. Bindle sniffed. To her it was a man's duty to get a job and keep it, just as it was a woman's duty to see to the requirements of the house.

"Ow am I going to cook without water?" she demanded, her diction becoming a little frayed under the stress of emotion.

"If they cut off the gas, we won't want to cook," he replied, striving to speak cheerfully. "We ain't got no coal."

"That's right, make a joke of it!" she cried. "That'll fill your stomach, won't it?"

"I ain't a-making a joke of it. I'm tryin' to make the best——"

"Yes, make the best of having no gas, no water, no coal, and no food. Pretty best you're likely to make of that."

Bindle was silent—he realised that the domestic barometer was falling.

"I've filled the jugs and pails," Mrs. Bindle announced presently, with the air of one who has scored off a natural enemy.

"There ain't no flies on you, Mrs. B.," and the grin with which he accompanied the remark was a tribute to Mrs. Bindle's astuteness. "I suppose we couldn't bottle some gas?" he suggested.

"Don't be a fool!" was the retort. "I saw the turncock," she added a moment later. There was a note of grimness in her voice.

"Wot did 'e say?" asked Bindle with interest. He was sorry to have missed Mrs. Bindle's encounter with the turncock. He knew her capacity for inspired invective when under the influence of great emotion.

"Oh! he was like all men," she cried scornfully. "Said he'd got his orders. I gave him a piece of my mind."

"Wot jer say to 'im?"

She sniffed disdainfully. She could not exactly remember what she had said; but the turncock remembered. It had spoilt his day.

The delay due to Mrs. Bindle's eloquence had made it too late for him to get on the 1.30 at Alexandra Park, and his choice had subsequently won at a 100 to 8. He had not so much minded the reflections that Mrs. Bindle had cast upon him as a father, a husband, and a man; but he had hated missing the 1.30, in fact he hated missing the first race at any meeting.

Somehow or other the conviction had been borne in upon him that his destiny was indissolubly linked up with first races, a circumstance that had earned for him the sobriquet of "First-race Rogers."

"Well?" demanded Mrs. Bindle, as Bindle made no further effort towards conversation.

"Eh?" he queried.

In his imagination he had been filling his clay pipe from a box full of tobacco. He sighed a little dolefully.

"How am I to cook without water?" she demanded for the third time.

"You got all them pails full."

"There's only two, and one's the slop-pail."

Bindle scratched his head with the air of one who is carefully weighing a difficult problem. "But ain't the jugs full?" he queried.

"We've got two jugs and three cups. I filled the large flower-pot; but the cork came out of the bottom."

"An' wot about my rinse?"

"You can't have it," she snapped.

"Well, it don't look as if there's goin' to be soup for dinner to-morrow," he muttered.

"That's right! Go on, make a joke of it!" she retorted.

"But things ain't so bad but wot you can laugh at 'em, Lizzie." There was a note of almost pleading in his voice.

"Then you'd better fill your stomach with it and see how empty you'll feel," was the angry rejoinder.

Mrs. Bindle liked to get the full dialectical value out of tragedy and drama, and she resented Bindle's flippancy. With her there was a time and place for all things. She did not realise that Bindle was applying the only balm he knew for a wounded spirit.

For weeks he had been out of work, and for weeks he had tramped London from early morning until late at night, without food, beer, or tobacco. He suffered considerable pain from what he called his "various" veins; but Joseph Bindle was a great-hearted little man, who realised to the full his domestic responsibilities.

Each night he returned home as he had left it that morning—one of the unemployed. He felt ashamed; yet never had he worked so hard as during those weeks of tramping the streets seeking employment.

He had presented himself as a candidate for every conceivable sort of job, on more than one occasion earning the scorn of the advertiser, who resented receiving applications for the post of traveller, or fish-fryer, from a journeyman pantehnicon-man.

In her heart Mrs. Bindle realised that Bindle was trying all he could to get a job; yet, destitute of tact, she did not seem to realise that in that one evening interrogation she drove the iron deep into his soul. Although he knew it to be inevitable, he never quite succeeded in steeling himself against the question when it actually did come.

On his return to No. 7 Fenton Street two evenings later, Bindle was met with the announcement that Mrs. Bindle had used the last of the water.

"I'll nip in next door and fetch some," he said, with forced cheerfulness.

"Don't you dare!"

He was startled by the angry intensity of her tone.

"Wot's up, you been scrappin'?"

"I won't be under an obligation to those women," she cried, her mouth shutting with a determined snap. "Besides, they don't know."

"Why, everybody in the street knows by now, and Mrs. Sawney and Mrs. Grimps——"

"Don't you dare to mention their names in my house."

"Then wot am I goin' to do when I wants a drink o' water?" he cried in an aggrieved tone.

"Go without!" was the angry response.

"There don't seem anythink else to do but turn up my toes," he grumbled. "'Ow you goin' to cook?"

"Not with their water," she announced with decision.

"I'll take a bucket round to 'Earty an' pinch some of 'is," said Bindle wearily.

"You do, and I'll throw it over you!" she cried. "Mark my words if I don't!"

"But where the 'ell are we goin' to get water, Lizzie, if you won't 'ave it from nowhere?"

"I won't have Mr. Hearty know, and I won't borrow it from those women, so there," and there was that in Mrs. Bindle's tone which convinced Bindle it would be foolish to argue. Instead, he put a beer-bottle in either trouser pocket, and two more under his coat, and stole out into the night.

A quarter of an hour later he returned triumphant, the four beer-bottles full of water.

"Where did you get it?" demanded Mrs. Bindle suspiciously, her eyes almost devouring the precious bottles.

"Round at a garridge in the Fulham Road," he lied.

As a matter of fact, he had obtained the precious fluid from a hydrant used for the filling of water-carts, aided by a spanner, borrowed on the way.

Mrs. Bindle poured out a little water in a cup and drank it daintily, although she was very thirsty.

"Why didn't you wash the bottles? It tastes of beer!" she cried, walking over to the sink; but for once the material triumphed over the ethical, and Mrs. Bindle swallowed the beer-tainted water, although she made a motion suggestive of disgust.

II

Three days later the gas-man called at No. 7 Fenton Street, and was met by Mrs. Bindle, mop in hand.

He explained that he had been sent to disconnect the meter from the supply pipe. At that point Mrs. Bindle monopolised the conversation.

The man was silent and respectful, bowing under the flail of Mrs. Bindle's biting tongue. He was not unsympathetic. He had a wife of his own, albeit one less biting of speech, and he was sorry to have to cut off from any home the sole means it possessed of cooking food; still, it was a little galling, even to him, to be called "a Hun," "a breaker-up of homes," and "the Eighth Plague."

At first he had scarcely hoped to get off with an unbroken head; but even Mrs. Bindle had seen the justice of his protestations that it wasn't his fault, and if she refused to allow him to cut off the gas, others would come and do so by force. He had gone on to tell the story of one woman who had assaulted an official of the company, with the result that she had done fourteen days, owing to her inability to pay the fine.

And so the gas, like the water, was added to the list of things forbidden at No. 7 Fenton Street.

Piece by piece the smaller of the Bindles' possessions had already passed through the portals over which swung the three brass balls of penury.

As the weeks passed, the articles became larger, and the hour at which they were taken out later. Mrs. Bindle was proud. Not for the world would she have allowed the neighbours to know that she was pawning her home; but the neighbours not only knew it; they were in a position to supply a fairly accurate list of the articles which had been disposed of.

Bindle had come to dread the return from these expeditions, with Mrs. Bindle's inevitable interrogation, "How much did you get?"

It soon became apparent that between her views on the matter of valuation, and those of the pawnbroker, there was a great gulf fixed.

Her much-valued lustres, for instance, which she had valued at five pounds, realised three shillings and sixpence, and a case of wax fruit, about which she was a little doubtful, but had finally settled upon as worth ten pounds, had produced only two shillings.

Without hesitation she had condemned the pawnbroker as a thief; but, inspired by a sense of fairness to him, she always insisted on seeing the pawntickets, although she had no objection to Bindle retaining them once she had checked the amount of the accommodation.

"There's comin' a day," muttered Bindle to himself one evening as he plodded wearily homewards, "there's comin' a day, J. B., when there won't be nothink left to pawn but Mrs. B., an' 'ow much you're a-goin' to get on 'er depends on Ole Isaac's views on women."

"Ole Isaac" was Bindle's name for Mr. Montagu Gordon, whose thickness of speech and arched nose confirmed his Scotch descent!

One day, a week after the interruption of the gas supply, Bindle was walking along the Fulham Road, when he was surprised to hear himself hailed from a motor-car. A moment later a neat little limousine drew up beside him, the door was burst open, and he saw Dr. Richard Little smiling at him.

"Hullo, J. B.! Where have you been all these years?"

"'Ullo, 'ullo!" cried Bindle joyfully, "and 'ow goes it, sir?"

"Come on, hop in," cried Dr. Little, and, a moment later, Bindle was whirled off in the direction of the doctor's flat in Sloane Gardens.

Years before, when a student at St. Timothy's Hospital, known as "Tim's," Dr. Little had sought Bindle's assistance in organising the Temperance Fête rag. They had continued friends ever since, and it was through him that Bindle became known to the men of St. Timothy's Hospital, whom he always referred to as "the Assassins."

Seating Bindle in a comfortable chair in his surgery, Dr. Little stood looking down at him, professional speculation in his eye. Reaching forward, he lifted his left wrist and felt the pulse.

"What's the trouble, J. B.?" he asked, gazing at him keenly.

"When I comes to my doctor, it's for 'im to tell me, not for me to tell 'im," retorted Bindle with a grin.

"Well, I haven't many minutes to spare; but I've just got time to snatch a bite before I push off again."

He pressed his thumb on the bell-push.

"A good plateful of sandwiches, Smithson," he said, as a dainty and efficient-looking parlourmaid entered. "I've not time for luncheon, and I'm very hungry."

For a moment the girl hesitated; but, too well trained to manifest surprise, she retired.

"Manage a sandwich with me?" he queried. "Then we can talk."

"Well, I ain't 'ungry," said Bindle, praying to be forgiven for the lie; "but I don't mind jest nibblin' orf the corner, if it's a very small one an' cut thin."

In his heart was a great thankfulness. Here was a prospect of food, which he could eat without wound to his pride.

Going to the sideboard, Dr. Little produced a claret-jug and some glasses. He had successfully diagnosed his

patient's case. It was an ailment requiring good red, blood-making wine instead of whisky-and-soda.

"Well," he cried presently, "how's the happy home?"

"I got most of it in my pocket. I——"

Bindle stopped suddenly, realising that he was giving the game away; but Dr. Little had seen a handful of pawntickets, which Bindle had half drawn from his pocket. Bindle cursed himself for his ready tongue; but the humour of the situation had carried him away.

"I been out of a job," he explained; "but it's all right now," and he took another sandwich from the dish Dr. Little pushed across to him.

"In work again?"

"Oh! we'll soon be all right now," Bindle equivocated.

For a quarter of an hour they chatted, during which time Dr. Little managed to persuade Bindle to make a fairly hearty meal of sandwiches, taking one himself for every one that Bindle took, and discarding it when he was not observed.

"Well, so long, J. B.," he cried heartily, as he gripped his hand, and Bindle was shown out by the trim parlourmaid, a cigar between his lips and a great content in his heart.

"I wish I could 'ave pinched a few for Lizzie," he muttered, as he walked down the steps; "but it wouldn't 'ave been right like to 'im."

Meanwhile, Dr. Little was examining a pile of pawntickets on his consulting-room table. There had been a time when, as Yu Li Tel, the Chinese wizard, he had been famous at Tim's for his sleight-of-hand.

The examination completed, he went down upon his knees and proceeded to retrieve partially eaten sandwiches from under the table. These he threw into the fireplace. The next morning, the maid who attended to the surgery, decided that the master must have had a stroke, her father being subject to fits.

That night, as luck would have it, Mrs. Bindle was in some doubt as to the amount lent upon a copper saucepan that she had valued at 15s., and on which the pawnbroker had lent either 2s. 9d. or 3s. 3d. To settle the point to her satisfaction, she demanded the pawntickets of Bindle.

Without hesitation he thrust his hand into his coat pocket, then, by the look of consternation on his face, she realised that something was wrong.

"What's the matter?" she demanded.

Bindle proceeded to go through his pockets with the hurried action of a bridegroom who has forgotten the ring.

"I 'ad 'em all in my pocket this mornin'," he mumbled.

"You've lost them," she announced; then she added inconsistently: "Go upstairs and look!"

Bindle spent the next half-hour in searching everything that was searchable, even down to the dustbin; but nowhere could he find a single pawnticket, and he had perforce to announce that the portion of their home which was in the possession of "Ole Isaac" was irretrievably lost to them, whereat Mrs. Bindle had sunk down at the kitchen-table and indulged in a fit of hysterics which was already twenty-four hours overdue. From careful observation Bindle had discovered that during the period of crisis Mrs. Bindle had hysterics twice a week.

"Well, well," he muttered. "It ain't no good either laughin' or cryin' about it. I'd never 'ave 'ad the money to get them sticks out. My Gawd! Them sandwiches, an' the wine, an' that cigar. I'll never forget 'em; yet it don't seem fair me 'avin'

'em without Lizzie."

The reduction of the Government dole from twenty to fifteen shillings a week had been a serious thing for the Bindles. The trade union to which Bindle belonged was practically bankrupt, and the seven shillings a week it paid was insufficient to meet the rent.

To feed two people upon a pound a week, with slight additions of a few shillings due to the transference to "Ole Isaac" of one or other of Mrs. Bindle's household gods, had required very careful and economical management. A reduction of twenty-five per cent. had spelt tragedy, and in a very short time Bindle had economised two holes in the leather belt he had taken to. He foresaw a time when he would have "a waist like a bloomin' wasp."

No longer could he "cut and come again" at his favourite dishes, for they, too, had been included in the general catastrophe, Mrs. Bindle being obliged to select such foods as were cheap and sustaining.

Bindle had learnt to hate the name of haricots, lentils and split peas, stewed with bones a week old and white from constant immersion. Even of these culinary reiterations there was insufficient, and the spirit of self-sacrifice inspired Bindle to lie, and Mrs. Bindle to compromise with the truth.

"How can I eat when I don't know where the next meal's coming from?" she would snap illogically, when urged to "ave another go at that there bone an' bean dish," as Bindle had named the large yellow pie-dish in which their meals were now always served.

"I ain't 'ungry, not workin'," he would remark, when ordered to pass up his plate, his very stomach seeming to protest at the lie which denied it the occupation to which it was accustomed.

By common consent both Bindle and Mrs. Bindle kept from the Heartys all knowledge of the straits to which they were reduced. Even had they communicated to him the facts of the case, it is doubtful if Mr. Hearty would have been of any real assistance. None knew better than he the value of money, and in all probability his aid would have taken the form of a stock-soiled pineapple, or a cokernut which had lost most of its value, owing to being cracked and destitute of milk.

Mr. Hearty's dictum was "Let not thy right hand know what thy left hand doeth," and he found no difficulty in observing the rule, as neither compromised itself with lavish or injudicious charity. He never gave to beggars in the street because they "only spent it on drink," and he was not the man irrevocably to plunge into the fiery furnace of perpetual damnation the soul of a fellow-creature.

There were times when Mr. Hearty would talk gravely, almost grimly, of the dangers of promiscuous giving, and it was always when he had refused largess to some importuning piece of human flotsam. The only way to extract charity from Alfred Hearty was to take him by the throat, for, much as he valued his money, he valued his life more.

And so the Bindles passed from one hungry day to another.

"I'm worried about——" Mrs. Hearty broke off, beating her breast with her clenched fist.

Mr. Hearty looked up from the day-book, in which he was making entries. He was accustomed to Mrs. Hearty's serial form of conversation.

"I'm worried about Lizzie and Joe," said Mrs. Hearty, when she had recovered somewhat.

"Lizzie and Joe," repeated Mr. Hearty, in a patient, woolly voice. Mr. Hearty was always patient.

"Joe's been out of work for—for—oh, my breath!" gasped Mrs. Hearty. It had become a habit with her to break off when a word short of the completion of the sentence, in order to expend more than the necessary oxygen required to complete it.

"Eight weeks," concluded Mrs. Hearty.

"Eight weeks," repeated Mr. Hearty vaguely, his thoughts having returned to the day-book. "Eight weeks what?"

"Work!" exploded Mrs. Hearty, who once more began to beat her breast.

"Who has got eight weeks' work?" enquired Mr. Hearty.

Mrs. Hearty shook her head violently, and made motions with her hands; but it was several seconds before she could gasp the words, "Hasn't had it."

When she had gained more control over her powers of breathing, she proceeded to explain in wheezy jerks that she was greatly concerned as to what was happening at No. 7 Fenton Street.

Mr. Hearty regarded her with the air of a man who would like to change the subject.

"Can't you do somethin' for Joe, Alf?" she enquired presently.

"Do something?" interrogated Mr. Hearty. "I am—I am rather pressed for ready money at the moment, Martha," he added, as a precaution.

"Try and get 'im a job then," she suggested.

"I will make enquiries," said Mr. Hearty, as he returned to the pages of the day-book.

Mrs. Hearty had no illusions about the man she had married. On the few occasions when Mr. Hearty indulged in charity, it was always in connection with a subscription list, where he felt that to some extent he obtained value for money in the form of prestige among the faithful of the Alton Road Chapel.

There was no bond of sympathy between him and his brother-in-law; in fact, there was no bond of sympathy between Alfred Hearty and anybody, as from youth he had always been self-centred, his whole attention being concentrated on the art of getting on.

He had married as a preliminary to starting in business on his own account. He foresaw absences from his shop, and he distrusted his fellows. A wife could be left in charge of the till, and her keep would be less than the salary he would have to pay an assistant. Apart from that, she would cook, wash and mend.

He found his attention wandering from his work. He realised in a vague sort of way that Martha was not a woman to desert her own kith and kin, and he found himself wondering how he could help the Bindles and, at the same time, help himself.

Finally he decided that if he were to discharge his carman, Smith, to whom he paid two pounds fifteen shillings a week, and offer Bindle the job for thirty-five shillings a week, he would be exercising an economy of a pound a week and, at the same time, prove himself to be a practical Christian.

As he worked, the idea grew upon him, and he decided to give it careful consideration. With Mr. Hearty, to think things over had become almost a religion. Fools might rush in; but not Alfred Hearty. He had to see his way clear to every step in his career.

Brilliancy had no attraction for him. He was a plodder, and he hated risks.

Late in the afternoon of the following day, Mr. Hearty had come to the conclusion that he must help the Bindles in the hour of their need—that was how he had come to regard it.

That evening, after tea, he announced to Mrs. Hearty that he was going round to Fenton Street to see what could be done for the Bindles. It was Mrs. Bindle who answered the door to him. From the kitchen, Bindle heard the woolly tones of his brother-in-law, and he wondered what had brought them so unaccustomed a visitor. For some time he listened to the murmur of the voices in the parlour. Presently Mrs. Bindle entered the kitchen.

"Mr. Hearty wants to see you, Bindle," she announced. There was an unwonted light in her eye.

"Wot's 'e want?" muttered Bindle.

"He has something to say to you," was the retort. "You'd better go at once."

"Ah, well," said Bindle. "I suppose 'e wants to tell me one of those long stories of 'is."

"Now, mind what you say to him!" admonished Mrs. Bindle. "You ought to be very grateful."

"I ought to be wot?" queried Bindle, pausing half-way to the door.

"You ought to be extremely grateful."

"Grateful to 'Earty," persisted Bindle. "Anyone wot was grateful to 'Earty would be a livin' lie."

"There you go!" hissed Mrs. Bindle angrily. "As soon as anyone tries to help you, you want to insult them."

Deciding that it was politic to allow Mrs. Bindle the last word, Bindle entered the parlour, to find Mr. Hearty seated on the edge of a chair.

"'Ullo, 'Earty!" cried Bindle. "'Ow's Martha?"

"Good evening, Joseph," said Mr. Hearty, who was always punctilious in the way of speaking. "Martha is about the same, thank you. I—I called to—to——" He paused uncertainly.

"Mr. Hearty's going to let you drive his van," explained Mrs. Bindle, who had followed him into the room. "I think it is very kind of you, Mr. Hearty," she added.

"Drive your van, 'Earty? I ain't much in the drivin' line," he added. "Still, if somebody leads the 'orse, I might be able to get through."

"Mr. Hearty will give you thirty-five shillings a week," continued Mrs. Bindle, "and—and——" She paused.

"Wot's 'appened to ole Smith?"

"He—he will be leaving." Mr. Hearty looked uncomfortable.

"You 'oofin' 'im out?" enquired Bindle, curiously. "Wot's 'e been up to, pinchin' the spuds?"

"He has—he has——" began Mr. Hearty.

Then he paused.

"Mr. Hearty is discharging him to make room for you, Bindle, and you ought to be very grateful."

"'As 'e been up to anythink, 'Earty?" enquired Bindle.

"No," replied Mr. Hearty. "He has always done very well; but I thought——"

"You're payin' 'im two pounds fifteen shillin' a week, ain't you?"

"Yes, that is what he gets."

"An' now you're goin' to give 'im the boot, an' give me 'is job, an' save a pound a week."

"I felt that—Martha said you were out of work, and I——"

"Earty," said Bindle, shaking his head from side to side, "you got the 'eart of a blackleg. Lizzie says I ain't got a soul; but if I 'ad I wouldn't sell it for a quid a week. An' I ain't a-goin' to take poor ole Smith's job, 'im with a wife an' three kids. No doubt you means well; but, my Gawd, you've got a funny way of showin' it," and with that Bindle turned, brushed past Mrs. Bindle and re-entered the kitchen.

"There's goin' to be a 'ell of a row to-night for this 'ere," he muttered, as he sat down and awaited the return of Mrs. Bindle. "Mrs. B. ain't altogether a joy w'en you got a belly full," he muttered. "W'en you ain't—well, well, we can't 'ave every think."

When Mrs. Bindle re-entered the kitchen, having closed the street-door behind Mr. Hearty, Bindle realised that he had not been unduly pessimistic in his anticipation. Before she had closed the door behind her, the storm burst.

"And now what have you got to say for yourself?" she demanded. "Insulting Mr. Hearty when he came to offer to help you."

"Earty don't care a blow about me," was Bindle's retort. "'E's out for savin' money."

"He was willing to give you work, and you refused it, and, not content with that, you must insult him at the same time. Mr. Hearty will find it very difficult to forgive you."

"Well, that's one comfort," retorted Bindle. "Any'ow, I'm never goin' to forgive 'im for wanting to make me a blackleg."

"It's those wicked trade-union ideas that you've got in your head," replied Mrs. Bindle. "I'd trade-union them if I got hold of them. Ruining homes like this. And now," she announced, with the air of one playing a last card, "you either accept Mr. Hearty's offer, or out you go from this house to-night. I've had enough of you and your lazy, good-for-nothing ways!" she cried, her voice increasing in shrillness.

"You don't want to work," she continued. "That's what's the matter with you. You're like the precious trade unions; but I'll show you, as I showed them. Now, you can make up your mind. Either you go and drive Mr. Hearty's van, or out you go!"

"But I can't take poor ole Smith's job, an' 'im with a wife an' kids."

"That's no business of yours!" retorted Mrs. Bindle. "If you have bread-and-butter put in your mouth, it's for you to eat it. No wonder you haven't got work if that's how you try to get it. I shall be ashamed to see Mr. Hearty after this."

"So shall I," was Bindle's dry retort. "Any man wot is a man would be ashamed to meet a cove wot could do the dirty like that."

"So you aren't going to accept the job?" demanded Mrs. Bindle.

"No, I bloomin' well ain't!" cried Bindle, with decision.

"Then out you go!" and Mrs. Bindle darted into the scullery, returning a moment later with the mop. "I mean it!" she shrilled. "Either you promise to start work for Mr. Hearty on Monday week, or you can find somebody else to look after you. Now then, make up your mind!"

To assist Bindle in making up his mind, she made a lunge at him with the business end of the mop. Bindle dodged, and put the kitchen table between them.

For several minutes they dodged about the kitchen. With the aid of chairs and doubling round the table, Bindle strove to keep Mrs. Bindle at such a distance from him as to render her weapon useless.

At length, realising that they could not spend the whole evening in jumping round like young lambs, he presently made a dart for the door, snatched up his cap as he passed, and made a successful get-away.

"You let me see your face back here again, and I'll throttle you!" rang Mrs. Bindle's valediction in his ears, as she banged the street-door behind him.

"Well, I'm blowed!" muttered Bindle, as he paused beneath a lamp-post half-way down Fenton Street. "I suppose this is wot they call the 'ome life of England."

III

"I likes a bit o' bread-an'-cheese an' a glass—an' a cup o' tea," amended Mr. Bindle, as, with moistened forefinger, he proceeded to gather up such crumbs as still lay upon his plate, later transferring them to his mouth. He had remembered in time that beer had ceased to figure in the menu at No. 7 Fenton Street.

He emptied his cup, striving to disguise his distaste for tea without milk or sugar.

Mrs. Bindle sat staring straight in front of her. Since Bindle had announced the night before that there would be no further payment from the union, she had realised that things were nearing a crisis.

Fifteen shillings a week with the rent to pay would leave nothing for food, and if the rent were not paid they would be turned out.

Never in the history of her married life had she been threatened by such a disaster. In the earlier days of the trouble she had not hesitated to reproach Bindle with his inability to obtain work; but as the weeks had passed, and he grew paler and thinner in the face, she manifested a sportsmanship that caused him to marvel.

The "Got a job?"; with which he was greeted each evening lost that note of hardness and reproach which had characterised it earlier. In its place was a wistful note of enquiry.

From eight o'clock that morning until well after six Bindle had tramped about, foodless and tobaccoless. He had given up the Labour Exchange as hopeless, contenting himself with the necessary reporting each day in order to obtain the dole. He would then make his way to the Fulham Library, where, in common with hundreds of others, he strove to catch a glimpse of the advertisement columns of the daily papers.

Since his return that evening he had striven to be conversational and cheerful. He was striving to postpone the discussion of their finances, which he knew was inevitable.

"There's fivepence-halfpenny in the drawer," announced Mrs. Bindle, with the air of one who is determined to face the crisis. It was her custom, when not engaged in shopping, to keep her purse in the right-hand dresser drawer.

For once in his life Bindle had no retort.

"There's nothing in the house for breakfast," she continued, "and that's all the bread we've got." Her eyes indicated about a quarter of a tin loaf that lay on the table.

"It don't look 'ealthy, do it?" he murmured bravely.

In times of great emotional stress, Mrs. Bindle would delve deep into the past, returning triumphantly with some further evidence of Bindle's obliquity.

"I won't accept charity!" cried Mrs. Bindle shrilly. "If you bring any of your parish relief people here, I'll mark them, see if I don't."

"All right, Lizzie," said Bindle pacifically. "I ain't said anythink about applyin' for parish relief."

"But you're thinking of it," was the retort. "I know you!"

"Oh, my Gawd!" murmured Bindle. "'Oo the 'ell put that into 'er 'ead."

"You're always trying to drag me down," continued Mrs. Bindle. "Ever since I married you, and now you want to shame me before the neighbours. It's always the same—you and your common ways. Look how you behave at table, picking your teeth with a bus-ticket. I might be your slave for all the respect you show me."

"But I ain't tryin' to drag you down, an' it ain't a bus-ticket, it's a bit of a matchbox, Lizzie," he protested. "I ain't said anything——"

"No, you haven't said anything; but I know you. I was warned what to expect when you were late at the church."

"Late at the church," repeated Bindle, with a puzzled air.

"Yes; when we were married. You couldn't even be there in time, leaving me to look like a fool while you——" She broke off hysterically.

"But I was there in time," protested Bindle. "You was early." And then Bindle committed a tactical error by adding: "Women always is early."

"You beast! I know what you mean," she cried tempestuously, the last vestiges of self-control slipping from her. "You want—you—look what you've brought me to. Perhaps you'll tell me how I'm going to feed you, instead of making stupid remarks," she snapped.

He said nothing. With the aid of a pipe he felt that he might possibly be equal to the situation; but without it he was a broken reed. His imagination refused to function.

"Well?"

"There don't seem much to say, Lizzie," and there was a humility in his tone which touched even Mrs. Bindle. In it was something of shame that he had failed to supply their modest domestic needs.

"I shall buy bread with all the money left," she announced, her housewifely instincts asserting themselves even in the hour of tragedy. "Stale bread," she added as an afterthought.

"Well, it won't exactly run to eggs and bacon," he agreed, with forced cheerfulness.

"That's right," she cried angrily, "treat it all as a joke! Perhaps it'll fill your stomach. You won't be happy till the brokers are——"

"My Gawd!"

It was not Mrs. Bindle's remark that drew from Bindle the exclamation; but a sudden pounding on the front door.

Both started to their feet and stood staring at the kitchen door which led into the narrow passage.

Again a tremendous rat-tat-tat filled the kitchen with sound.

"Well, aren't you going to open the door?" she cried at length, being the first to recover from her astonishment.

"Shall I let 'em in?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Let who in?"

"The bums," and for once Mrs. Bindle forgot to rebuke him for slang.

"The rent's paid to the end of the month," she said, and Bindle walked reluctantly to the door, fear in his eyes and speculation in his heart.

A moment later Mrs. Bindle's eyes widened. Down the passage boomed the refrain, sung in many keys:

"For he's a jolly good fellow,
For he's a jolly good fellow,
For he's a jolly good fellow,
And so say all of us."

Her left hand seemed instinctively to raise itself to her heart, while her right clutched the edge of the table. The moment was pregnant with drama, and Mrs. Bindle, for the first time in her life, wondered if she were going to faint.

A moment later the kitchen door was burst open, and half a dozen young men poured in, shouting at the top of their voices; while the rear was brought up by Bindle, who protested that he had got something in his eye and proceeded to rub, not one, but both eyes with the back of his hand.

Mrs. Bindle noticed that two of the men carried between them a large hamper, which they placed in the centre of the room.

Suddenly one of them, who appeared to be a sort of master of the ceremonies, blew a shrill blast upon a whistle, producing instantaneous silence. He thereupon mounted a chair.

"Mrs. Bindle," he cried gravely, "we, the men of Tim's, have come to supper. Minions, do your duty," he cried, addressing the others.

Instantly the table was cleared and the dirty crockery piled in the sink. In a dazed sort of way, Mrs. Bindle watched these young men opening drawers, collecting knives and forks and laying the table for eight, while one proceeded to wash up the dirty dishes, producing the water from a large earthenware jar they had brought with them.

The hamper was opened, and proved a veritable cornucopia.

Through a mist of water caused by the fly which had got into his eye, Bindle saw taken from that basket things he was able to identify, such as sandwiches and pastries; and things that were new to him, including galantine of chicken, chicken in aspic, and other dainties.

Several times Mrs. Bindle seemed to swallow with difficulty. Suddenly she turned and literally ran from the room, a moment later followed by Bindle.

When the two returned, they found the table laid, and even Mrs. Bindle, a severe critic in such matters, could find no fault with it. There was not enough cutlery to go round, and the plate shortage was overcome by using saucers.

From the bedroom window above, Bindle had seen a large open car at the door. He had also seen the majority of his neighbours at either door or window.

Some had come out into the street in order to miss nothing of the sight of "a private motor-car" at the door of one of their neighbours' houses.

"Altesse! the banquet is served," announced a little man with large round spectacles and sandy hair, as he bowed gravely before the man with the silver whistle.

Walking up to Mrs. Bindle, the master of the ceremonies gravely offered her his arm. In spite of herself, she took it, and was led to the head of the table.

Bindle, still blinking, was placed at the foot, and the others seated themselves three on either side.

"Now!" cried the leader, rising and addressing his companions, "you have our permission to indulge your disgusting

appetites."

Amidst cheers, they proceeded to help themselves, not forgetting the Bindles.

At first Mrs. Bindle hesitated; but the galantine of chicken was good, and it was weeks since she had eaten a satisfying meal. As for Bindle, he ate as a man eats but once or twice in a lifetime. The food was good, and the beer was better; but the company was best of all.

For once Mrs. Bindle forgot her table manners. She no longer toyed with her knife and fork, but used them with the zest of one who is hungry.

It was long before Bindle pushed his plate from him.

"It's no good," he sighed, in response to urgings to try a wing of chicken. "I can't. I 'ope nothink swells," he added a moment later, a note of anxiety in his voice. "If it does, then I'll bust."

The meal completed, the leader once more rose, bowed, and, without a word of adieu, the whole party tramped from the room, leaving the remains of the feast behind, and in those remains Bindle saw at least a dozen good meals for them both.

"Stop them!"

Mrs. Bindle's exclamation galvanised Bindle to action. He dashed across the kitchen and along the passage, arriving just in time to see the tail-light of the car as it turned the corner.

"Well, I'm blowed!"

For more than a minute he stood at the door, unconscious of the many pairs of eyes that were turned upon him. He was aroused from his thoughts by an exclamation, half cry, half scream, from Mrs. Bindle. A moment later the parlour door opened.

"Bindle, come here!" she cried, and there was something in her voice that struck him as strange.

Closing the street-door, he dashed into the parlour, to find Mrs. Bindle gazing down at a miscellaneous assortment of household goods piled on the floor.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he muttered, as he gazed at the sacrifices made at the altar at which presided "Ole Isaac."
"Well, I'm blowed!" he repeated for the third time. "They must 'ave brought 'em in when we was upstairs."

"What did you do with them pawn tickets?" demanded Mrs. Bindle aggressively.

"I must 'ave lorst 'em."

"You gave them to someone," she cried suspiciously.

"Strike me dead if I did, Lizzie!" he assured her, and in the sincerity of his tone she forgave him the blasphemy.

On the centre table was a large envelope. He tore it open with fingers that were none too steady, and unfolded a sheet of paper, to which was attached a bunch of five one-pound notes.

For a moment the words danced before his eyes, which once more became obscured by the pain of "the fly."

Mrs. Bindle snatched the note from him, and read:

We, the reprobates of Tim's, never forsake a pal, just as we always respect his independence. Enclosed is a

promissory note for the money and a fourth of the banquet. We, the men of Tim's, ate the rest.

Pay when you can and how you like. Send the money to Dr. Richard Little, of Sloane Gardens, who stole the pawntickets. By the way, he's got you a job—go and see if you like it. The water and the gas will flow again to-morrow.

Ave atque vale!

THE ASSASSINS OF TIM'S.

Without a word, Mrs. Bindle handed the paper to Bindle and, as he read, the pain of the fly in his eye became so great that the tears rolled uninterruptedly down either side of his face.

Putting the paper down on the table, he turned and left the room. A moment later Mrs. Bindle sank to her knees by the table and, clutching it with both hands, her head fell forward, and she proceeded to cry quietly on to the chenille cover, and there was nothing hysterical in her emotion.

That night, the course of Mrs. Bindle's prayers to heaven was as straight as those of a little child.

CHAPTER II

BINDLE GOES TO CHAPEL

I

Mrs. Bindle looked forward to Sunday. The afternoon and evening she dedicated to her soul; but the morning she spent in the kitchen, preparing dinner. She was an excellent cook and a good housewife, and her faith was never permitted to interfere with the proper performance of her domestic duties.

Once a fellow-member of the Alton Road Chapel had suggested that Providence would not look kindly on one who worked on the Sabbath, even in the preparation of meals.

"Then what about the Sea of Galilee?" Mrs. Bindle had retorted.

The critic was silenced, and henceforth held her peace. She prided herself upon her knowledge of the Scriptures; but the reference to the Sea of Galilee puzzled her. She hesitated to confess her ignorance of an incident which seemed to come so easily to Mrs. Bindle's tongue.

Long and patiently this woman had searched Holy Writ for something that seemed even remotely to condone labouring upon the seventh day; but without success. In consequence she disliked Mrs. Bindle even more than before; but her dislike was henceforth tinged with respect.

To Bindle, Sunday dinner was an affair to be approached with what he called "tack." He enjoyed Mrs. Bindle's cooking, just as he disliked the homilies that invariably accompanied the Sabbath midday meal.

For six days Mrs. Bindle laboured with broom and duster, soap and water, hearth-stone and furniture-polish, in her fight for the material cleanliness of Bindle's home; on the seventh day she devoted herself to the spiritual conquest of his soul. To her a soul was what a scalp is to the American Indian. Bindle had once remarked to his friend Ginger: "Wot I likes about you, Ging, is that you ain't got a soul, an' no one wouldn't never know you'd ever 'eard of soap."

One Sunday, as Bindle was enjoying to the full Mrs. Bindle's conception of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding (made

with eggs and cooked under the meat), he was startled out of his content by the sudden and peremptory question: "Bindle, are you prepared to meet your Maker?"

He was in the act of lifting to his mouth a particularly succulent morsel of Yorkshire pudding, which he had been keeping till the last. He made a point of reserving what he called "a tasty bit" for the final mouthful.

The suddenness of Mrs. Bindle's interrogation caused him to glance at her obliquely, just at the moment when the Yorkshire pudding had covered half the distance to his mouth.

That side-look was fatal. The knife tilted slightly, and the Yorkshire pudding slid off, and ricocheted from his left knee on to the kitchen floor.

While he was rescuing the morsel and, for safety's sake, conveying it to his mouth by the more reliable means of his fingers, Mrs. Bindle sat regarding him with indrawn lips. It was the Sabbath, and she was striving to conduct herself as it behoved "a daughter of the Lord."

"Well?" she demanded, when he had masticated the errant dainty and pushed the plate from him, a sign that, so far as he was concerned, it possessed no further use or interest for him, and that he was prepared to sit in judgment upon whatever else there was to follow.

He turned to her, innocence and interrogation in his eye.

"Did you hear what I said?"

Mrs. Bindle was not to be diverted from her purpose, especially when that purpose had to do with the work of salvation.

"I 'eard you say somethink, Lizzie," he confessed, "but——" He paused.

"Are you prepared to meet the Lord?"

In Mrs. Bindle's tones there was a hell-fire-and-brimstone Calvinism.

"When?" demanded Bindle, desirous of temporising until the pudding appeared.

"Now!" was the uncompromising rejoinder.

"Before I've 'ad my puddin'?" with an injured air. "No, I ain't," he added with decision.

"You heathen!" Bindle was startled by the venom she precipitated into the words. "You're locked in the outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," she added with glib conviction.

"But not in my dinner-hour," he protested, his eye on a large saucepan, which instinct told him contained the next course.

"Blasphemer!" The word leapt from Mrs. Bindle's lips like a verbal Jack-in-the-box.

"No, I ain't, Lizzie." He recognised the portents, and realised that there would be a solemn course of theology before the sweets appeared.

"You are, and you know it," she cried. "Whistling on Sundays," she added inconsequently. "I've heard you."

Bindle always strove to suppress his natural inclination to whistle on the Sabbath; but there were times when a bar or two of some secular air would break bounds before he realised what day it was.

"Well, you didn't ought to want me to get up in the middle o' Sunday dinner," he grumbled.

"I wonder you aren't afraid of being struck dead where you sit, saying such things."

"Wot 'ave I said now?" He looked across at her, entirely at a loss.

"Oh, don't talk to me!" She rose from the table. "You're enough to try the patience of a saint." To Bindle's manifest relief, she proceeded to attack the saucepan, which proved to contain an apple pudding, in the making of which Mrs. Bindle had nothing to learn.

He raised his head and sniffed the air like a hound. He was uncommonly fond of apple pudding.

Mrs. Bindle dished-up the pudding to the accompaniment of a series of bangs, which eloquently expressed her feelings.

Bindle licked his lips and waited.

With a super-bang she placed the dish upon the table and resumed her chair. Seizing a spoon, she proceeded to hack out a piece of the pudding, dash it on to a plate as if it had been Bindle's soul, and dab apple beside it.

"Mind it doesn't choke you," she snapped as she handed him the plate.

"I'll try and see that it slips down comfortable like," he said cheerily, reaching for the sugar-basin.

"Better taste it first," she interposed; "there's plenty of sugar."

Bindle took a generous spoonful of the pudding, conveyed it to his mouth, but a moment later he returned it to the plate with a little yelp.

"You beast!"

"But it's 'ot," he protested, looking reproachfully at the steaming pudding. "Burnt my mouth, it did."

"You behave like a cannibal," she cried illogically. Mrs. Bindle's own table manners were almost too refined for the proper nourishment of her body.

"You wouldn't 'ave 'ad me swallow it?" He looked at her in surprise. "It 'ud 'ave burnt an ole in my——"

"Stop it!"

"Oh, all right!" he grumbled as he returned to his plate and proceeded to attack the pudding with subtle strategy, approaching it from the outer edge, and subjecting each spoonful to a vigorous blowing before putting it into his mouth.

"You never go to a place of worship," Mrs. Bindle remarked, returning to her original theme.

"A place of wot?" He looked across at her, still continuing his efforts to reduce the temperature of a piled-up spoonful before him.

"You never go to chapel. You know quite well what I mean. Perhaps if you went to chapel, you wouldn't be out of work." Mrs. Bindle drew in her lips and chin with the air of one who had pronounced a great truth.

"But 'ow's goin' to chapel goin' to 'elp me get a job?" asked Bindle, with corrugated brow. "They wouldn't listen to me a-preachin'."

"You're being punished!" announced Mrs. Bindle, with relish. "Punished for all your wickedness."

"Jer mean to say that Gawd's lost me my job so as to make me go to chapel?" persisted Bindle, whose literalness Mrs. Bindle frequently found disconcerting.

"Oh, don't talk to me!" she cried impatiently.

It was a phrase that came readily to her lips when she found difficulty in answering one of Bindle's theological interrogations.

"Besides," she continued a moment later, "Mr. Tubbs might give you a job if you belonged to the chapel."

"Oo's 'e?" demanded Bindle, his interest awakened at the thought of a job.

"Mr. Tubbs is a builder, and he is very fond of singing," she added in consequently.

"Well, I ain't got much of a voice," said Bindle, with the air of one trying to be scrupulously fair, and undesirous of taking a mean advantage of an employer; "and as to buildin', well, I shouldn't care to live in anythink wot I built. Still, somebody might go an' nose round an' see wot——"

"You jeer at everything I suggest," broke in Mrs. Bindle. "If you meant to get on, you would. You should go to the spider," she continued, recalling a phrase from one of Mr. MacFie's recent sermons on Bruce and the spider.

"The Yellow Ostrich is good enough for me," said Bindle. "Wot's the use of tellin' me to go to the spider when I 'aven't got twopence for a drink?"

"When you do get a job you don't keep it, because you don't behave yourself," said Mrs. Bindle, ignoring Bindle's irrelevancy.

"Look 'ere, Lizzie," he said quite recklessly, "I'll come to chapel next Sunday, blowed if I don't!" The pudding was uncommonly good, and Bindle felt on excellent terms with everybody; besides, next Sunday was a long way off.

"You'd only make me ashamed of you if you was to come. You've always been against religion and going to chapel," she complained.

"I ain't got nothink to say agin religion as religion," he remarked. "It's the Singin' Susans an' the Prayin' Peters wot gets me on the point of the jaw."

"If you go to chapel you've got to behave yourself," said Mrs. Bindle grimly.

"I'll be as good as gold." He held up his plate for another helping.

"You'd better!" she counselled grimly, as she viciously dabbed a spoonful of apple on the plate. "I'll speak to Mr. MacFie about it."

Mr. MacFie was the minister of the Alton Road Chapel and Bindle groaned in spirit at the prospect.

"I ain't got nothin' to say agin religion," he remarked a few minutes later, as he proceeded to scoop up the last fragment of pudding from the edge of the plate, "provided it don't go a-mixin' itself up with meal-times."

II

"Well, I'm blowed!" cried Bindle, coming to a standstill outside the Alton Road Chapel. "If I'd a known, I'm blessed if I'd 'ave come."

"Sssh!" Mrs. Bindle jabbed her elbow into Bindle's ribs.

"But look," he persisted, indicating a notice-board on which appeared in large letters:

ALL ARE WELCOME.
HEARTY SINGING.

"That ain't the way to get 'em to go in, a-telling 'em that 'Earty's a-goin' to sing. 'E'd empty a pub before closin'-time with a voice like 'is."

"Stop it!" Again Mrs. Bindle's elbow found Bindle's seventh rib. "It means all are to sing."

Her eyes were fixed upon a little man with bandy legs, a frock-coat and a silk hat, who was approaching.

"Mind you raise your hat when Mr. Tubbs raises his," she whispered to Bindle.

"Raise my wot?" Bindle gazed about him vaguely.

"Sssh!"

"Ain't we goin' in?" he enquired with the air of one who, having made up his mind to go to the dentist, sees no object in waiting outside.

Mrs. Bindle ignored the question. Mr. Tubbs was a deacon at the Alcon Road Chapel, and, socially, she always had one eye upon those who breathed the air of a higher plane. She was conscious of looking her best in an alpaca dress of deep purple, cut to a decorous length, which quite obscured her elastic-sided boots.

She wore a bonnet of a shape that she had adopted for years. Flat at the sides, it was built up high in front, like the bows of a modern destroyer.

Her fawn kid gloves, tight across the palm, rendered the carrying of her best (silver-mounted) umbrella a matter of some difficulty.

When he reached the chapel door, Mr. Tubbs did all that was expected of him; but he was not accustomed to putting on a top-hat except before the looking-glass, with the result that in restoring it to his small, bald head he managed to drop his hymn-book (large size with music, Mr. Tubbs being great on harmony—his own harmony).

Bindle sprang forward and rescued the book, and with a cheerful smile handed it to Mr. Tubbs.

"Funny sort o' things when you ain't used to 'em," he said pleasantly. "Them 'ats," he added, nodding to indicate Mr. Tubbs's headgear.

"Bindle!" hissed Mrs. Bindle in his ear.

Mr. Tubbs stared as if Bindle had made a remark in some strange tongue.

Before there was any chance of further conversation, Mrs. Bindle somehow managed to hurry Bindle into the chapel, Mr. Tubbs having made it obvious that the Bindles were to precede him. He prided himself upon his manners, which seemed to hang about him rather like a harness than a natural possession.

The Alton Road Chapel was a small brick building roofed with corrugated iron, and possessed of a single bell of depressing dolefulness.

Once inside, Bindle raised his head and sniffed as he was wont to do on entering Mrs. Bindle's kitchen when there were evidences that stewed steak and onions were in preparation.

"'Ums a bit, don't it?" he said in a hoarse whisper, which was clearly audible.

In her horror and shame, Mrs. Bindle gripped him by the arm with her forefinger and thumb.

"Ow!" he cried. "Leggo my arm, you're 'urting."

Every head in the chapel was turned towards them, and for the moment Mrs. Bindle would have welcomed even the pit of Tophet to open and swallow her up.

Bindle seemed to realise that he had said and done the wrong thing, for, rubbing his arm gingerly, he permitted himself to be led to one of the highly varnished seats about half-way up the aisle.

Mrs. Bindle was conscious that heads were drawing together, and there was a subdued hiss of whispering. Never had she felt so ashamed, and she mentally registered a resolve that Bindle should have cause to regret his conduct.

In the meantime, Bindle was endeavouring to dissect the odour into its various component parts. There was a smell of dampness, of varnish, with a leitmotiv of carbolic soap. These he was able to detach from the whole; but there was a predominant influence at work, which he decided must owe its origin to a dead rat, possibly a cat. The other scents entirely eluded him.

Suddenly he became conscious that Mrs. Bindle was on her knees, her head bowed between her hands. For some seconds he regarded her curiously; but soon his attention was distracted by the sight of Mr. Hearty walking up the aisle to his seat.

"Ullo, 'Earty," he whispered as he leant towards his brother-in-law.

Mr. Hearty started as if Beelzebub himself had addressed him, looked round vaguely, then, his eyes resting on Bindle, he stared with dropped jaw.

Bindle grinned cheerfully. He quite realised the cause of his brother-in-law's surprise.

"Didn't expect to see me 'ere, did you, 'Earty?" he continued in a whisper that could clearly be heard all over the little chapel.

Mr. Hearty hurried to his seat. At the sound of Bindle's whisper, Mrs. Bindle had risen to her feet.

She dare not nudge him for fear of what he might say. Suddenly her eyes fell upon the hymn-book before her. Seizing and opening it, she thrust it into his hands. He looked at the book, then up at Mrs. Bindle.

"This the one?" he queried.

"Sssh!"

The admonition came from behind. Bindle turned his head quickly and caught the disapproving eye of Mr. Tubbs. He nodded cheerily and returned to the hymn-book, the leaves of which he proceeded to turn, with the air of a man who has nothing with which to occupy him.

Mrs. Bindle sat staring straight in front of her like an Assyrian goddess. She had already bitterly regretted this latest attempt to achieve Bindle's salvation.

It was with a feeling of relief that she saw Mr. MacFie come out of the small vestry and move towards his reading-desk.

The congregation straightened itself preparatory to throwing itself with vigour into the opening hymn.

With a strong Scots accent, Mr. MacFie announced the number.

"Don't you dare to sing," commanded Mrs. Bindle in a whisper; but Bindle was industriously engaged in tracking down hymn number 611.

It was with something of a thrill that he discovered it to be "Onward, Christian Soldiers." If there was one thing

about religion that Bindle liked, it was this particular hymn. There was about it a martial clash that appealed to him.

"It ain't like them other sappy tunes," he had once remarked to Mrs. Bindle. "There's ginger in it." But neither Mr. Baring Gould nor Sir Arthur Sullivan had ever conceived their hymn as Bindle was wont to render it.

"Mind now," repeated Mrs. Bindle, confident of not being overheard in the rustle of turning leaves, "don't you dare to sing, Bindle."

From somewhere at the other end of the chapel, an American organ began to moan and the congregation rose. They liked that hymn. They had it frequently, sometimes twice a day.

The American organ plodded on its way in spite of the ciphering of two notes. Presently the player gave the signal for the singing to start. The congregation gripped it as it never failed to grip a hymn it liked; but Bindle got off a full stroke ahead of the rest, and he proceeded to throw himself into the inspiring melody with heart and soul.

The weakness about Bindle's singing was his inability to control his voice. It wavered and darted about over the whole gamut of sound, while he himself seemed quite oblivious of the fact that the notes he was singing were not those that were being sung around him.

After the first few bars, several singers in his vicinity stopped and gazed at him in wonder. Mr. Tubbs glared at Bindle's back, no harmony could make way against such a volume of sound as Bindle was letting loose.

Mrs. Bindle dug her elbow viciously into his ribs; but Bindle was now well in his stride, and enjoying himself hugely.

By the time the refrain was started, Bindle, the American organ and a little deaf man at the far end of the chapel, had matters their own way, with Bindle nearly a bar ahead.

As the hymn progressed, other members of the congregation gradually recovered from their surprise and joined once more the flow of song; but Bindle's voice rose well above the combined efforts of the others, who had taken the precaution of linking-up with him rather than with the American organ. The instrument, as if weary of lagging behind, made a gallant effort to catch up the singers; but, led by Bindle, they kept a good half-bar ahead.

Mrs. Bindle's vicious digs at him with her elbow seemed to spur him on to further effort. It was essentially his hymn, and, as if to demonstrate this fact, he concluded the refrain of the last verse a good half-bar behind the rest.

With a reluctant sigh of satisfaction, he closed the hymn-book and resumed his seat, regretful that hymns admitted of no encores.

That morning Mrs. Bindle suffered as she had never suffered before at chapel. During the prayers, which were of great length, Bindle grew restless and fidgeted to such an extent as to attract to himself the attention of those about him; but, to Mrs. Bindle, the prayers were as nothing to the hymns.

As she later confided to Mr. Hearty, "It made me hot all over to hear Bindle blaspheming in the House of God. 'E did it a-purpose, Mr. Hearty," she said, forgetting her meticulous diction in the intensity of her emotion. "I'm sure that's why he offered to come."

Mr. Hearty murmured something suggestive of woolly sympathy.

"And Mr. Tubbs only two seats off," she had continued, "and Bindle shouting 'Man the Lifeboat,' as if—as if he were calling coals. Oh! I was so ashamed, and Mr. Tubbs so fond of that hymn, too."

"But it wasn't your fault, Elizabeth," Mr. Hearty sympathised, in a voice admirably suited to a funeral in November. "In the sight of Heaven——" He paused. Mr. Hearty had a habit of beginning sentences and leaving them unfinished.

It was not the sight of Heaven, however, that had troubled Mrs. Bindle at that moment so much as the sight of man,

which was more penetrating and more critical.

"I shall never be able to hold up my head again," she had moaned. "The beast! I'll pay 'im," she added a moment later, dropping from Christianity into Judaism.

It was not until Mr. MacFie began his address that Mrs. Bindle regained to some degree her composure.

Mr. MacFie plunged into the parable of the lost sheep with gusto. His eloquence and dialect were equally marked as he narrated the joy of the Shepherd in discovering and bringing safe into the fold the lost Sheep.

Bindle listened drowsily to Mr. MacFie's somnolent voice, which many of his flock had difficulty in withstanding. It was not until Mr. MacFie announced, "Ahm geeven to onderstand that we have in our meedst the day a puir, wayward lamb that was in danger of becoming lost," that Bindle, scenting scandal, began to take an active interest in Mr. MacFie's droning periods. "It is to be our preevilege to snatch him from the seething cauldron of sin, from the gleettering highway of the riotous and sinful liver."

Bindle looked about him with interest, hoping that the culprit would betray himself; but everyone seemed to return his gaze with a curiosity equal to his own.

Mr. MacFie proceeded to trace the rake's progress from the cradle to a sort of post-mortem grill, which inevitably would have been his fate had he not "seen the Light" in time.

He seemed to find a grim satisfaction in piling up opprobrious epithet upon opprobrious epithet, until it seemed impossible for anyone so deeply merged in sin to turn from his evil ways.

During this tirade, Bindle's attention had been divided between Mr. MacFie and an inoffensive little man with bowed head sitting three seats in front of him, who seemed to be heavily charged with "Amens."

"Oo's 'e?" Bindle demanded of Mrs. Bindle in an eager whisper. He was convinced that the little man was the culprit.

"Husssssssh!" she hissed tensely.

Mr. MacFie continued with inspiration to describe the past life of the sinner, until Bindle decided that it was far too hectic for the little man with the bowed head in front. He was obviously too frail an object to have been "such a snorter," in spite of "'im 'avin' Amens like 'iccups," as he later remarked to Mr. Hearty.

Mr. MacFie proceeded to draw a comparison between the wrong-doer's past life and his now assured future. He exhorted his hearers to go out that night and pluck brands from the burning.

Again Bindle looked enquiringly at Mrs. Bindle; but her gaze was fixed and stony. It might almost have appeared that she was the sinner being pilloried by the minister. She had already regretted taking the minister into her confidence in the matter of Bindle's approaching regeneration.

Bindle made a further effort to identify the culprit; but nowhere could he see anyone whose general demeanour denoted that he was the black-hearted sinner who had come to the Alton Road Chapel to be cleansed.

Mr. MacFie seemed to find greater pleasure in dwelling upon the iniquities of the repentant sinner's past, than the rewards of the future. He referred to him as "drinking deep of the cup that Satan holds out to all," of being "addeected to trail his garments in the blood of the eennocent," of having stricken the fatherless and taken advantage of the trusting widow; "and yet, ma freends, he is the lamb that we welcome here the day."

"Pretty streaky sort o' lamb," muttered Bindle. "They didn't ought to 'ave let 'im orf the collar," he added, drawing from Mrs. Bindle another admonitory "Sssssh!"

For some time Mr. MacFie continued droning damnation, and Bindle began to realise that the repentant sinner was

not to be hauled forth and presented to the full view of the congregation. The dramatic always appealed to him.

At length, Mr. MacFie seemed to have exhausted his supply of blacks and crimsons in describing the hereafter of the sinner had he not escaped judgment. Amidst a chorus of what seemed to Bindle like groans, but were in reality "Amens," he concluded.

Two minutes later, Bindle was leading the congregation in a particularly lusty rendering of "Wonderful Words," in which he beat all comers and actually silenced the American organ, which gave up at the beginning of the second chorus.

Immediately the hymn had concluded, Mrs. Bindle manifested a strong desire to get home. She thrust Bindle's hat into his hand, and gave him a push that sent him sliding some eighteen inches along the seat.

"Go out!" she hissed with all the intensity of a villain in a melodrama, and Bindle regretfully obeyed. He would infinitely have preferred to stay in the hope of exchanging a few words with the ex-lost soul; but Mrs. Bindle was inexorable.

"I enjoyed them 'ymns," he remarked as they walked along the Alton Road.

Mrs. Bindle made no comment; but continued to stalk beside him with lips indrawn, and hymn-book clutched tightly in her right hand.

"'E must 'ave been 'ot stuff, that cove what they was prayin' for." Bindle made another effort at conversation as they turned into the New King's Road.

Mrs. Bindle still maintained a grim silence. She dared not trust herself to speak.

"I tried to spot 'im," continued Bindle, as he waved to an acquaintance engaged in collecting fares on the top of a motorbus.

"Fancy a cove bein' all them things, an' then 'avin' the bloomin' cheek to go to chapel expectin' to be washed white. Like a nigger goin' to a swimmin' bath and thinkin' 'e'll——"

"Stop it!" hissed Mrs. Bindle from between her tightly clenched teeth.

For the next hundred yards he was silent; but his interest in the identity of the lost one was greater than his discretion.

"Personally, meself," he remarked, with the air of one who after mature consideration has come to a decision, "I think it was that nosey little cove in front wot kep' sayin' 'Amen.' More like a goat bleatin' than a lamb."

"IT WAS YOU!"

The words came tensely from between Mrs. Bindle's hidden lips.

"Me?" Into that one word Bindle seemed to precipitate all the surprise of which he was capable.

"It was you that Mr. MacFie was praying for, you heathen!" She could restrain herself no longer.

"Me?" Bindle repeated, coming to a standstill in his astonishment. "Me?" he said for the third time, as with a few swift steps he caught up with her.

"Yes, and you know it," she cried, struggling against the hysterical outburst that was long overdue. "You know it in that black heart of yours, and now you have disgraced me," she added as they turned into Fenton Street.

"Me all them things wot 'e told us about!" cried Bindle, still incredulous. "Me a brand from the burnin', a blasphemier, a-strikin' the fatherless and bilkin' the widow."

Mrs. Bindle covered the few yards that lay between her and No. 7 almost at the double. She had the key in her hand and with trembling, uncertain movements inserted it in the lock, opened the door and ran along the passage to the kitchen.

As Bindle closed the door, a peal of unnatural mirth rang along the narrow passage. Mrs. Bindle was having hysterics.

"Well I'm blowed!" he muttered as, with lagging steps, he covered the distance between himself and the kitchen door. "Fancy 'er a-takin' on like that, an' me a-singin' the 'ymns like giddy-o."

"Poor Mr. Bindle!" muttered Mrs. Sawney, who lived at No. 5, as she put on the kettle, "'E 'as somethink to put up with."

CHAPTER III

THE PUSSYFOOT MEETING

I

"'Ullo, 'Earty," cried Bindle cheerily as he entered the parlour of Mr. Hearty's Putney shop, followed by Mrs. Hearty, wheezing laboriously, "goin' to open a pawnshop?"

The table at which Mr. Hearty sat was littered with white and pink tickets, and he himself was laboriously addressing envelopes with a spluttering pen.

"It's the prohibition meeting," gasped Mrs. Hearty, who suffered from a reluctant heart and constricted breathing, as she collapsed into an arm-chair.

"The wot?" demanded Bindle, walking over to the table, picking up a pink ticket and reading it with elaborate care.

"It's a prohibition meeting," said Mr. Hearty, looking up a little apprehensively. He had hoped that Bindle would not call that evening; but his heart had been charged with misgiving. If ever he desired that his brother-in-law should not call, it inevitably happened that Bindle chose that particular occasion on which to present himself.

"Well, I'm blowed if this ain't It!" Bindle looked reproachfully down at Mr. Hearty. "An' wot's goin' to 'appen to the British Empire without beer?" he demanded.

"I'm afraid——" began Mr. Hearty nervously, then paused.

"He's late for chapel," wheezed Mrs. Hearty.

"'Earty, 'Earty, you really didn't ought to get yourself mixed up in these 'ere sort o' stunts. You'll get them whiskers o' yours pulled out one o' these days, sure as sure. You ain't no scrapper," and Bindle looked down at Mr. Hearty reproachfully. "Any'ow I'll give an 'and," he cried genially, as he put his hat down on the table. "Wot's to be done?"

"If you'll put pink tickets in those envelopes," said Mr. Hearty with a sigh of relief as he indicated a pile of addressed envelopes in front of him. "Tuck in the flaps and they'll go for a halfpenny. Thank you, Joseph," he added as an afterthought.

"Right-o!" cried Bindle cheerfully.

For some time they worked in silence, Mr. Hearty addressing envelopes, Bindle inserting tickets and tucking in the

flaps.

"Wot yer want to do the workin' man out of 'is beer for, 'Earty?" Bindle presently enquired conversationally.

"He'll—he'll be happier without it," said Mr. Hearty, seizing the blotting-paper to remedy a blob of ink.

"I shouldn't 'ave thought it," was Bindle's comment. "Wot's 'e goin' to drink instead?"

"There's tea and coffee and lemonade——" began Mr. Hearty, then he paused and glanced furtively at Bindle.

"I 'adn't thought of them," was the dry retort.

"They're better than beer."

"Can you see a cove tryin' to pick up a road on lemonade, 'im wot's been used to beer?" demanded Bindle.

"America's gone 'dry'," said Mr. Hearty, as if in self-defence. "There's no drink there."

"So they says," was Bindle's comment.

"But it's in the papers," persisted Mr. Hearty, pausing in his envelope-addressing.

"There's an 'ell of a lot in the papers, 'Earty, wot 'ud take some provin'. Still you go on, don't mind me, an' if you gets yer 'ead broken, as you certainly will if ole Ginger gets to 'ear of it, well, don't say I didn't warn you. Now for stamps."

"I'll get them, Joseph," said Mr. Hearty, rising with alacrity, thankful of an excuse for breaking off the conversation.

Whilst he was out of the room, Bindle slipped into his pocket a number of both pink and white tickets. In this he had no very definite object in view; but, like the boy scouts, his motto was "Be prepared."

"You'll be late for chapel, Alf," wheezed Mrs. Hearty, as Mr. Hearty re-entered the room. He glanced apprehensively at the clock.

"I'll stick on the stamps, 'Earty," said Bindle good-naturedly, "an' post 'em if you like," he added. "I ain't a prayer-'og like you."

"Thank you, Joseph, thank you," said Mr. Hearty gratefully. "I don't want to be late to-night," he added. "You're sure you don't mind?" he enquired as he paused, his hand upon the door-knob.

"Not if you don't tell Ginger," was the cheery reply.

For the next quarter of an hour Bindle stuck on stamps, at the same time keeping Mrs. Hearty gasping and wheezing. Mrs. Hearty always laughed at Bindle, whether what he said were funny or not.

"Well, so long, Martha," he cried at length as he picked up his hat. "Don't you get goin' to no lemonade meetings. You stick to stout—on the quiet."

The next morning many earnest residents of Fulham and the surrounding district were puzzled to account for an intimation, brought to them by the postman, to the effect that John Blink dispensed at The Yellow Ostrich only the best beer, wines, and spirits, and furthermore that he was fully licensed to sell tobacco and cigars. They marvelled the more because their temperance tendencies were not unknown in the neighbourhood. However, they did not give the matter a second thought, knowing full well that the presence of the Evil One was manifested in many and devious ways.

On the Monday night following Mr. Hearty's activities in connection with the Pussyfoot Meeting to be held in Fulham two events were taking place in different parts of London that were to exercise some influence upon the course of that assembly.

At St. Timothy's Hospital, known to the initiated as "Tim's," among the students of which Bindle had many friends and admirers, a special meeting of the Amateur Dramatic Society was being held under the presidency of Dick Little, a one-time student at Tim's. He was explaining how essential it was that the younger generation should learn of the evils that ensued from alcoholism, and offered to any who would care to go a ticket for the great prohibitionist meeting to be held in Fulham a week hence.

At the self-same hour Bindle was standing in the public-bar of The Yellow Ostrich, situated off the Fulham Road, endeavouring to explain to his friends, Ginger, Huggles, and Wilkes, the meaning of the term "pussyfoot" and what it implied.

"The only time I ever see pore ole Ging 'urt in 'is private feelings," he remarked to Mr. Blink, the landlord, a florid little man with a bald, shiny head, side-whiskers, and a manner that could cow a drunk, no matter what his fighting weight, "was when milk went up to ninepence a quart. Ain't that so, Ging?" he queried.

Ginger murmured something about "blinkin' cat-lap."

"An' wot's goin' to 'appen to 'im when we all go 'dry'?" Bindle enquired of Mr. Blink.

"Go dry!" repeated Ginger, looking up from a contemplation of a buff spittoon in the corner, a gleam of interest manifesting itself from a desert of spots and freckles. "Who's goin' dry?"

"When the Pussyfoots come over 'ere, Ging, you got to drink stone ginger."

Ginger growled something indicative of decorated incredulity.

"You come along o' me on Monday to the meetin'," said Bindle, "an' you'll 'ear all about it."

Ginger looked from Bindle to Mr. Blink, then on to Huggles and Wilkes. Huggles grinned vacuously, and Wilkes nodded. He was in the midst of an elaborate fugue of coughs. Wilkes was always coughing; with him it had developed into something between a habit and a hobby. Ginger spat towards the buff spittoon and missed by inches.

"I ain't goin' wivout beer," he said fiercely. "Ruddy muck," he added somewhat inconsistently.

"Well, if them Pussyfoots gets their way, Ging, you'll be on milk-an'-soda before you knows it."

"I'll break 'is blinkin' jaw," announced Ginger, inspired by the sentiments of Caligula. "I'll show 'im."

"It ain't 'im, Ging," explained Bindle, "it's them. Millions of 'em. You can't get a drink in America, an' now they're comin' over 'ere to try an' stop you a-spoilin' that complexion o' yours."

"It's a ruddy lie, Joe Bindle, an' you're a blinkin' liar." Ginger's blood was up. With fists clenched at his sides, he threw out his jaw and leaned towards Bindle. There was menace in his attitude, menace and anger.

"'Alf a mo'," said Mr. Blink tactfully. "There ain't nothink to get shirty about. What he says is right; leastwise they go quite dry next year."

"Wot!" Ginger turned upon his new antagonist; Mr. Blink had not a reputation either as a humorist or a liar, and Ginger believed him. At first he seemed stunned, then, picking up his pewter, he slowly drained it, ending by gazing lovingly into its depths.

"'Ave another while you can, Ging," suggested Bindle, and Ginger replaced his pot upon the counter, acquiescence in his eye.

"I'll break their shudderin' jaws," he said, when he had half-emptied his refilled pewter. "Gi'e me one o' them streamin' tickets, gi'e me a ruddy dozen," he added. Ginger meant business.

"Well, so long," cried Bindle, as he turned towards the door, wiping his lips with the back of his hand. "I got to be movin' on." And with a nod to Mr. Blink he passed out of the bar of The Yellow Ostrich.

That evening Bindle visited several public bars where he was known and appreciated, and great was the indignation of those who frequented them at the news that a movement was on foot which seemed to imperil the fountain of their cheer and inspiration.

Men who had never before in their lives attended a meeting angrily demanded "a blinkin' ticket," and to all these requests Bindle readily responded until the supply of pieces of pink and white pasteboard was exhausted.

"Well, well," he murmured as he put his key into the latch of his house in Fenton Street, "it ought to be a pleasant evenin'—for the Pussyfoots."

III

The doorkeepers were puzzled. Those who presented tickets of admission for the meeting in "support of a memorial to Parliament in favour of prohibiting the sale of intoxicants throughout His Majesty's Dominions," were to a large extent such as are not usually associated with that particular kind of assembly.

The stewards had conferred among themselves; but had decided that when tickets were produced, admission could not very well be refused: still their hearts misgave them. They were men of peace, and from some of the expressions they had overheard, they were by no means sure that the bulk of the audience was animated by the same sentiment.

The front seats, it is true, were occupied by men whose soft hats and low collars were reassuring. They were suggestive of a stout adherence to the principles of right and dryness. At the back of the hall, however, there was obviously an element of rowdiness and potential objection.

Ginger had arrived early with an entourage that filled the stewards with doubt. One of them, a little gimlet-faced man with a large blue rosette pinned to the lapel of his coat, had come forward to examine their tickets; but Ginger's look had been so uncompromisingly aggressive that he had stepped hurriedly aside, and Ginger and his friends had taken their seats.

Bindle, who had been there "almost as soon as the gas," as he put it, had taken up a position where he had a good view of the platform without himself being too obvious. With him was Dick Little.

"Well, I'm blowed," he exclaimed, as he gazed at the fast filling platform.

"What's up, J.B.?" enquired Dick Little.

"There's my ole pal Gupperduck, 'im wot used to be our lodger; yes, an' there's 'is two pals with 'im—that cove wot looks like a goat, that's one of 'em. It was 'im wot shinned up a tree on Putney 'Ill when they dipped pore ole Guppy in the pond. Rare cove for trees 'e is. 'Ullo, there's 'Earty," as Mr. Hearty appeared, looking very nervous and self-conscious.

"I wouldn't have known 'em," he said, lowering his voice to a whisper as he looked towards the soft-hatted, earnest young men in the front seats. "It's a rare ole camelflage."

"Tim's always does the thing in style," said Dick Little.

Eight o'clock, the hour at which the proceedings were advertised to commence, passed, and the audience began to show signs of restiveness. From the back benches there was clapping and shuffling of feet, and cries of "Get a move on"

and "Now we shan't be long." It was a quarter past eight, however, before the chairman, a big, flabby man with an ample watch-chain and a pathetically nervous manner, made his appearance.

A feeble clapping broke out among the elect upon the platform. The chairman looked about him uncertainly, then poured out a glass of water, slopping it upon the table in his nervousness.

As he rose he was greeted with cries of "Profiteer!" and "Hands off the people's food!" As a matter of fact he was a house and estate agent.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, and then paused and coughed. "I er—er, regret to er—announce, inform you, that Mr. Lisah T. Emden has er—not arrived. He——"

"E was bound to get lorst wiv a name like that," cried a voice. "Wot jer expect?"

The chairman's next few remarks were lost in the laugh that followed.

"Mr. Emden, er—er——"

"German spy!" from the hall.

"Will be here—er, presently—immediately."

"We're ready for him."

"He is a most eminent——"

"Pussyfoot."

There were loud cries of "Order," and several blue-rosetted stewards strove to reach the various spots from which the interruptions seemed to come; but legs, alien legs, seemed unaccountably to get in their way.

In the meantime somebody had pulled vigorously at the chairman's coat-tails. He turned, and having listened a moment to a little sandy man with two prominent front teeth that gave him the appearance of a rat, he turned once more to the audience and announced that he had been in error in stating that Mr. Emden had not arrived; that as a matter of fact Mr. Emden was already "fortunately in our midst," an announcement that was greeted with loud cries of "Shame!"

Mr. Lisah T. Emden stepped forward and stood for a moment whilst his audience expressed themselves according to their individual convictions. The faithful applauded loudly; those who were not in sympathy with him expressed their disapproval according to their lights and idiom. Mr. Emden was a spare man, with high cheek-bones, a dry, tightly-drawn yellow skin, a Roman nose, and the general appearance of an Indian brave. His face was perfectly expressionless, his lips grey and hard. With the immobility of a sphinx, Mr. Emden waited. Gradually the uproar died down, curiosity took the place of protest and a silence fell over the assembly.

"Shall we poison the House of God?" Mr. Emden paused dramatically, and with tightly closed lips stood looking straight in front of him. "That," he continued, "is the question we in America have airsked ourselves, and I am vurry glad to be able to tell you here and now that our airnsver has been No! [Cries of "Shame!"] There are in this country millions of ["Pussyfoots," cried a voice. There was a shout of laughter]—millions of," continued Mr. Emden, "men and women who are daily poisoning their bodies and their souls with alcohol. That is why I left my country, my wife and family ["Lucky beggars!" cried a voice], to make you a visit, and to tell you how we have corraled the drink god in America.

"I expect opposition ["And you'll get it"], I expect contumely ["Who's 'e?" enquired a voice], I expect all that is the lot of one who preaches an unpopular gospel. I repeat, I expect enmity, hatred, and uncharitableness; but I bring to the fight a hopeful heart. ["And you'll take home a broken jaw if you're not careful," cried a voice.] I come," continued Mr. Emden, "I come to you as a prophet——"

"Propheteer," corrected a voice.

There was another yell of laughter, and it was some minutes before Mr. Emden could obtain a further hearing.

"All my life," he continued, "I have drunk [a voice, "Whisky"] of the springs, and with it I have quaffed deep of the flagon of happiness. ["You don't look it."] When I look on this fair land and think what it might be I am filled with hope."

Mr. Emden went on with increasing interruptions to tell the story of how America had fought against the drink traffic, and how she had won a bloodless victory.

As the disorderliness of the meeting became more pronounced, those on the platform showed obvious signs of nervousness. They whispered together, and several glanced over their shoulders towards the door giving egress from the platform. The chairman from time to time wiped his forehead with a blue silk handkerchief, and repeatedly had recourse to the glass of water before him, which was intended for the lecturer.

Finally, Mr. Emden resumed his seat amidst a pandemonium of applause, booing, and cat-calls.

The chairman looked about him helplessly, then, as if feeling that something was required of him, rose to his feet. It was fully five minutes before he could make himself heard, when those who were nearest understood him to say that Mr. Emden was prepared to answer any questions addressed to him.

Again pandemonium broke out as the chairman resumed his seat.

"'Ere, I can't stand this," cried Bindle, as he mounted on the chair beside Dick Little; "I got to 'ave a word with ole yellowbeak."

At the sight of Bindle standing on his chair the curiosity of the audience gradually overcame their desire for noise, and midst cries of "Order!" and "Silence!" the uproar gradually died down.

"I'd like to ask you a few questions, sir," said Bindle when he could make himself heard.

Mr. Emden merely turned his face towards Bindle; but made no comment.

"Now suppose a cove likes a kipper for 'is breakfast an' suddenly you tells 'im that kippers ain't good for 'im, an' he's got to 'ave a sponge cake wot always makes 'im sick. Wot's the result?"

"I am afraid I do not follow you, my friend," said Mr. Emden.

"The workin' men of this 'ere country," continued Bindle, "'ave got used to 'avin' beer, an' they likes it, and it don't do 'em no 'arm so long as they don't go an' make giddy beasts of theirselves. Suddenly you comes along, Gawd knows why, and says they mustn't 'ave no more beer, but got to drink lemonade and tea wot makes 'em sick. Wot's the result?"

"You would all be happier," said Mr. Emden, when the cheers that greeted Bindle's reasoning had subsided.

"'Ow do you know wot's goin' to make me 'appy?" demanded Bindle.

"Because you would be doing the right thing."

"But the right thing don't always make you 'appy," persisted Bindle. "Look at my brother-in-law 'Earty, been doin' the right thing for years, 'e 'as, an' 'e looks about as 'appy as a winkle wot feels the pin. And why is it right for you to tell me wot I got to drink?" Again loud shouts of approval ran through the hall.

As Mr. Emden did not reply Bindle continued:

"Us workin' chaps 'as been used to beer all our lives: you take it away from us and we'll be that unhappy that we'll start all sorts of strikes and revolutions. Look at Russia. Wot 'appened when you took 'er drink away and made 'er dry? Why, they're cuttin' each other's throats like giddy-o, now."

Again a yell of applause greeted Bindle's reasoning.

"You do not understand, my friend," said Mr. Emden, whilst the party on the platform looked more than ever ill-at-ease.

"I understand this much, ole sport," said Bindle, "that a drop o' beer inside me makes me feel much 'appier than a drink o' lemonade, an' when a man's 'appy 'e don't go lookin' for trouble. You better run 'ome before they spoils that pretty face o' yours——"

"Lemme go, I say, I'm goin' to break 'is blinkin' jaw, I tell yer. Wot the blinkin' 'ell does 'e want to come over 'ere with 'is streamin' lemonade? Lemme go, I say."

There was a scuffle at the back of the hall, and presently a man broke away and started lurching up the middle gangway. It was Ginger. His face was flushed with passion, and there was murder in his eyes. The stewards whose duty it was to intercept him stood aside; Ginger was an ugly opponent when his blood was up. Just as he reached the platform a bugle at the back of the hall sounded the two notes that had become so dear to Londoners during the war. It was the "all clear" signal. Instantly the hall was plunged in darkness.

There were shouts and cries, hootings and loud whistlings, whilst from the platform a number of electric torches were to be seen flashing about. There were many cries from the faithful, cries of "Let go of my nose." Someone shouted "Murder!" and there was a general stampede for the platform exit.

"Oh, my Gawd! wot a stink!" cried a voice just as the lights went up upon an empty platform.

There was a stampede towards the doors, just as there had been a stampede from the platform, as foul-smelling fumes spread through the hall. There were cries and oaths as the terrible odour assailed the nostrils of the audience. Pussyfoots and prohibition were forgotten in the wild desire to get away from that pursuing, intolerable stench.

IV

That evening at Dick Little's flat in Chelsea, which he now used only professionally, were gathered a number of sedately dressed men sporting low collars suggestive of restrained tastes and disciplined passions.

"I got two," said one reminiscently.

"I made a mess of mine," said another. "He's got one cheek blue and the other *au naturel!*"

"I ain't got nothink to say agin a cove drinkin' petrol if it keeps 'im quiet," remarked Bindle, "but 'e didn't ought to try an' make every other cove do wot 'e does."

Loud cries of agreement greeted this remark.

"I ain't a pet canary with a drop o' beer in me; but wot I should be on stone ginger——" Bindle broke off eloquently and buried his face in his pewter.

"That was a brainy idea of yours to clear the hall, Dick," said a black-coated figure with a cigar in one hand and a whisky-and-soda in the other. "There might have been the deuce of a row otherwise."

Whilst Dick Little was entertaining his guests, the occupants of an omnibus passing along the Fulham Road in the direction of Putney were greatly surprised by the entrance of three eminently respectable-looking men with noses of so vivid a tint, two of vermilion and the third of a blue reminiscent of Ricketts. The conductor stared at them open-mouthed.

At the sight of each other their jaws dropped, and their hands rose instinctively to their own noses. The other passengers tittered. One of the new arrivals whispered to his neighbour, whose hand instinctively fondled his nose. Then they both whispered to the third.

As if inspired by a common instinct they rose, one wildly clutched the communication cord, whilst all three tumbled out of the vehicle.

As the 'bus continued on its way, the conductor had a glimpse of three men gathered under a lamp-post vigorously rubbing their noses with white pocket-handkerchiefs.

That night a number of earnest reformers spent hours in a vain endeavour to remove an alien vividness from their noses and other parts of their face. Soda they tried, patent washing powders, soap and hot water, petrol, in short, everything that solicitous wives and anxious families could think of.

In some cases the family doctor was called in, all the chemists' being shut; but he had frankly to confess that the artificial colouring could not be removed immediately; but would in all probability wear off in time.

The victims groaned in spirit at the thought of the morrow. They could not face the world with a nose of the hue of a pillar-box, or of a patent washing blue. In self-defence they developed various symptoms that would keep them to the house for some days to come.

Mr. Hearty had walked home, let himself in with his key and gone straight to bed without reference to his appearance in a looking-glass. Mrs. Hearty was already fast asleep. Consequently he did not make the discovery until putting on his collar on the following morning. Mr. Hearty was always first up.

When the first horror of surprise had passed off, he strove by every means in his power to remove the stain that rendered one side of his nose blue and the other side red. At last with inspiration he thought of the pumice-stone, with the result that when the doctor arrived he announced that unless Mr. Hearty were very careful blood-poisoning might very reasonably ensue. Mr. Hearty accordingly took to his bed as had so many reformers in the neighbourhood of Fulham.

* * * * *

"I'm sorry for 'Earty," remarked Bindle to Mrs. Bindle some days later, "but 'e didn't ought to go shovin' that nose of 'is into wot don't concern 'im, tryin' to rob pore ole Ginger of 'is beer."

"You're not sorry at all; you're glad," snapped Mrs. Bindle. "You'll get run in yet, mark my words. The police have got a clue," she added darkly.

CHAPTER IV

THE FLITTING OF MR. MAURICE CRANE

I

"Can you keep yer mouth shut?" demanded the yard-foreman of the Victoria Depository and Furniture Removing Company, as he looked at Bindle with the air of one who has already made up his mind negatively upon the subject.

"If you'd lived a matter o' twenty years with Mrs. B., ole sport," replied Bindle, "you'd be able to give an oyster ten yards in the 'undred an' beat 'im every time."

"Well, there ain't got to be no blabbin' over this 'ere job," announced the foreman, a heavily-built man with a drink-swollen face, a bald head, and a soured temper.

"Shootin' the moon?" enquired Bindle innocently.

"Don't you worry what it's about, cockie," said the foreman surlily; "you jest do what yer told, and keep yer ruddy mouth shut."

Bindle eyed the man with disfavour.

"Pleasant way you got o' putting things, Tawny," he remarked amiably.

The foreman's hair was of a strangely sun-dried tint, which had earned for him the name of Tawny. He disliked the familiarity, preferring to be called Mr. Hitch. Instead he was invariably called Tawny to his face, and Ole-Itch-an'-Scratch-It behind his back.

"You got to take the steam van and trailer to 18 Vanstorn Road, Balham, load up, then telephone 'ere and you'll get the address where you're to go. It's in the country. You'll be away two days. You'll draw ten bob a day, exes. Be 'ere at seven."

"In the country?" queried Bindle. "What part of the country?"

"Never you mind what part of the country," said the foreman malevolently. "You jest obey orders, and keep that ugly mouth o' yours closed, then people won't know what blinkin' bad teeth you got. Stevens'll be engineer, you can take Huggles and Wilkes. Send 'em back when you've loaded up. There'll be men at the other end to 'elp unload. Got it?"

"Wot a wonderful chap you are, Tawny, for explaining things"—Bindle gazed at him in mock admiration—"and yer language too, since you joined that Sunday school wot took the tint out of yer complexion. Wonderful face you got for peepin' round an 'arp."

"One o' these days you'll get a thick ear, Jo Bindle," said the foreman angrily.

"Well, well," said Bindle philosophically, "better a thick ear than a thick 'ead."

"It's about fifty miles away," continued the foreman. "You got to be there at six, so you can put up for a couple of hours on the road, and get a kip. Now 'op it, and if you says a ruddy word of where you've been or where yer goin' to, I'll cut yer pinkish liver out. I've 'ad my blinkin' eye on you some time," added the foreman darkly; "you an' yer stutterin' tricks."

"Where you learns it all does me," said Bindle good-humouredly, as he turned away; then, as a sudden inspiration struck him, he added, "No one couldn't 'ave their eye long on a face like yours without blinkin', Tawny. So-long."

Bindle always enjoyed getting the last word.

II

"Mrs. B.," remarked Bindle that evening, as he leaned back contentedly after a particularly successful supper of sheep's heart stuffed with sage-and-onions, in the preparation of which Mrs. Bindle was an adept. "Mrs. B., there are them wot appreciates your ole man."

Mrs. Bindle sniffed scornfully, and, rising from the table, proceeded to draw out of the oven a rhubarb tart, which she banged upon the table. To Mrs. Bindle emphasis was the salt of life. As Bindle had once remarked, "My missis does every think as if she meant it. She cooks like giddy-o, talks like a bust drain, an' prays like 'ell."

"What's the matter now?" she snapped, curiosity overcoming her scorn of all things relating to her spouse.

"I got to go away on a secret service mission," he announced through a mouthful of rhubarb tart.

"Where are you going?" she demanded suspiciously.

"I ain't allowed to say," was the response. "It 'ud be quod if I did. Ole Tawny calls me up this afternoon and says, 'Bindle,' 'e says, there ain't a stouter 'eart than yours in the British Empire.' Of course I jest looks down and says, 'Bow-wow!'"

"If you want me to listen you'd better talk sense."

Mrs. Bindle slashed out another V of pie-crust, tipped it on to the plate that Bindle held towards her, and proceeded to dab rhubarb beside it.

"Sense it is, Mrs. B.," he said. "I got to go away for two days. Now mind you don't get up to——"

"Where are you going?" demanded Mrs. Bindle.

"That's a secret. Nobody ain't permitted to know."

For some moments Mrs. Bindle eyed him suspiciously.

"You're going to the races!" There was grim conviction in her tones. "Don't deny it," she added, "I know."

"It ain't no use trying to keep things from you, Lizzie," said Bindle with a grin. "'Earty didn't want me to tell you; still, if you've found out, it can't be 'elped, can it?"

"Mr. Hearty?" interrogated Mrs. Bindle.

"Terrible goin's on." Bindle shook his head with gloomy foreboding. "Been putting things on horses for months, 'e 'as—cokernuts, pine-apples, bags of potatoes—an' now 'e's goin' to Epsom to put 'is shirt on."

"Bindle, don't be disgusting. What do you mean about Mr. Hearty?"

"Well, you jest nip round and ask 'im," said Bindle. "If I'm going to the races to-morrow so is 'Earty. That was a damn fine tart, Mrs. B.," he added as he rose from the table. "I got to be down at the yard to-morrow at seven," he announced, as he walked towards the door.

"Where are you going to?"

"The place where they don't play billiards," he hummed as, picking up his cap from the dresser, he went out, leaving Mrs. Bindle a prey to jealousy and suspicion.

III

"I shall miss you when you're gone, 'Ugges," said Bindle, "jest as I shall miss ole Wilkie's cough." He was seated on the tail-board of the trailer-pantechnicon between his two associates, Huggles and Wilkes—Huggles grinning vacuously, Wilkes coughing intermittently. "You ain't bad sorts as 'umpers go; but I'd 'ave to be bloomin' drunk to see you two with wings and 'arps. Wot they're goin' to do in 'eaven with your cough, Wilkie, and your complexion, 'Ugges—well, it does me."

As he spoke the pantechnicon and trailer turned at a generous angle into the Vanstorn Road, Balham. A minute later they drew up in front of Number 18, a modern, semi-detached villa of the "studiodious" type.

"Here we are, my little love-birds," said Bindle, leisurely tumbling off the tail-board.

As they passed through the gate of Number 18, the front door was opened by a smooth, puffy little man with an unhealthy skin and a pompous manner. He was wearing a snuff-coloured suit of painful newness, a pink shirt, a white satin tie with a diamond pin, and white spats. Across his waistcoat was drawn a massive gold chain, whilst on his

fingers were several rings. His scanty black hair was well greased across an unintellectual forehead.

"Blinkin' profiteer," muttered Huggles with unusual eloquence, as they walked up the path.

Bindle turned and looked at him with interest.

"It ain't often you speaks, 'Uggles," he remarked, "but when you does, it's a bull every time."

"Are you the moving-men?" demanded he of the brown suit, in a tone that some men seem to think necessary to adopt to their social inferiors.

"Regular Sherlock 'Olmes you are, sir," said Bindle cheerfully.

"I am Mr. Crane, Mr. Maurice Crane. Which is the foreman?"

"Now, need you ask, sir?" said Bindle reproachfully. "Look at these two ole reprobates, do they look——?"

"I want to speak to you," interrupted Mr. Crane, and turning on his heel he led the way into the house.

"'E's a dook right enough," said Bindle, addressing Wilkes and Huggles. "'E's so polite"; and he passed into the dining-room, Mr. Crane carefully closing the door behind him.

"You understand that this is an—er——" he paused.

"It's all right, sir," said Bindle reassuringly, "nothing ain't going to be said to nobody."

"There's no name on the van?" went on Mr. Crane.

Bindle looked out of the window.

"Not so much as a number, sir."

"And you don't know where you are going."

"Well, sir," said Bindle cheerfully, "'Earty and Mrs. B. seems pretty sure it's 'ell; but——"

"Don't be impertinent." Mr. Crane looked at Bindle severely. "You don't know your destination, where you are taking the—er—furniture?"

"'Aven't a notion, sir," was the response. "I got to 'phone up the office soon as we're loaded up, then I'll 'ear."

Mr. Crane nodded approvingly.

"The neighbours," began Mr. Crane. Again he paused. He was obviously nervous.

"You leave them to me, sir," said Bindle confidentially. "I can tell the tale."

"And you understand," said Mr. Crane, putting his hand in his pocket and jingling his money seductively.

"When the V.D. gets a job like this 'ere, sir, they always sends me. 'Joe Bindle,' says the manager to me yesterday afternoon, 'if it wasn't for you,' 'e says, 'Gawd knows wot would 'ave 'appened to the British Empire.' You see, sir," he continued, "I'm married myself," and he winked knowingly.

Mr. Crane started violently.

"You—I—what do you mean?" he demanded, fear and suspicion in his eyes.

"Don't you worry, sir, you jest leave it all to me. I'll see you through, safe as 'ouses."

"I'm going down by train to——" began Mr. Crane—and again he hesitated—"to where you're coming to," he concluded.

"There ain't no trains runnin' to where I'm goin'," murmured Bindle with mournful conviction. "An' now I'll get on with the job, sir, if you please"; and with that he turned and walked to the door and went out.

For some time Mr. Crane watched the work of dismantling his home. His early inclination to interfere Bindle had discouraged.

"Now, you jest set down an' watch, sir," he had said, "or you'll get them pretty duds o' yours all messed up, an' wot'll she say then?"

Soon after ten Mr. Crane departed, having given explicit instructions to Bindle not to divulge a secret with which he was unacquainted. Mr. Crane did not seem to see the inconsistency of the request.

Contrary to Bindle's expectations and those of Mr. Crane, the neighbours evinced no very particular interest as to where the furniture from Number 18 was going. They gazed from behind their curtains and from their front doors according to the state of their presentability; but nothing more. A few of the tradespeople from time to time took up strong strategic positions, and watched the proceedings.

The most persistent of these itinerants was a telegraph-girl, who seemed to have the whole morning before her. A perky, diminutive little creature with a scrap of fair hair tied behind with a pink ribbon, she stood drinking in the scene, her jaws moving continuously in the process of chewing gum. At length, as if to assure herself of the correctness of her own deductions, she turned to Bindle as he was returning to the house.

"Moving?" she enquired indifferently, nodding her head in the direction of the house.

"No, darling, we're doin' it to make our 'air grow. We puts everythink in the van, then we takes it all back into the 'ouse again, and we feels better. Gives us a sort of appetite for supper."

"Funny, ain't you?" she retorted, quite unmoved, as she continued her chewing.

At noon Bindle and his mates knocked off for dinner, locking the doors of the vans and also of the house. At one o'clock they were back again.

As Bindle turned into the garden he caught sight of a lady standing at the front door. She was a little slip of a thing, brown hair, brown eyes, brown dress, with very red lips and an almost childish expression of countenance. Her hands were trembling violently, and her large brown eyes looked as if they would start from her head. As Bindle approached she took a step towards him.

"What—what are you doing with my furniture?" she cried in an unsteady voice.

"Your furniture, mum?" repeated Bindle as if he were not quite sure that he had heard aright.

"You mustn't take it away, oh, you mustn't!"

She clasped her trembling hands together, and looked at him beseechingly. There was in her voice the note of a child who sees a cherished toy in danger of destruction.

"We're takin' it away accordin' to orders, mum," said Bindle, forgetful of his instructions in his sympathy for the pathetic figure before him.

"But—but whose orders?"

"Fat little chap 'e was, mum, with jewels all over 'im, an' black 'air all smarmed down, enough to cause a grease

shortage."

"That was my husband," she replied. "I am Mrs. Crane."

She was now trembling violently, and swayed slightly as if about to collapse.

"Look 'ere, mum," said Bindle, solicitously, "you better come in and set down, you ain't fit to stand out 'ere."

Opening the door with the key he held in his hand, he led the way into one of the rooms where a large, chintz-covered easy-chair stood near the door. Bindle jerked his thumb to indicate to Mrs. Crane that she was to sit there. With a sigh that was half a sob, she collapsed into its capacious depths, which seemed to emphasise the slightness of her figure.

"Where—where are you taking——" she paused.

"I ain't allowed to say, mum. I'm sorry," said Bindle sympathetically. "As a matter of fact, I don't know myself till we're loaded up, then I gets my orders."

"Oh, Maurice! how could you?" she moaned. Then, suddenly turning to Bindle, she cried: "You mustn't, you won't, will you? It's my home, you see, and—and——" she broke off, sobbing.

Bindle stood before her, cap in hand, the picture of embarrassment and indecision.

Presently the storm of weeping subsided, and she looked up at him through her tears, a pitiable figure of despair.

"He—he sent me away, and—and—it isn't his fault; it's that dreadful woman. Oh! you won't take them away, will you? Please—please say you won't."

"Look 'ere, mum," said Bindle with sudden decision, "you an' me's got to have a little talk about this 'ere"; and he seated himself on the edge of a chair opposite.

When Bindle left the house to continue the work of removal, there was a grim set about his jaw and a strange look in his eyes. For the rest of the day his habitual good-humour seemed to have forsaken him. The work proceeded without the usual quips and jokes, and Huggles and Wilkes missed them. From time to time they gazed at their comrade and then at each other, as if puzzled to account for the change.

IV

"'Ere, steady, ole sports," cried Bindle, "gently does it. Valuable little bit o' stuff this 'ere."

Three men were toiling laboriously with a large, double-doored oak cabinet of Jacobean design and dubious antiquity. Bindle was dodging from side to side in an endeavour to prevent damage.

"Pleasant little canary-cage," he murmured, during a brief rest, as he wiped his forehead with a large khaki-coloured handkerchief.

"Where's she going?" enquired one of the men.

"Dinin'-room," replied Bindle. "Keep her upright, there's things inside," he added by way of explanation. "Mustn't upset the bird-seed."

On arriving that morning at six o'clock at the address in Brighton given him the night before, Bindle had found three men waiting to help unload the van. Stevens, the engineer, had gone to get a sleep, whilst Bindle had immediately set to work. During the journey to Brighton he had slept fairly comfortably on a heap of matting on top of the trailer.

After infinite labour and much grumbling and blowing on the part of the men, the cabinet was planted in the dining-room opposite the fireplace.

"That finishes the dining-room," murmured Bindle. "Now, then, you ole warriors," he called after the men as they trooped out of the room, "put your backs into it, an' you shall 'ave a drink of milk and a bun if you're good boys. Ah! 'ere you are, sir," as Mr. Crane bustled into the house.

"So you got here safely?" he enquired, still anxious and furtive. "No one——" He paused.

"No one said nothink, sir, nor asked nothink."

"You are quite sure."

"Sure *as* sure, sir," said Bindle reassuringly.

"You were not followed," persisted Mr. Crane.

"Nothink followed us along the road, sir, an' I didn't 'ear an aeroplane."

Mr. Crane drew a deep sigh of relief.

"We've got the drawin'-room an' the dinin'-room done, sir, an' now we'll get on with the other rooms."

Mr. Crane looked about him, apparently pleasantly surprised at the progress that had been made during the last three hours.

"There's a—er—er—a lady coming," he said. "You had—er—better call me."

"Right-o, sir," said Bindle cheerfully, as he walked down the passage towards the door, whistling, "My Wife won't let me."

Mr. Crane gazed after him with a look of doubt on his face.

A few minutes later Bindle was back in the dining-room examining the oak cabinet, apparently to see that it had suffered no damage.

"Where's Mr. Crane?"

Bindle span round on his heel and stood regarding a flamboyantly dressed girl with puffy features, full hips, and startling yellow hair. Her manner was supercilious, and her diction that of Bow.

"'E was 'ere a moment ago, mum, or miss," said Bindle, when he had taken stock of the stranger. "Did you want 'im?"

"Tell him I'm here," said the girl, as she proceeded to peel off her gloves.

Bindle noticed a broad circle of gold upon the third finger of her left hand. He winked knowingly at a portrait of a pale, narrow-headed man, looking like a half-ripe banana.

"Very good, miss—mum, I mean. Who shall I say?" Bindle gave a covert glance in the direction of the oak cabinet.

"Mrs. Crane," she replied indifferently.

"Right-o, miss, I'll go an' fetch 'im."

As he turned towards the door Mr. Crane entered; at the sight of the girl his customary nervousness seemed to increase. He fluttered across to her with a forced, rather sickly smile.

"The drawing-room is quite ready, my dear," he said, looking at her anxiously, as if uncertain of her mood.

"That'll have to be moved," she announced, pointing to the cabinet, and without any attempt at greeting, by which Bindle decided in his own mind that they had parted only a short time before.

"Moved, my dear?" interrogated Mr. Crane.

"I don't like it. It's hideous. You'll have to sell it."

"I—er——" began Mr. Crane.

"What's inside—shelves?" she demanded.

"It's—er—there's nothing inside," said Mr. Crane. "It's just an ornament."

"Ornament!" she cried scornfully, going over to it and turning the handle. "Where's the key?" she demanded over her shoulder.

"The key ought to be in it," said Mr. Crane, turning and looking interrogatingly at Bindle.

"I got the key, sir," said Bindle, rummaging in his trousers pocket. "I took it out when we was bringin' it in, for fear it might catch up against somethink."

With a grin he handed the key to the girl, who proceeded to insert it in the lock. Indolently and indifferently she opened the right-hand door, then with a cry started back. Mr. Crane turned to see the cause of the cry. His eyes became fixed, almost bulging out of his head.

"Good morning, Maurice."

Out of the oak cabinet stepped the diminutive form of the real Mrs. Crane, perfectly self possessed and smiling.

The effect of the greeting upon Mr. Crane was curious. His hands fell to his sides, his jaw dropped, and his thick, pursy lips gaped. His face became an ashen colour, and in his eyes was terror, as he gazed at the neat and self-possessed figure of his wife.

"Won't you introduce me to your friend, Maurice?" enquired Mrs. Crane sweetly, looking from one to the other.

Mr. Crane swallowed twice laboriously, at the end of each effort his lips parting again in a silly gape. He blinked his eyes rapidly; but speech was denied him.

Bindle stood in the background, all the satisfaction of a successful impresario depicted upon his features.

Seeing that nothing was to be got from her husband, Mrs. Crane turned to the fair-haired, flamboyantly dressed girl, who had stood the picture of dazed stupidity.

"Won't you sit down?"

Mrs. Crane's honied sweetness seemed to goad the girl to madness. She laughed a sneering, insolent laugh.

"You damn fool!" she cried, turning to the now trembling figure of Mr. Crane. "They've tricked you, or else"—her eyes suddenly blazed—"you've done it on purpose. You mealy-mouthed, chicken-hearted swine!" And a stream of obscene vituperation poured from her lips.

Bindle took a step forward; but the girl did not wait.

With a fresh volley of abuse she flounced out of the room, Mrs. Crane following her into the hall as if to assure herself that her visitor had really left the house. When she returned she stood for a moment regarding her husband, who

had sunk into a chair, the picture of dejection and despair.

"Please—please have the furniture put back into the van."

Bindle turned round from the window where he had been watching the departure of the vanquished "bit o' fluff." For a moment he hesitated, then, dashing forward, was just in time to catch Mrs. Crane as she fell.

"Well, I'm blowed, what would Mrs. B. say now?" he mumbled. "'Ere, look 'ere, sir, this is your job," he cried, looking across at where Mr. Crane sat, a moist and beaten man.

Seeing that no help was to be expected from Mr. Crane, Bindle gently lowered his wife to the floor and, placing a hassock beneath her head, bolted out of the room in search of water. When he returned, after having told the men to wait by the van, he found Mr. Crane kneeling by his wife's side, the picture of helpless misery.

As Bindle knelt down beside her, a cup of water in his hand, Mrs. Crane opened her eyes. After looking at him for a moment with a puzzled expression, she smiled.

Lifting her head gently, Bindle placed the cup to her lips. She drank a little, then with a motion of her head signed to him to take it away. She sighed deeply and looked enquiringly at her husband, who was still on his knees gazing down at her with unseeing eyes.

"Now," said Bindle, "you jest lift 'er into that chair, an' she'll be all right in two ticks."

Mr. Crane seemed grateful for something to do. Stooping down, he lifted the slight form of his wife and placed her in a chair.

For some minutes Bindle and Mr. Crane stood gazing down at Mrs. Crane. Presently she appeared to gather herself together, and, looking from one to the other, she smiled.

"I'm all right now," she said weakly. "You—you mustn't bother any more."

"Well, mum, if you don't mind bein' left alone for a minute or two, me an' 'im's got one or two little things to settle." He indicated Mr. Crane with his thumb. "You're sure you'll be all right?" he asked anxiously.

Mrs. Crane nodded and smiled wanly.

"Now, sir," said Bindle, addressing Mr. Crane, "we'll go into the kitchen."

There was a grimness about Bindle's tone that caused Mr. Crane to look apprehensively in the direction of his wife; but her eyes were closed. Bindle's air, as he stood holding open the door, was so determined that, after a momentary hesitation, Mr. Crane passed through it into the kitchen, as if compelled by sheer force of personality. Carefully closing the door, Bindle stood before it facing his victim.

"Now, look 'ere, sir," he said. "I met some queer coves in my time, coves wot wasn't over particular wot they did; but you're about the dammedest and dirtiest tyke I ever see without a muzzle." He paused, as if to give Mr. Crane an opportunity of resenting or denying the charge. As he did neither, Bindle continued:

"I ain't been brought up in a young ladies' school, an' I seen some pretty dirty things done by men an' women an' 'orses; but I'm blowed if this ain't the dirtiest I ever 'eard of."

Again he paused and looked at Mr. Crane, who stood clutching with both hands the corner of the kitchen table, as if unable to support himself with his own legs. His face was a ghastly grey, his lips dry, and in his eyes was fear.

"I 'eard all about it from your missus, 'ow you got 'er to go away to see 'er mother while you nipped orf with the sticks an' that there bit o' fluff wot jest got it in the neck. I brought 'er down in that there black cupboard o' yours—your missus, I mean. Such goin's-on didn't ought to be allowed. Now, you can lose me my job by reportin' me, or you can 'ave

it out in the back-yard man to man. Which is it to be?"

Bindle looked eagerly at the quaking figure before him. Twice Mr. Crane swallowed noisily. He made several ineffectual efforts to moisten his lips. Finally he blinked his eyes; but no sound came from him.

"If you could make it the back-yard, I'd be kind o' grateful," said Bindle. "I want to 'it you badly; but I can't do it while you looks like that. You're bigger'n wot I am, an' you ain't so old, an' I wouldn't mind betting two to one you ain't got various veins in yer legs, so I'm givin' away a lot of things besides weight. Now, do take orf yer coat," he said persuasively.

And then Mr. Crane did a strange thing. His knees seemed slowly to double up beneath him, and he sank down, still clutching with both hands the edge of the table. Burying his face in his arms, he sobbed the hard, dry sobs of a man who is alone with his soul.

"Well, I'm blowed," muttered Bindle, his eyes upon the light patch on the back of Mr. Crane's head. "If this ain't It." And he walked over to the table and stood gazing down at the sobbing man, as if he had been some new and strange animal.

"Please leave us now," said a quiet voice behind him. He turned swiftly to find Mrs. Crane standing just inside the kitchen door, a new light in her eyes. "Get the furniture back in the van, please; I will settle up everything with your employers. You have been very, very kind to me. I shall never forget it. I will thank you later." And she looked up into Bindle's face with a tremulous little smile.

A moment later Bindle was blowing his nose violently in the passage.

"Well, I'm blowed," he muttered, as he made his way into the dining-room. "Jest fancy 'er wantin' 'im back, an' me gettin' mixed up in—'ere, you ole reprobates," he shouted out of the window, "we got to load up again. Now, look slippy. Been a little family scrap 'ere," he said a moment later, by way of explanation, to the men as they trooped into the room. "Now, then, Charlie Chaplin," this to a large man enveloped in a voluminous pair of trousers, "up Guards an' at 'em."

The men grinned; they had a fairly clear idea of what had taken place.

"Well, I'm blowed," said Bindle, when they were all at work again, as he scratched his head through his cap. "If this ain't the rummest go I ever——"

"So you've come back." Mrs. Bindle proceeded to splosh Irish stew from a saucepan into a large, buff-coloured pie-dish.

"The tired ole 'orse returns to 'is stable," said Bindle with a grin, as he walked over to the sink for the evening rinse.

"Depend on you to come home when your stomach's empty. About the only time you ever do come home," she snapped. "Where've you been?"

"I been seein' life," said Bindle through the roller-towel, with which he was polishing his face, "an' I'm tired. Two nights I've slept on top of a van a-singin', 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star,' an' thinkin' of you, Lizzie. I'll tell yer all about it when I taken the edge orf a little appetite I got."

Mrs. Bindle sniffed and proceeded to fill Bindle's plate. For twenty minutes he ate with noisy enjoyment; finally he leaned back in his chair with a sigh of relief and repletion.

"Now, Mrs. B., for the story," he said, as he filled and lighted his pipe. When it was drawing to his entire satisfaction, he started to tell Mrs. Bindle of the happenings of the last two days. In her interest she forgot to clear away the supper-things.

"Jezebel!" was her comment when Bindle had concluded his account of the discomfiture of the pseudo Mrs. Crane.

"That might 'ave been 'er name; but she didn't 'appen to mention it."

"And what happened afterwards?" enquired Mrs. Bindle eagerly.

Bindle explained his interview with Mr. Crane in the kitchen, and how it had been interrupted.

"When they come out of the kitchen," he concluded, "they was like love-birds: jest like you an' me, Lizzie. Now, wot does a woman like 'er see in that bit o' kidney soot dressed up like a nob? That's wot does me."

Mrs. Bindle drew in her lips with the air of a woman who knows, but will not tell.

"Now they're back in Balham as 'appy as 'appy. It was a pity," he added reminiscently, "that 'e didn't come into the back-yard. I did want to 'it 'im."

Mrs. Bindle nodded her head approvingly, much to Bindle's surprise.

"And did she give you anything?" demanded Mrs. Bindle.

"She offered it; but you don't take money for doin' things like that," said Bindle simply.

Again Mrs. Bindle nodded her head.

"You done right for once, Joe Bindle," she remarked grudgingly; whereat Bindle gazed at her in mute astonishment, for he remembered that he had repeated the language he had used to Mr. Crane.

"Wot I don't understand," he said, "is why she wanted 'im back, 'im wot 'ad done the dirty on 'er like that, an' 'e wasn't a rose-show to look at. Seemed to think it was all the other gal, she did. Funny things, women," he muttered, "funny as funny."

"He was her husband," said Mrs. Bindle sententiously, "and in the eyes of the Lord——"

"If 'e'd come out into that back-yard," said Bindle grimly, "'e'd 'ave been the funniest sight for the eyes——"

"Blasphemer!"

"An' us gettin' on so well too." Bindle grinned. "Suppose I'd nipped orf with our sticks an' a little bit o' fluff," queried Bindle as he moved towards the door, "would you 'ave taken me back?"

"Don't be disgusting, Bindle."

"But would you?" Bindle's hand was on the handle of the door.

"You try it and see"—there was a world of grim meaning in the retort.

"Well, if women ain't the funniest things that ever was," Bindle muttered, as he closed the door behind him, bent on taking a little stroll before turning in. "They beats silkworms, an' they was pretty difficult to get the 'ang of."

CHAPTER V

THE BINDLES AT THE ZOO

"You can get your own tea on Sunday," announced Mrs. Bindle, as she banged upon the table a yellow pie-dish containing Irish stew.

"Get my own tea?" queried Bindle, looking up from the newspaper he had been surreptitiously reading, newspapers not being popular with Mrs. Bindle at meal-times. "Why should I get my own tea on Sunday, Mrs. B.?"

"Because I'm going out, that's why," she retorted. "I suppose you'd like me to give up all my pleasures as well as wait on you hand and foot."

"Where you going, Lizzie?" he enquired pacifically. He hated storms before meat—they always affected the size of Mrs. Bindle's "helpings."

"I'm going to the Zoo."

"To live?"

A moment later he cursed himself for his glib tongue. The nice meaty chop that Mrs. Bindle had in the spoon was dropped back into the dish, and a piece of unattractive scrag selected in its place.

"Mr. Hearty has invited me to go with him."

For the next few minutes Bindle occupied himself in trying to find some vulnerable spot for his knife and fork in the piece of scrag that lay on his plate.

"He's had some tickets given him. It's a private day on Sunday," announced Mrs. Bindle presently, determined to get the full flavour out of the episode.

"Better put this 'ere piece of bone in your pocket for the lions in case they 'aven't got enough," he said gloomily, turning over the bit of scrag and examining it from the underside.

"That's right, complain about your food. Pity you haven't got something else to grumble about"—Mrs. Bindle was out for blood. "It's grumble, grumble, grumble, morning, noon, and night. Nothing ever satisfies you, and meat the price it is."

"Can't I have somethink with a bit o' meat on it, then?" he complained, still making valiant efforts to dissect that which nature had never intended should be dissected.

"There, look at you now!"

In his struggle, Bindle had approached too near the edge of the plate, with the result that it had suddenly tilted towards him, depositing its contents upon his knees.

"You're not fit to eat with pigs," was Mrs. Bindle's comment, as she watched Bindle scrape from his clothes and pick up from the floor what remained of his meal, using a spoon for the purpose. This done, he pushed his plate towards her; but Mrs. Bindle ignored the hint.

"Give us a bit more, Lizzie," he pleaded.

"There isn't any more," she announced with decision.

"No more!" he echoed in consternation. "But there's a lot in the dish."

"That's got to do for to-morrow. You seem to forget the price of things. In future you'd better take your meals in the scullery, then you can slop your food about as you like."

"But I ain't 'ad anythink to eat yet," he grumbled.

Mrs. Bindle ignored the protest, but compromised a delicate situation by dabbing on his plate two potatoes, some gravy, and a small piece of meat.

Another time the news that Mrs. Bindle and Mr. Hearty were going to the Zoo would have filled Bindle with unholy joy; but it is a humorous head that laughs on an empty stomach. When he left No. 7 Fenton Street to return to his work, it was with a sense of grievance that somehow seemed to involve his brother-in-law, Mr. Hearty, and the Zoo itself.

All the afternoon he brooded over the wrong that had been done him, inspired to discontent by the feeling of emptiness within.

That evening, when he left work, he took a bus to Chelsea to call on his friend, Dr. Richard Little, whom he found at home. When, half an hour later, he left the surgery, it was with a lighter heart and a brighter outlook. Dr. Little had promised to obtain from a friend tickets for the Zoological Gardens which could be used on the following Sunday. Bindle's plaintive remark that "Some'ow it doesn't seem right to miss seein' Mrs. B. and 'Earty in the monkey 'ouse" had proved irresistible.

On the following Sunday the Bindles dined early. One o'clock saw Mrs. Bindle's kitchen spotless, with not a thing awry, and tea laid for one. Mrs. Bindle herself stood at the door taking a final look round to see that everything was as it should be.

"You'll find tea in the cup. Mind you hot the pot first and see the water's boiling, then let it stand for three minutes."

She was arrayed in her best alpaca and her most biscuit-coloured gloves, tight across the palms to the point of discomfort. Her bonnet of purple, "picked out with spring-leaf green," sat perpendicularly upon her head, and the purple ribbons were tied with meticulous neatness beneath her sharp chin.

From her elastic-sided boots, with patent-leather toe-caps, to the top of her rather forbidding headgear, she was conscious that there was nothing amiss. In Bindle's idiom, she felt herself to be "It."

"And mind you don't spill your tea on the cloth," she said as she turned towards the door, "and when you've finished put your cup and saucer and plate in the pan in the sink."

"You're wastin' a lot o' breath, Mrs. B.," said Bindle at length. "I ain't a-goin' to be 'ome to tea."

"Then why couldn't you say so before, and save me laying it?"

Bindle had postponed the announcement until the last moment. He had intended telling Mrs. Bindle that he also was bound for the Zoo; but just as the words were on his lips he realised that a more dramatic effect might be obtained by presenting himself to his wife and brother-in-law as they were indulging in their pleasures.

Five minutes later the front door banged, and Mrs. Bindle was on her way to Putney Bridge Station, to meet her brother-in-law.

II

"I think," remarked Mr. Hearty, with the air of one who has given the matter mature consideration, "I think, Elizabeth, that we ought to see the lions fed."

"I should like it, Mr. Hearty," said Mrs. Bindle, drawing in her chin, which, when with Mr. Hearty, was always a sign that she was pleased. "I have never seen the lions fed," she added, as one announcing that she had never tasted artichokes.

"Can you tell me what time the lions are fed?" enquired Mr. Hearty politely, as they passed through the turnstiles.

"Four o'clock," replied the man, in the tone of one who suffers fools professionally.

"We must see the Mappin Terraces, also," announced Mr. Hearty, springing open the case of his gold hunter. Mr. Hearty never lost an opportunity of acquainting himself with the time.

"I should like to," said Mrs. Bindle, utterly at sea as to what a Mappin terrace might be; but prepared to see every animal known to Noah.

For nearly half an hour they proceeded to stroll about, aimless and uncertain, Mr. Hearty generally half a yard in front. He realised that care was necessary in a place like the Zoo. He had already determined to do all he could to head Mrs. Bindle off from the Monkey House.

Mr. Hearty was never at home in the Monkey House. There was a certain realistic freedom adopted by monkeys which he found disconcerting.

Suddenly his eye caught sight of the words "Cat House." Recalling a previous visit to the Zoo, he piloted Mrs. Bindle past the entrance.

"Phew! What a stink!"

As the words assailed his ears Mr. Hearty shuddered. A moment later, his head jerked forward, as a flat and hearty hand caught him full between the shoulders.

"So I caught you, 'ave I?"

Mr. Hearty turned to find himself blinking uncertainly into the eyes of Bindle behind a large cigar with a red and gold band. In the background stood Ginger, a gloomy picture of pimpled misanthropy, emphasised by a Cambridge-blue tie. Ginger's complexion had never been schemed for delicate tints in neck-wear.

Mrs. Bindle glared at Ginger, then, as if dazzled by his tie, she transferred her eyes to Bindle.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"Jest a-toddlin' round sayin' 'ow-jer-do to the snakes," was the response. "Been to see the old toms?" he enquired pleasantly of Mr. Hearty, who shuddered at the question.

"Blinkin' stink!" was Ginger's comment. "I'd poison 'em," he added malevolently. "Don't 'old wiv cats!"

"Come along, 'Earty," said Bindle, linking his arm in that of his reluctant brother-in-law. "Funny thing seein' you 'ere. Dr. Little give me two tickets, so I brought ole Ging. The Zoo always cheers 'im up, don't it, Ging?" he threw over his shoulder, at which Ginger growled a remark about not holding with something or other.

During the short conversation Mrs. Bindle had stood with indrawn lips. She saw in Bindle's sudden appearance with the unspeakable Ginger, whom she detested, another organised attempt to humiliate her.

As Bindle led Mr. Hearty away, she had perforce to follow with Ginger, who, conversationally, was an undischarged bankrupt. This, coupled with his openly expressed hatred of women, rendered him a questionable cavalier.

"Nothin' but one stink after another," he grumbled.

Mrs. Bindle stiffened. In her own mind she was preparing things she intended to say to Bindle when a suitable occasion presented itself.

"'Ere, Ging, come an' look at this," cried Bindle, who had pulled up in front of a cage in which sat, with embarrassing frankness and composure, a mandrill.

Mrs. Bindle suddenly became conscious that Mr. Hearty had turned and was walking hurriedly away.

"Did yer ever see any think like it?" demanded Bindle of Ginger. "Looks as if 'e 'd——"

"Bindle!"

Mrs. Bindle's lips had entirely disappeared. A moment later she too turned and walked swiftly away in the direction taken by Mr. Hearty. Ginger leant forward, one hand on either knee, examining with an interest that surprised Bindle the eccentrically marked mandrill.

"Wot yer think of 'im, Ging?"

"Funny old blinker!" muttered Ginger presently. "Fancy 'avin' to go about wiv a——"

"Ush, Ging! Remember it's Sunday," and Bindle drew his reluctant friend away from the mandrill's cage.

"Fancy a-paintin' of 'im up like that," persisted Ginger. "Funny place to——"

"Ush, Ging!" murmured Bindle.

"Oo's 'e?" demanded Ginger, as he and Bindle proceeded to overtake Mr. Hearty, who had waited for Mrs. Bindle. "E ain't 'alf got the blinkin' 'eart bowed down," he added.

Bindle explained the relationship.

"Ullo, they're going to see the elephants," he said, as Mrs. Bindle and Mr. Hearty disappeared into the elephant shed.

Upon Mr. Hearty's features as he entered was the expression of a man who finds the atmosphere distasteful. He possessed an extremely delicate sense of smell.

Taking her cue from her brother-in-law, Mrs. Bindle drew a handkerchief from her pocket and held it to her nose.

"I likes the smell of elephants," announced Bindle, with the air of one announcing that heliotrope or mignonette is a delight to his nostrils.

"I don't 'old wiv elephants," grumbled Ginger, as he gazed at the waving trunk of the elephant before which they were standing.

"Get away, you brute!"

Mrs. Bindle brought her umbrella down with a vigorous smack on the side of the trunk, which the elephant, anticipating hospitality, had thrust towards her, opening and closing the viscid extremity invitingly.

A moment later Mrs. Bindle started back with a scream, dropping her umbrella. The elephant, resenting the assault, had blown deliberately in her face, with the result that to Mrs. Bindle's features clung much elephantine moisture.

Mr. Hearty turned and made for the door, while Ginger laughed.

So astonished was Bindle at the sight of Ginger laughing that he forgot Mrs. Bindle in the contemplation of what was, so far as his experience went, a record.

"Blinkin' old 'Un, spittin' like that," said Ginger, and he laughed again. Ginger had spent six months in a German prison.

A keeper strolled up and proceeded to soothe the irate pachyderm.

With fingers that trembled with anger, Mrs. Bindle proceeded to remove her veil and then to wipe her face. This done, she turned upon the keeper.

"I shall report you," she announced, "for—for not putting that brute in a cage."

"He's harmless enough, mum," was the keeper's cool retort; "but he don't like being hit. It's a wonder he didn't lift you up and dash you against the roof," he added, drawing upon his imagination.

Mrs. Bindle retreated a pace, realising that she was still within reach of that tenuous menace.

Mr. Hearty had disappeared, and a moment later Mrs. Bindle followed, while Bindle and Ginger bought up the rear.

"I'll report that man!" announced Mrs. Bindle to Mr. Hearty as she continued to rub her face; it still felt contracted, due to the elephant's stickiness.

"They ought not to allow such brutes loose," said Mr. Hearty with conviction. He had already made up his mind to approach nothing that was not behind iron bars. He almost regretted his suggestion that they should see the lions fed.

"It's ten minutes to four, 'Earty," cried Bindle from behind. "We'd better go and see 'em feed the lions."

The lions did not appear to be hungry; they accepted their joints with a callousness that disappointed both Bindle and Ginger, who had hoped for "a bit of a scrap."

Mrs. Bindle expressed her views upon the quality of the meat supplied, the arrival of which Bindle had heralded with: "Oh, lor, don't it niff?"

The zoological interests of Mrs. Bindle and Ginger were as the Poles asunder. The exhibits which interested Ginger aroused in Mrs. Bindle a feeling of repulsion. Their first differences of opinion arose in regard to the kangaroos.

Ginger was not overburdened with zoological knowledge; but one thing he did know, and that was the way in which certain marsupials, notably the kangaroo, carry their young. With Ginger, to know a thing was to impart the knowledge to others. In general he was a man upon whose lips had fallen a great silence.

From the first he had been anxious to discover the whereabouts of the kangaroos. When at last he found them, Ginger gave a little grunt of satisfaction.

"Look!" he said, seizing Mrs. Bindle by the arm and pointing to a lady kangaroo. "See, that's where it carries——"

For answer, Mrs. Bindle gripped her umbrella and brought its knob in sharp contact with Ginger's chin.

"'Ere, wot the blinkin'——!" he shouted.

"Steady, Ginger," grinned Bindle, "this ain't a bloomin' Cabinet Meetin'."

"Wot she want to biff me wiv 'er umbrella for?" he demanded angrily.

"If you give me any more of your lewd talk I'll do it again," announced Mrs. Bindle, pale with anger.

"I only said——" began Ginger.

"Stop it!" cried Mrs. Bindle, raising the umbrella, and Ginger stopped it.

Mrs. Bindle walked on with Mr. Hearty. For her, kangaroos were irretrievably and for ever banned as disgusting beasts.

Ginger stayed behind to explain to Bindle the nursery accommodation provided by nature for juvenile kangaroos.

Another crisis arose owing to a heated discussion between Bindle and Ginger about a zoological matter connected with a white-bearded gnu, which both seemed satisfied to call "gee-new." Bindle maintained that it was a lord of creation, whilst Ginger was equally convinced that it was what he described as "a milker."

Mr. Hearty now had the appearance of a man possessed of some secret dread. He approached each pen or cage with suspicion, taking a hurried glance at the inmates before he ventured to pause for a closer inspection. Mr Hearty was a man upon whom delicacy had descended as a blight.

Ginger's other zoological titbit of information was concerned with the amazing characteristics of the camels. During the War he had served in Egypt.

"Ain't got no blinkin' feelin's, 'aven't camels," he announced. "Plug 'em through the innards an' they jest 'iccups. I ——" Ginger stopped suddenly, noticing a certain rigidity about Mrs. Bindle's umbrella-arm.

"Look 'ere, Joe," he grumbled a few minutes later. "If your missis lands me wiv 'er umbrella again, I'm goin' to dot 'er one."

Mr. Hearty received one shock. Much to his interest, he had discovered a skirt that was short even for London, and the limbs beneath were shapely. Mr. Hearty's zoological interest became intensified.

"I am surprised at you!" cried a hoarse voice, almost in his ear.

Dropping his umbrella, he spun round with the air of a man discovered in some illicit act, only to face a moth-eaten parrot of dingy reds and yellows and blues with a huge bone beak.

By the time Mr. Hearty had retrieved his umbrella, the skirt, and what the skirt had inadequately covered, had disappeared.

III

Throughout the afternoon Bindle had been doing his utmost to head the party in the direction of the Monkey House, but both Mrs. Bindle and Mr. Hearty seemed determined to avoid that particular spot.

Matters were at length brought to a crisis by a remark from Ginger.

"Wot about the blinkin' monkeys?" he demanded, suddenly coming to a standstill. "We got to see them."

Mr. Hearty, who had stared violently at the adjective, looked across at Mrs. Bindle. She appeared to hesitate.

"You ain't been to the Zoo if you 'aven't seen the monkeys," said Bindle. "Come along, 'Earty, I know the way," with which he linked his arm through that of Mr. Hearty and made off in the direction of the Monkey House.

"Funny little blinkers, them monkeys," grumbled Ginger.

He had been almost genial since the elephant's attack on Mrs. Bindle.

"Didn't 'alf spit in yer eye, did 'e?" he added, his mind still dwelling upon the delightful feeling he had experienced at seeing Mrs. Bindle blown upon by an elephant.

Mrs. Bindle lifted her chin. She disliked Ginger intensely.

"I'll thank you to keep your remarks to yourself," she said, drawing in her lips.

"Eh?" Ginger's mouth opened vacantly. With him it was a sign that he failed to understand.

"You've got a lewd tongue," continued Mrs. Bindle.

"No, I ain't," he contradicted, "it's fur. 'Ad a thick night last night, I did," he added, by way of explanation.

"It's what?" she demanded.

"Fur!" said Ginger. "Look!" and he produced from between his lips an unearthly looking thing of grey and blue and pink.

"You beast!" and with that Mrs. Bindle hurried forward, leaving the astonished Ginger with his tongue still protruding from his lips, puzzled to account for her reception of what, to him, was a friendly act. He showed his tongue to few women.

"If you don't stop that man saying disgusting things to me, Bindle, I shall tell a keeper," cried Mrs. Bindle on catching up with the others.

"'E's all right is ole Ging," said Bindle genially as he turned once more to Mr. Hearty, to whom he was explaining, much to Mr. Hearty's embarrassment, a certain incident he had seen in the Monkey House on the occasion of his last visit to the Zoo. The presence of Mrs. Bindle, however, robbed the story of much of its realism.

It had been Mr. Hearty's intention carefully to avoid the Monkey House. He recalled once having visited it with Mrs. Hearty, and her Rabelaisian mirth had embarrassed him so painfully that he had left the building, preferring to wait for her outside.

As the party entered the Monkey House, Mr. Hearty had the air of a man determined to see nothing he ought not to see. Mrs. Bindle was clearly on the defensive. She was prepared to retreat at the least manifestation of that from which, in her opinion, all nice-minded people should retire.

Ginger manifested eagerness, while Bindle's attitude was clearly that of a man who is approaching what he regards as "the tasty bit of the 'ole show," as he had just expressed it to his brother-in-law.

Mr. Hearty took the precaution of moving on ahead, leaving Mrs. Bindle wedged in a stream of people, with Bindle and Ginger in attendance.

Never had Bindle known Ginger so loquacious. He volunteered a great deal of information about monkeys, most of which was inaccurate; he seemed to have a considerable store of recollections upon which to draw.

Bindle fed the stream of reminiscence by judicious enquiry.

Mr. Hearty was doing better than he had anticipated. He decided that the Monkey House was obviously a place to visit alone.

"Look, Joe!" cried Ginger, his freckled face assuming an expression of almost animation. "Look at them two up there. Tell your missis!" Ginger was too wise to address Mrs. Bindle directly.

"Hi!" Ginger called to Mr. Hearty. "See that?" and he pointed to a bar on which a monkey was lying luxuriously extended, whilst a colleague was going over him as with a tooth-comb.

"'E don't 'alf like it," cried Ginger, his eyes fixed upon the pair. "Look, 'e's turning over." Ginger was determined that no one should lose the most trifling detail or incident if he could avoid it.

"If you don't stop that man, I'll hit him again," hissed Mrs. Bindle in Bindle's ear.

"Stop, Ging!" cried Bindle incredulously. "You might jest as well 'ave tried to stop the War as ole Ging when 'e gets on monkeys. There's only two things wot really sets 'im goin'; one's bell-tents an' the other's monkeys. You been in a bell-tent, now you——"

"Look!" cried Ginger excitedly. "Look at that little blinker!" In his eagerness he failed to realise that Bindle and Mrs. Bindle had changed positions, and he nudged her where Mrs. Bindle strongly objected to being nudged.

Without a moment's hesitation she jabbed the handle of her umbrella in Ginger's direction. The ferrule, however, caught in the cage and prodded a large grey monkey, attracting its attention from behind. In a flash it seemed to swing up above the netting and, a moment later, a long mole-coloured arm darted out from between the bars.

There was a scream and Mrs. Bindle stood bonnetless, her thin sandy hair hanging in wisps about her hatchet-like head, while an ecstatic monkey, with a purple and green bonnet, was swiftly retreating to the highest and most inaccessible portion of the cage.

"Stop him!" she cried wildly, recovering from the shock. "He's got my bonnet."

For the second time that afternoon Ginger laughed, a loud raucous bark that seemed to goad Mrs. Bindle to fury.

"You brute!" she cried. "It was your fault." She made another lunge at Ginger with her umbrella, missed him and caught Bindle on the side of the nose.

With a yelp of pain he clapped his hand to his face.

"'Ere, what are you doin', Lizzie?" he yelled.

"That monkey's got my bonnet! Here, you!" she cried, as a keeper pushed his way through the crowd.

"Go in and get it!" she ordered, as the keeper came alongside.

"I can't do that, mum," said the man civilly.

"Then I'll report you," was the furious retort. "I want to see the manager."

"See the what?"

"The manager—the manager of the Zoo," she added, as if to leave no doubt as to the identity of him with whom she desired speech.

The man scratched his head through his cap.

"You mean the secretary, mum," he ventured. "He isn't here on Sundays."

"I want my bonnet!" cried Mrs. Bindle, making frantic efforts to tuck away the wayward strands of sandy hair, her eyes fixed upon the robber of her headgear.

"Tie your handkerchief over your head," suggested a little man whose face radiated friendliness.

"Hold your tongue!" snapped Mrs. Bindle; then, turning to the keeper, she demanded:

"Are you going to get my bonnet?"

The keeper once more explained the impossibility of the task.

"Then I shall report you!" she announced for the second time. "I can't go home like this. Where's Mr. Hearty?" she demanded, looking about her. But Mr. Hearty was making no effort to push his way to the front; on the contrary, he had allowed himself to be forced to the outer edge of the crowd.

Attracted by the unusual sight of a bonnet in the possession of their comrade, the other monkeys had made a rush in its direction. By this time a wild game of follow-my-leader was in progress.

At length the possessor of the bonnet secured a corner at the top of the cage, on which all but a frontal attack was impossible. Here it proceeded to dissect Mrs. Bindle's millinery, the other monkeys forming an eager group before him.

As it tore the bonnet bit from bit, each portion was subjected to a careful scrutiny. When apparently satisfied that there could be no difficulty about identifying that particular piece, the long grey arm handed it to one of the waiting group. Soon the bonnet which had caused Mrs. Bindle much thought and labour was being put to a decorative use by the monkeys in a way which, as she later explained to Mrs. Hearty, made her feel hot all over.

The crowd was delighted.

In escaping from Mrs. Bindle, Ginger had captured Mr. Hearty and, with a wealth of expletive, was explaining to him what had happened.

"Pinched 'er blinkin' bonnet—look!" he cried, as one of the monkeys adorned himself grotesquely with a piece of green ribbon. "Blinkin' ole guy, ain't she?" he muttered, leaning towards Mr. Hearty.

Mr. Hearty started back. Although a green-grocer, he disliked onions—at least, second-hand.

"I don't 'old wiv women," cried Ginger, his eyes still fixed on the gambols of the monkeys. "Streamin' well better orf wivout 'em. Got one of yer own?" he enquired.

Mr. Hearty was relieved from the necessity of replying by Mrs. Bindle once more demanding to see the manager.

"I tell you, I'm not going home like this," she announced.

"Well, you can't stay here all night," said the keeper gravely. "We shuts at half-past six."

"Then bring the manager to see me."

"I tell you, there ain't no manager. This ain't a music-hall."

"Look 'ere, ole sport," said Bindle, drawing the keeper aside. "'Ave you got an 'at the missis can go 'ome in?"

The man pondered and once more scratched his head through his hat.

"I might be able to get you the loan of such a thing, mate," he responded. "You wait 'ere; I'll go an' see wot I can find. I don't live on the place myself; but some of us do, with their missises. She yours?" he enquired, jerking his head in the direction of Mrs. Bindle.

Bindle nodded.

"Well, you got my sympathy, mate," he said as he moved off.

A few minutes later he returned with the suggestion that Mrs. Bindle should accompany him in search of headgear. Without a word she acquiesced, relieved at the prospect of escaping from the gaze of the crowd, which instinctively she felt was unsympathetic.

"Of all the bloomin' larks!" cried Ginger, slapping a biscuit-coloured thigh in high good-humour. Then, a moment later, he added: "Why ain't there a blinking pub in this 'ere place?"

Ginger's thoughts gravitated towards beer as inevitably as the needle of a compass points to the magnetic pole. The more dramatic the action, the more insistent became his thirst.

Mr. Hearty was endeavouring to edge away from Ginger and his brother-in-law; he had the appearance of a man who is trying to lose a dog that has no intention of being lost.

Ginger continued to assure Mr. Hearty of the intensity of his enjoyment of the afternoon's entertainment, and he did

so amidst a stress of picturesque language that seemed almost to numb Mr. Hearty's faculties.

Ginger's description of Mrs. Bindle's appearance at length drew from Bindle a protest.

"Look 'ere, Ging! If it 'ad been your 'at, it wouldn't have seemed so funny, would it?"

In Ginger's eyes was a puzzled look—he was thinking.

"Oh, my Gawd!"

The exclamation broke involuntarily from Bindle.

Coming towards them, elbowing the crowd with characteristic determination, was Mrs. Bindle. Her dress was the same, her expression of uncompromising disapproval was the same, her umbrella was the same, and the narrow-palmed, biscuit-coloured gloves were those with which she had set out upon her day's pleasures. For all that it seemed an entirely new Mrs. Bindle that approached the three men, and Bindle in his own idiom had expressed the view of all.

In place of her austere correct bonnet, built up high in front like the bows of a modern destroyer, was a felt hat, which industry and pipe-clay had failed to restore to its original whiteness.

The brim was narrow and shaped like a saucer, while round the crown was a faded pale blue ribbon.

"Come on, Joe," whispered Ginger hoarsely, conscious of the grins of those around him. "Let's go an' see the kangaroos," and Bindle and Ginger melted away, leaving Mrs. Bindle to Mr. Hearty, in whose direction she was making.

That afternoon Mr. Hearty suffered as he had never suffered before.

It was only a sense of nakedness that seemed capable of offending Mrs. Bindle. The consciousness that on her head was a hat seemed to satisfy her. She appeared to be oblivious of the fact that as she passed heads turned automatically and arms nudged into sides.

To the hypersensitive Mr. Hearty, however, this was only too apparent. Three times he suggested that they should return home, and three times Mrs. Bindle told him of things she yet desired to see.

Finally, in desperation, Mr. Hearty suggested tea. For one thing he wanted refreshment, and for another he felt that, sitting down, Mrs. Bindle would attract less attention.

Mrs. Bindle made quite a hearty meal. The absence of Ginger and Bindle had raised her spirits.

It was, however, on the way home in the Tube that Mr. Hearty's misery and embarrassment reached its culminating point. Seated opposite to them was a child of an enquiring turn of mind, accompanied by a particularly affectionate mother.

From the first the child's attention was attracted by Mrs. Bindle. For some time the youngster gazed at her head in speculative wonder.

Just before she had entered the carriage, the doting mother had found occasion to censure her offspring by saying that only bad people made themselves conspicuous in railway carriages.

The rebuke had gone home. After a thorough examination of Mrs. Bindle's hat and person, and choosing a moment when the train was in the station, the child turned to its mother and in a shrill voice enquired:

"Mummie, is that a bad woman?" and the child's index finger indicated Mrs. Bindle.

CHAPTER VI

MRS. BINDLE TAKES TO HER HEELS

I

"I 'ope you got an apple pudden, Lizzie," remarked Bindle as he gazed reproachfully at a large piece of fat upon his plate. Like Jack Spratt, he disliked fat, a circumstance that Mrs. Bindle sometimes turned to her own use.

"That's right, go on!" she cried. "It wouldn't be you not to grumble about something."

"I ain't grumblin'," he said pacifically. "I only asked if you 'ad an apple pudden."

"You were grumbling about having mutton."

"I only 'appened to remark that cold mutton *is* cold mutton, Lizzie. Surely you 'aven't got anythink to complain about in that?"

Mrs. Bindle sniffed and drew in her chin.

"I ain't a-sayin' but wot mashed potatoes don't make it more tasty; still, cold mutton *is* cold mutton, now ain't it?"

"I suppose you'd like me to throw away the rest of the joint," she retorted. "If you have hot dinner on Sunday, you must have cold dinner on Monday."

"Couldn't you get a smaller bit?" he suggested.

"Oh! don't talk to me, with your cold mutton and your smaller bits and your——" She hesitated for the right word. "I'm sick and tired of your grumbling," she added.

"Well, I'm glad there's an apple pudden," he sighed, trying a new line of strategy.

"I didn't say there was one!"

"No, Lizzie; but you didn't say there wasn't," he grinned, "an' I never known anythink disappointin' 'appenin' without you sort of 'arpin' on it."

Mrs. Bindle rose and proceeded to gather together the used plates in preparation for the next course.

Bindle watched her furtively. It did not do to be too obvious with Mrs. Bindle. Instinct told him that the large, black saucepan upon the stove held a dainty dear to his heart—an apple pudding made by Mrs. Bindle.

She on her part seemed desirous of tantalising him by deferring the moving of the saucepan-lid until the last moment. At length revelation could no longer be deferred, and, with a sigh of deep content, Bindle saw extracted from the saucepan a large white pudding-basin, surmounted by a grey-looking cloth. He said nothing, however. The fact that Mrs. Bindle always did the "helping" always placed him at a disadvantage.

He ate largely and appreciatively, and when at length nature intervened and he pushed his empty plate from him, his sigh was that of a man who realises that he has done not too badly for a single meal.

"And now I suppose you'll go off and leave me for the rest of the day, like you always do on Bank-holidays."

Mrs. Bindle was always at her worst when the banks were closed. If the day happened to be fine, it invariably found her in a mood of uncompromising disapproval.

"I'm goin' to 'Ampstead," Bindle announced. He always disliked the short period that must inevitably elapse

between the conclusion of a meal and his own get-away.

"I thought so," she cried, "and I can stay here and moil and toil preparing your next meal for you, I suppose. You're a nice sort of husband."

"But you don't like 'Ampstead."

"How can I like it when I never go?" she demanded angrily.

"Well, why don't you come, then?"

A moment later he could have bitten off his own tongue. In half a dozen words he had spoilt an afternoon's enjoyment that he had looked forward to for months past.

"You'll have to wait until I dress," was her ungracious retort, and Bindle groaned in spirit.

"I've been an' done it now," he mumbled under his breath, "an' I did want to see them fat women. 'Ow long'll you be?" he asked, as he rose and proceeded to light his pipe, in the filling of which he had been engaged during the last few minutes.

"I've got to clear away and wash up first," she snapped. "I can't walk in and out like a—like a lord, same as you can."

"All right, Lizzie," he said soothingly as he picked up his cap. "I only asked 'ow long you were goin' to be. I'll come back in 'alf an hour."

"Where are you going?" she demanded suspiciously.

"Jest for a stroll round the 'ouses."

"Don't you forget. If you play any of your tricks on me, Joe Bindle, I'll lock you out all night again," and Bindle registered a vow that there should be no tricks.

"There's one thing about Lizzie," he muttered as he passed out of the garden-gate, "it don't take much to get 'er rag out."

II

"And how much longer are you going to drag me uphill like this?" demanded Mrs. Bindle as she paused for a moment to take breath.

"You said you wanted to come to 'Ampstead," protested Bindle, as he too stopped and proceeded to mop a particularly moist forehead.

"You can get nearer the Heath than this," she panted. Her face was flushed, she had miscalculated the temperature in the matter of clothing. Mrs. Bindle was always prepared for a sudden drop in the mercury, even on the hottest day.

"You said you wouldn't go by Toob," he protested, "an' this was the only bus we could get. I told you there'd be a bit of a stroll at the end."

"You didn't say I should have to climb hills."

Bindle decided that the circumstances called for silence, and they resumed their trudge up what Mrs. Bindle subsequently described as "a hill like the side of a mountain."

Presently they became caught up in a stream of people journeying Hampsteadwards. From time to time a stray hawker standing by the kerb suggested the festivities to come.

As they progressed, the pavements became lined with these itinerants. One, more daring than his fellows, thrust before Mrs. Bindle's eyes what looked like a wisp of hemp tied on the end of a stick, and exhorted her to buy a "tickler" for a penny, assuring her at the same time that in it was comprised "all the fun of the fair."

With an angry movement she dashed aside the hand. The man grinned sympathetically at Bindle, on whose face, however, there was no answering grin.

His mind was busy speculating as to the eventual results upon his domestic life of a successful attempt to lose Mrs. Bindle; but, remembering the lock-out, he determined that, whatever else he lost that afternoon on Hampstead Heath, it should not be his wife.

After much effort and more complaining from Mrs. Bindle, they reached the Heath in the neighbourhood of the pond by "Jack Straw's Castle." Here were scores of wading children clamant for pennies to be thrown in the water, in search of which they would plunge their hands and arms deep into the mud and slime.

Bindle hesitated, he had a large heart for children; but Mrs. Bindle passed resolutely on. She seemed to resent the hawkers, in particular a man who offered her a large nose of alarming redness, beneath which was stuck a vivid yellow moustache.

People pushed and hustled good-humouredly, and Mrs. Bindle hated to be hustled, good-humouredly or otherwise. She had left behind the spirit that makes Easter Monday at Hampstead a great joy to the heart of the Cockney.

"Bindle!" she demanded after a few minutes spent in struggling through the crowd, "you get me out of this."

"Get you out of wot, Lizzie?" he queried, his eyes on a girl whose hat was a rainbow of paper feathers.

"This crowd, of course," she snapped. "What did you think I meant?"

For once Mrs. Bindle's wishes synchronised with those of her lord. On the right was an opening in the railings, leading down to the booths and roundabouts, for which Bindle's heart had been yearning. Here raucous cries and clang of bell fell upon the ear.

"Penny a ball, seven for sixpence!"

"Three rings for twopence."

"Every prize you win you have!"

"All bad nuts changed."

"Ladies and children half-way up."

"We're just showing, no waiting."

Bindle's instinct was to pause at every booth or shy, exhaust its interest, and then pass on to the next. Mrs. Bindle, on the other hand, seemed inspired by a desire to get through the crowd as quickly as possible.

Time after time Bindle dragged himself reluctantly from a stall that had intrigued him; but at length there came a moment when interest triumphed over marital duty.

Outside a dingy-looking tent was hanging a florid-looking picture of a woman of marked redundancy. Upon the generously exposed portions of her figure was tattooed every possible form of intricate and complicated design. At the entrance of the tent stood a man upon whom volubility had descended like a mantle of inspiration.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried, "last year I promised you, cost me what it might, that I would bring with me to-day the famous tattooed lady. I 'ave got 'er inside"—he jerked a dubious thumb to indicate the tent behind. "I had to go to the Continent to fetch 'er," he continued, "and it has cost me a small fortune. Still, I've brought 'er 'ere to-day to show you at threepence each. We are just showing, ladies and gentlemen. There is no waiting. The greatest marvel of the Western world."

In Bindle's heart there was a great desire to see this expensive lady who had come from across the Channel, and who was willing so generously to display herself at threepence a head.

"'Ere, Lizzie," he began tentatively. "Would you like to see——"

"Don't be disgusting," retorted Mrs. Bindle, as she landed one of her sharply pointed elbows in the ear of an inoffensive little man, who was striving to obtain a better view of the lower portion of the design tattooed on the picture outside the tent.

"She ain't disgustin'," protested Bindle. "She's tattooed," he added as he turned and reluctantly followed Mrs. Bindle.

"Don't talk to me about such things."

"But she's got clothes on," protested Bindle.

"If you say anything more to me, Bindle, I'll hit you," and Mrs. Bindle clutched her umbrella in the centre.

With a sigh, Bindle followed in her wake, thus getting the full benefit of public opinion of Mrs. Bindle, due to the way in which she used her elbows. Her method of getting through a crowd was not unlike that of an ice-breaker cleaving a passage through the White Sea.

Mrs. Bindle seemed determined not to be placated. Every form of refreshment that Bindle suggested was unhesitatingly vetoed. One after the other he suggested cockles, tea, slices of pineapple hawked on plates at a penny and twopence a slice with the use of a fork to pick it up, sherbet, rock, fearsome alike in its stickiness and hue, and lemonade of a yellowness sufficient to convince the most inveterate pessimist of the presence of the lemon. On through it all Mrs. Bindle passed—she lacked the holiday spirit!

Presently she stopped, and of her own accord. It was at the sight of a small stall vending tea, round which hovered a knot of people.

Behind the stall was a brazier, on which stood a large tin can, in which a big, dirty-looking man, with unshaven chin and uncleansed finger-nails, was busily stirring what a notice on the stall described as "tea freshly made for each customer."

For more than a minute Mrs. Bindle watched him stirring the tea to extract from it the last fraction of elemental juice.

"That's not the way to make tea," she said, meaning the remark for Bindle; but in the heat of disapproval forgetting that her voice might carry.

An ill-favoured, gipsy-looking woman attached to the stall overheard the remark. Her eyes flashed. She took a step forward.

"Oh! it ain't, ain't it?"

Mrs. Bindle turned and looked at her in surprise.

"What's it got to do with you how we make our tea?"

"I wasn't addressing myself to you," said Mrs. Bindle, with frigid dignity.

"You was talking about the way my man was making tea, and that's enough for me," retorted the woman.

The man had stopped his stirring, and now stood regarding the protagonists with something in his eyes that might have been amusement.

"We didn't ask you to buy it, did we?" continued the gipsy-looking woman. "You just keep yer head shut, or I'll make that ugly face of yours uglier than wot it is; although," she added, with the air of one desiring to be studiously fair, "it 'ud take a bit o' doin'."

"Come along, Lizzie," whispered Bindle, taking Mrs. Bindle by the arm. She permitted herself to be led once more into the crowd, followed by a stream of profanity from the gipsy-looking woman.

"It ain't no good a-startin' back-chattin' with them sort," he added. "You didn't ought to——"

"Stop it!"

Releasing Mrs. Bindle's arm, he dropped behind. He realised that the day was spoilt for him, and that he alone was to blame.

He had been keeping a careful look-out for fat women, the real object of his visit to Hampstead. He realised that Mrs. Bindle's attitude towards such an exhibition would be one of uncompromising condemnation; but his curiosity overcame his caution.

Presently he caught sight of a man perched upon a platform in front of a small tent. By the size of the crowd in front of him, Bindle judged that, in all probability, his search was ended.

"'Ere, let's come over 'ere, Lizzie," he cried, steering Mrs. Bindle towards the tent. A minute later he regretted his precipitancy, for, as they reached the fringe of the crowd, the man shook out some voluminous garment of dubious linen with the words:

"Didn't I tell you she was a big 'un," and he waved the billowing mass at the crowd. "Too small for her, my word of honour."

The crowd laughed.

"Look at the size of her," he cried, turning to a highly-coloured painting hanging in front of the tent.

It depicted a woman of proportions so gigantic, and clothing so scanty as to cause the pennies almost to jump out of the pockets of the holiday-makers.

"Look at her!" cried the man, as he mopped a moist forehead. "It's the opportunity of a lifetime. For threepence you can see for yourselves, and you can touch her—yes, I'll let you touch her. You can feel her arms, touch her shoulders, and you'll find she's all woman flesh and blood, threepence each and no waiting."

"Look at these!" He took up a gigantic pair of stays, which he began to wind round him. "Gave up wearing 'em years ago, couldn't breathe in 'em, and all it costs is threepence a time and no waiting. You never in all your lives, ladies and gentlemen, saw such a sight as Madame Zifinelli. Thirty-eight stone she is, and jazzing through life like a two-year-old."

Bindle had been drinking in the man's words, his eyes fixed upon the garments that were waved in the faces of the ribald crowd.

Suddenly he felt a hand clutch his arm.

"Come away!" cried Mrs. Bindle, hoarsely. "The disgusting beast," and she made to drag Bindle with her.

"Old 'ard!" cried Bindle, as the man made a dive for yet another item of the fat lady's wardrobe.

"If you stay another minute looking at that disgusting creature I'll——"

Mrs. Bindle got no further. A low-browed woman with a dusky skin, gold ear-rings and a magenta blouse, who was pushing her way through the crowd, had overheard the remark.

"Who are you calling disgustin'?" she demanded aggressively.

Mrs. Bindle ignored her, and with one hand still gripping the reluctant Bindle, proceeded to drag him away.

"Did you hear what I said?" demanded the woman, placing herself in Mrs. Bindle's path.

"I didn't speak to you," retorted Mrs. Bindle, very white about the corners of the mouth. She disliked intensely anything in the nature of an altercation in public.

"Who did you mean was disgustin'?" demanded the woman, pushing back Mrs. Bindle with her forearm.

"It's all disgusting!" cried Mrs. Bindle, in a phrase, rendering herself an Ishmael; for the crowd took the condemnation of its pleasure as a reflection upon itself.

"Then you'll just come inside and see for yourself," announced the dusky woman in the magenta-coloured blouse. "Then, if you say my sister's disgustin', I'll give you in charge." She saw in Mrs. Bindle's strictures a splendid advertisement for the show.

"I won't go in!" cried Mrs. Bindle.

"Oh! yes you will," cried the woman. "If you don't come I'll drag you; this is England, this is," she continued with inspiration, "and we're going to have fair play. Isn't that so?" she demanded, turning to the crowd, which had now lost interest in the comedy of the lady's wearing apparel in favour of the more vital drama connected with Mrs. Bindle's puritanism.

The crowd murmuring its approval of the dusky woman's reasoning, drew closer round the Bindles, as if to prevent any possibility of escape.

"I tell you I won't go in!" cried Mrs. Bindle.

"Well, I leaves it to the ladies and gentlemen of the crowd to see fair play," announced the dusky woman, folding her arms with the air of one who knows that she has justice on her side. "She said my sister's disgustin', didn't she?" she demanded.

There were ominous murmurs from the crowd, and Bindle for one recognised that however she might protest, or strive to protest, Mrs. Bindle was doomed to see Madame Zifinelli, who was thirty-eight inches round the calf. Headed by the dusky woman, Mrs. Bindle and Bindle were pushed through the crowd towards the entrance to the tent. The man who had been displaying Madame Zifinelli's more intimate garments, rubbed his hands gleefully. Business had been none too good. Fat women were not what they had been when he was a boy. Personally, he ascribed it to the fact that the feminine surface of exposure had been considerably enlarged during the past few years. Time was when the only chests and legs visible to the general public were those of fat women.

The exhibition of Madame Zifinelli's alleged lingerie, he had at first regarded as a "blinkin' brain-wave"; but its reception had disappointed him. The crowd laughed—a little, and he cursed the police for allowing the frankness they did in the matter of window-dressing.

"The public's fed up with underclothes," he had cried in disgust to Madame Zifinelli only the night before. "Hang 'em!" and Madame Zifinelli had nodded fatly as with a soiled pocket-handkerchief, she wiped the froth from the large lips which had just closed over a pint of Guinness.

The man proceeded to hurl witticisms at Mrs. Bindle, and his idea of humour was as broad as the garments he had temporarily laid aside.

"My Gawd! If Lizzie 'ud only 'old 'er bloomin' tongue," muttered Bindle, as he paid sixpence and received the two tickets necessary for admission, although the dusky woman did not seem to expect payment. Her obvious intention was to use Mrs. Bindle as a two-edged sword of advertisement.

The crowd poured into the tent after the Bindles, until there was hardly room for the tent-poles. The heat was suffocating, and the jests were almost equal in temperature to the atmosphere.

At the far end of the tent was a daïs, in front was stretched a curtain, behind which was the fat woman. The man from outside had entered the tent, and now, seating himself on the daïs, proceeded to address the company, making liberal reference to Mrs. Bindle, whom he referred to as "Mrs. Pussyfoot." He assured the audience that Madame Zifinelli was his own sister-in-law, "and a better 'earted gal ain't a-sniffin' the briny of 'Ampstead this blessed day," he added.

At that moment the curtains parted to reveal the record-breaking Madame Zifinelli. A murmur rose from the crowd. She certainly justified the encomiums heaped upon her. She was pink and puffy, proportioned like a baby advertised as brought up on somebody or other's patent food. She was short and shapeless; but she possessed one valuable asset—she looked her weight.

Nevertheless, with a sigh of regret, Bindle noted that the pictorial advertisement had over-estimated Madame Zifinelli's bulk, and under-estimated the clothing she wore; but as he later remarked to Ginger, when describing the episode, "You can't 'ave everythink."

Madame Zifinelli presented the appearance of having been blown up with a motor-pump, a circumstance that was emphasised by the nature of the frock she wore, made of a thin white material with a vivid blue sash round the waist.

She proceeded to reel off a catalogue of her measurements. She took the company into her confidence on a number of intimate matters, more suitable for her dressmaker than a mixed gathering.

She walked down the tent through an aisle that was made with much grinning and squeezing, glared full in Mrs. Bindle's face and turned upon her a back, so indelicately misshapen with fat, that Mrs. Bindle instinctively turned her head.

Having remounted her platform and glared once more at Mrs. Bindle, Madame Zifinelli bade the crowd "good afternoon" and, a fatty smirk upon her countenance, disappeared behind the curtains.

With a feeling of relief, Mrs. Bindle made for the exit of the tent, followed by Bindle. Never in the whole of her life had she felt so uncomfortable as during the past few minutes. It was all Bindle's fault for bringing her to Hampstead Heath on a Bank Holiday! He should suffer for it, she told herself.

"Well, jer like it?" Mrs. Bindle started as, on emerging from the tent, she was confronted by the showman.

"Is she disgustin'?" asked the woman in the magenta-coloured blouse.

Mrs. Bindle looked about her wildly, then she committed an unpardonable blunder. She started to run. The showman bent upon advertisement, the venomous tongue of the woman in the magenta-coloured blouse, the crowd, eager for drama; all had conspired to frighten her.

Quick to perceive the strategical error of such an act, Bindle seized her by the arm. The mere fact that he sought to restrain her was sufficient to convince Mrs. Bindle of the lightness of her action.

With a jerk she wrenched her arm free and, darting through an open space between a cocoanut-shy and a stall devoted to little globes of gold-fish, which optimists sought to ring with hoops of wood, she ran as she had never run in her life before.

"Lizzie, Lizzie!" shouted Bindle starting to run after her. "Don't be a——" his exhortation remained unfinished; at that moment he ran full tilt into what seemed to him to be an extra firm feather-bed.

By the time he had explained to the breathless and irate owner of the gold-fish stall, who might reasonably have claimed kinship with Madame Zifinelli, Mrs. Bindle had gained a winning start, and she was legging it across the sparsely populated Heath like one possessed.

The crowd, scenting drama, shouted its encouragement and, where physical condition admitted of it, joined in the pursuit. Those who knew the circumstances strove to tell those who did not; but the wind of a Cockney crowd is for the most part constricted.

In spite of the "various veins" in his legs, Bindle set out gallantly to pursue and rescue Mrs. Bindle from the consequences of her own folly. For one handicapped by a long skirt, she ran astonishingly well. She dodged the various obstacles, animate and inanimate, that beset her path, and dodged them without losing pace. The unaccustomed movement loosened her bonnet strings, and soon the bonnet itself was hanging down her back, while strand after strand of her thin, sandy hair seemed to turn Bolshevik, and escape from the restraining influence of hairpins.

"Stop thief!"

Some misguided wretch had given tongue to the very phrase that Bindle had dreaded.

He knew the London crowd to be sporting; but it would show no sympathy for a thief.

Hearing the cry and seeing a woman running, a little man in a straw hat two sizes too small for him, sought to impress his wife and mother-in-law with his courage by planting himself directly in Mrs. Bindle's path.

She ran on until within a yard of where he stood, then swerving like a Rucker three-quarter, she at the same time smote him violently with the back of her hand. The remembrance of that back-hander remained with the little man to the end of his days; for Mrs. Bindle's hands were those of a worker, hard and bony.

On she tore, the crowd led by Bindle close upon her heels. In spite of the excitement and the unaccustomed exertion, Bindle realised that the situation was becoming desperate. To be chased by a Hampstead Bank Holiday crowd might, as he afterwards expressed it to Mrs. Hearty, "mean anythink."

To Mrs. Bindle it seemed that the whole of the tens of thousands of people the Heath contained had suddenly forsaken their pleasures and occupations to join in pursuing her. Her brain reeled. What would be the result of it? She could not go on much longer. Her knees felt as if they would give way any moment. Her breath came in short sobs. Her

"Now then, what's the matter?"

She had a vision of a policeman, calm, reliant, and resourceful. Something like iron gripped her arm. Then everything began whirling madly round, as her knees gave way and she crumpled up at the feet of P.C. Q321.

"Feelin' better, Lizzie?" enquired Bindle solicitously, leaning across the table of a little tea-shop to which he had piloted her after both the policeman and the crowd had been appeased.

"Don't talk to me about feeling better," she almost hissed. "One of these days you'll kill me, that's what you'll do, and then you'll be glad."

"But wot 'ave I done?" he whispered back, conscious that several heads were turned in the direction of their table.

For answer she rose and marched straight out of the shop, pushing aside the attendant at the door, who asked her if she had paid her bill.

"There's going to be trouble over this 'ere little blow on 'Ampstead 'Eath," murmured Bindle, as he too rose and drew from his pocket a handful of money with which to pay the bill. "I suppose she's got to blow orf sooner or later," he muttered resignedly a moment later, as he proceeded to overtake Mrs. Bindle.

"I'm sorry, Lizzie; but I did my best——"

"Don't you dare say anything more to me," was the uncompromising rejoinder, "and let me tell you this, Bindle, if ever you try and persuade me to go to Hampstead Heath again, I'll—I'll hit you."

Bindle preserved silence and the King's Peace, solacing himself with humming under his breath. "It's the Same Old Business Every Time."

That night at supper the piece of cold mutton that fell to his portion was, to use his own phrase, "as fat as an archbishop's screw."

CHAPTER VII

MRS. BINDLE FETCHES A POLICEMAN

I

"Where's the tea-caddy?"

Bindle started violently as Mrs. Bindle's sharp, incisive question came through the half-open door leading from the parlour into the kitchen.

"Oh, my Gawd!" he muttered, and his eye instinctively sought the nail on which his cap hung.

"Are you deaf?" she demanded, appearing at the door and eyeing him like a sharp-featured Rhadamanthus.

"I wasn't this mornin' when you was snorin'," he said, with the air of a man who wants to tell the executioner a joke in order to put off the drawing of the fatal bolt.

"Then where's the tea-caddy?"

Mrs. Bindle's arms went up to her hips, and her Rhadamanthine aspect became more pronounced. She was a quick reader of character, especially Bindle's character; and she knew guilt when she saw it.

"Ain't it there?" he queried, his eye once more wandering towards the door on which hung his cap; but Mrs. Bindle was in a position to cut off his retreat.

"You know it isn't there," she retorted angrily.

The tea-caddy to which Mrs. Bindle referred had come to her from her grandfather, who had made it himself, and made it well. The opening of the lid disclosed a sugar-basin reposing in a bed of puce-coloured velvet, while on either side were hinged smaller lids giving access to compartments for the tea. It was far too sacred a relic for everyday use, and Mrs. Bindle kept it on the bottom shelf of the sideboard.

"Well?" she demanded.

"I'll come and 'ave a look presently," he said feebly, in his heart cursing the weakness of the flesh that had prompted

him to turn the tea-caddy into the wherewithal to back a certain assured winner at 100 to 6.

"You've pawned it!"

Involuntarily Bindle shivered at the inflection of her voice. There was going to be what he always described as "an 'ell of a row."

That morning Bindle had gone out earlier than usual. As he was walking up Fulham High Street, he overtook a mate with whom he had worked some months before, one Harry Walker. The man was whistling cheerily as if, whatever the world might hold for others, it possessed nothing but good for him.

In the course of a few minutes' conversation Bindle had heard that, from a cousin in a training-stable at Newmarket, Harry Walker had received a tip coupled with the injunction to "put his shirt on it."

Great was the faith of Harry Walker in the judgment of his kinsman. "I'd put my ruddy trousers on it if it wasn't for the police," he assured Bindle with a grin.

All that morning Bindle had been preoccupied with the thought of "Oh Hell," for so the horse was named. It seemed to him like the direct interposition of Providence, this throwing of his race-wise mate across his path at so critical a juncture in his domestic affairs. It would be nothing short of wicked he decided not to take advantage of such an opportunity; but how?

To suggest to Mrs. Bindle the selling of some of their possessions in order to put the money on a horse, particularly a horse so named, would be like pulling the chain of an ice-water douche. It was unthinkable. On the other hand, suppose "Oh Hell" were to win without carrying Bindle's money? He groaned at the thought.

"Well, you see, Lizzie, I 'ad——"

"You go and get it back at once or——" she hesitated, as might hesitate an Inquisitor who has come to the conclusion that red-hot pincers and boiling oil are a trifle *démodé*,—"or I'll give you in charge," she concluded with inspiration. "I'll teach you!" she added as an afterthought.

Bindle rose, his get-away was going to be easier than he had hoped.

"Where is it?" she demanded, making a movement that brought him to a standstill.

He looked across at her helplessly. It seemed to him that she held every card in the pack.

"You don't leave this house till you tell me," she announced, as he remained silent. Her tone convinced him that she meant what she said.

"I took it round to Ole Isaac," he confessed.

"Why?" Mrs. Bindle would have liked to disclaim all knowledge of the local pawnbroker; but that was impossible. Comparatively recently he had acquired a large section of her home.

"I was 'ard up," he temporised.

"You've been betting again, that's what you've been doing." Her gimlet-like eyes seemed to pierce his soul.

"I put it on an 'orse," mumbled Bindle, feeling that it was better to get the worst over.

"I knew it," she cried triumphantly. "And you've lost it!"

"No I ain't," he interjected hurriedly. "The race ain't come orf yet."

"What horse did you put it on?" she demanded suspiciously.

"Oh 'Eil."

"Don't you swear at me when I ask you a civil question. You tell me the name of that horse, or it'll be worse for you," and her hands rose to her hips, emphasising the aggressiveness of her words.

"I jest told you," he mumbled. "'Oh 'Eil'; that's the name of the bloomin' 'orse, 'Oh 'Eil'. I ain't swearin'."

"It's like you to pick a horse with a name like that," she cried angrily, "and now you been and lost my tea-caddy. You know how I prized it."

"It ain't lorst," he protested. "The race ain't till to-morrow," he continued glibly, hoping to steer her off the animal's unfortunate name. As a matter of fact, when he received the tip from a mate, he had been impressed more by the horse's name than by the record of its achievements. If successful, he had intended telling his brother-in-law, Mr. Hearty.

"I shall look in the evening paper," announced Mrs. Bindle, "and if you've told me a lie, I shall——"

"It ain't a lie, Lizzie," he said, moving towards the door, "it's a dead cert."

"Don't talk to me about such things!" she retorted, "and now you'll go round and fetch my tea-caddy back again, and mind you don't bring it in till after dark," she added, as he took his cap from its peg and opened the door. "I won't have the neighbours see how you're always trying to drag me down."

"All right, Lizzie," he said meekly, "that'll be all right. Don't you worry."

"I'm not going to worry," she announced grimly. "It's you who'll do the worrying if you come back without my tea-caddy, you villain you! Get out of my sight, do!"

And Bindle got out of her sight with remarkable celerity for one afflicted with "various" veins in his legs.

That evening he discovered a money tightness in Fulham which seemed to indicate that the whole borough was on the eve of a financial collapse. Wherever he went the cry was the same, "Sorry, Joe," or words to that effect. For one thing it was Thursday, and towards the end of the week Fulham always became conscious of a money shortage; for another thing, it had been a week of rank-outsiders getting home.

As a last resource he crossed the bridge to Putney, and called at the shop of his brother-in-law.

Mrs. Hearty was out; but Mr. Hearty was in. Bindle mentioned his need of temporary accommodation; but in Putney money seemed even tighter than in Fulham. Mr. Hearty had just sufficient on him for to-morrow's visit to Covent Garden, in fact so fine had he cut it that there seemed some doubt in his mind as to whether or no he had sufficient for the train-fare back.

"Well, well," murmured Bindle, as he followed Mr. Hearty to the shop door, "I suppose I must wait until the banks open, an' draw a cheque."

"I'm very sorry, Joseph," hesitated Mr. Hearty.

"That's all right 'Earty, you can't 'elp it," responded Bindle, and he meant it.

II

"Well, have you got it?"

"Oh, my Gawd! She's up!" Bindle groaned. For nearly an hour after the closing of the hospitable doors of The Yellow Ostrich, he had tramped about the streets to give Mrs. Bindle a chance of getting to bed, determining to sleep in

the kitchen himself.

"You won't 'ave no beauty-sleep to-night, Lizzie," he said, with a forced cheeriness that sounded sepulchral even to him.

"Don't you talk to me of beauty-sleep," was Mrs. Bindle's grim retort. "You give me my tea-caddy!"

"Ole Isaac was shut," he lied.

"Then you go round to the side door!" she countered.

"But it is the side door," he protested. "It's always the side door at a pawnshop. Besides, he wouldn't come if I was to go; it ain't a dairy."

"Never you mind what it is. You go and get my tea-caddy!"

"But I can't go an' knock 'im up after closin' time at night," he protested. "'E'd lose 'is bloomin' licence. I should get run in, and——" he broke off. Mrs. Bindle had suddenly turned and was making for the scullery. Instinctively he knew she had gone in search of either broom or mop.

As a strategical move he dived into the parlour, realising that Mrs. Bindle would not risk violence in the midst of her household gods.

"Come out!" she ordered, a moment later, in the tone of one addressing a mongrel that has taken refuge under the bed. "I'll show you!"

"But there ain't nothink I want to be shown, Lizzie," he wailed. "I want to get to bed."

"You come out, or it'll be worse for you," she replied.

To this he made no response; but took the precaution of moving round to the other side of the large chenille-covered table which occupied the centre of the room.

"I'll give you three minutes to come out and not a second more," she announced, going into the kitchen.

"I wonder how she's goin' to reckon three minutes," he muttered, "with the bloomin' ole clock stopped." Moving softly across the room, taking care to avoid falling over the multitude of things which to Mrs. Bindle meant home comforts, he applied his eye to the crack of the kitchen door. He saw Mrs. Bindle in the act of inverting the egg-boiler. She prided herself on being a woman of her word.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he grinned. "It's the first time I ever been treated like an egg." He was amused in spite of the perilous domestic position in which he found himself.

Scarcely daring to breathe, he watched the stream of brick-red sand pouring away his period of grace. Mrs. Bindle watched it too, and there was a grim set about her mouth which told him that dramatic events were pending.

"Very well, then," she announced, as the thin red stream suddenly ceased, "don't blame me. Remember, I warned you."

"I won't an' I will, Lizzie," was the retort. He was so deeply in the toils that he felt a little "back-chat" could not make things worse than they were, and he proceeded to make his way back to the other side of the table.

Untying her apron she unhooked her brown mackintosh from behind the scullery door, and put it on with the air of one who has made up her mind.

"I 'ope she ain't a-goin' to knock up poor Ole Isaac," was Bindle's unuttered thought. "That'll put the bloomin' lid on any more Pop-an'-Take for me."

"Goin' out, Lizzie?" he enquired.

"P'r'aps I'll never come back," she retorted hysterically, as she opened the dresser-drawer, and took out her bonnet. Jerking it on to her head, she proceeded to tie the strings beneath her determined chin. Taking a final look round the kitchen, she lowered the gas and marched out into the passage. With a swift movement Bindle slipped into the farther corner of the parlour and, in doing so, hit his leg violently against a chair.

With a little yelp he flopped down upon the couch, nursing his leg in agony.

Unconscious that the enemy was not in a position to continue the contest, Mrs. Bindle marched along the passage and out of the house, closing the door softly behind her. She had no desire for neighbours' eyes to pry into her affairs, and in Fenton Street a bang late at night was a signal for the curious to run to door and window.

Presently Bindle ceased rubbing his injured shin and crept stealthily to the door giving access to the passage. It was never safe to be too sure on occasions such as this. Mrs. Bindle had been known to indulge in the strategy of shutting the street-door with herself on the inside and for the sole purpose of luring him from cover. This time, however, she had actually gone out, and he limped painfully into the kitchen.

"Blowed if she ain't forgotten 'er key!" he muttered as he caught sight of it lying on the dresser. "P'r'aps she's goin' round to Martha's."

"Martha" was Mrs. Hearty, Mrs. Bindle's sister, who sometimes became the recipient of her confidences on the subject of "that Bindle."

Deciding that the best course was to go to bed, Bindle mounted the stairs, and in a few minutes he was between the sheets. He was tired, it was late, and sleep came readily to his eyelids to solve, if only temporarily, his domestic problems.

Bindle was a heavy sleeper, particularly during the early part of the night. He had been known to drop peacefully into slumber in the midst of a domestic storm, during which Mrs. Bindle banged doors and opened and shut drawers with such vigour that both Mrs. Crimps and Mrs. Sawney, who lived on either side, had knocked fiercely upon the wall in protest. In Fenton Street much was done by means of the party-walls dividing the houses.

That night Bindle dreamt. He had entered an opium-den to rescue a very lightly-attired, fluffy young thing. He had succeeded in snatching her from a sinister-looking Chinee, who wore a belt full of cutlasses and revolvers, and had dashed up a rickety flight of stairs, banging to and locking the door just in time.

There was a rush of padded feet and, a moment later, a host of slant-eyed devils were hacking at the door with clubs and axes. The noise was deafening. The door was giving way. A yellow hand was thrust through a hole that an axe had splintered. A——

Suddenly he sat up in bed, his forehead beaded with perspiration, his limbs trembling with excitement.

"Oly ointment!" he cried as he jumped out of bed. "It's a fire!"

Throwing up the window, he thrust his head out. A moment later it was bathed in a patch of brilliant white light.

"There he is!" cried a voice.

For a moment he was blinded by the light of what was obviously a policeman's electric lantern.

"Come down and open the door," said a gruff voice.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he muttered. "If Lizzie ain't gone an' got a cop."

When Mrs. Bindle had quietly closed the street-door of No. 7 Fenton Street behind her, she had no definite plan of

action. In giving Bindle three minutes in which to capitulate, she had not thought of what was to happen if he failed to do so. In consequence, when the last flutter of sand dropped through the narrow neck of the egg-boiler, she found herself pledged to something without the least idea of what that something would develop into.

Many a domestic scene in the past had ended in her going out in a frenzy of hate, leaving behind her dark hints of self-destruction. When the egg-boiler had performed its dramatic task, the only thing she could think of was a repetition of these tactics.

For half an hour she had walked about, fury seething within her. Had she been in her own home a violent fit of hysterics would have relieved her pent-up feelings, but in a public thoroughfare she realised that hysterics would be out of place.

The sight of a policeman had brought inspiration to her distraught brain. She would give Bindle in charge. Had he not stolen her tea-caddy? Was he not, therefore, a thief? Had he not all their married life shown himself to be a villain?

Without pausing to deliberate, she marched up to a policeman and informed him that she wanted to give a man in charge for stealing her tea-caddy.

The policeman was young, inexperienced, and a bachelor. He was also anxious to catch the eye of his superiors. In effect he had said "Lead on," and Mrs. Bindle had led on, only to find on arrival at her own front door that she had forgotten the key.

At first she had knocked gently, while the policeman at her bidding had thrown pebbles up at the bedroom window. He was already in a state of some uncertainty about the adventure. Throwing stones up at a bedroom window in order to persuade a thief to come down and be caught was not exactly his conception of the duty of a member of the Metropolitan Police Force.

He made one or two tentative efforts at enquiry; but Mrs. Bindle had parried them. "Wait till he comes down, I'll show him," which convinced the policeman that it was the lodger who had stolen the tea-caddy. His mother had been an inveterate taker-in of lodgers, and he knew the fraternity.

After nearly ten minutes' gentle knocking, Mrs. Bindle had gone out into the road to get a better view.

In her own mind she was convinced that Bindle was hiding behind the curtains, "laughing at her," and Mrs. Bindle hated being laughed at. The policeman had seized the opportunity and the knocker at the same time, and Bindle had been saved from the yellow hordes of China.

That knock brought Fenton Street out in force. From nearly every window heads were thrust. Doors opened as if by magic, and men and women streamed out. There was Drama in the air, and Fenton would sooner lose its sleep than miss a row.

"Stop it!"

Realising what would be the inevitable result of the policeman's indiscretion with her knocker, Mrs. Bindle had sprinted up the path and seized his arm.

It was at that moment that the lower sash of the window itself was thrown up and Bindle's head thrust out. The policeman, with a quick eye for the effective lighting of the scene, switched on his lantern.

Fenton Street almost cheered. Several heads were withdrawn that their owners might dash downstairs, thrusting arms into coats as they ran. This was a business worthy of a front-row stand.

The sight of Bindle seemed to madden Mrs. Bindle. Already in her own mind she saddled him with the responsibility for what was taking place. She forgot the neighbours, forgot the scandal, forgot everything except the fact that, but for his having pawned her tea-caddy, all this would never have happened.

"Wot's the matter?" enquired Bindle. "Is the 'ouse on fire?"

"You come down and let me in!" cried Mrs. Bindle.

"The door ain't locked," temporised Bindle. He was puzzled at the presence of the policeman.

"You come down, you villain!" she cried, burning the boats of her discretion. "I'll show you!"

"You'd better come quietly," said the youthful policeman, hoping he was saying the right thing, and that nobody would detect from his idiom his inexperience.

"Don't you come, Joe," cried a voice from the darkness. "He's going to pinch you."

"Now then, none of that!" cried the policeman over his shoulder, a tinge of anger in his voice. He had heard an inspector use the phrase only two days before, and he uttered it with confidence.

Several "boos" and two distinct hisses came from the darkness. More heads disappeared from windows, and the crowd in front of No. 7 became enlarged.

"Send for a fire-escape, flattie," came a voice from the outer fringe.

"Climb up the water-spout!"

"Break the door down!"

Fenton Street was seldom satisfied with a walking-on part in such matters.

"Better break a window and get in there," suggested the policeman, nodding in the direction of the parlour window.

"Don't you dare!" was the fierce retort. In her mind's eye Mrs. Bindle saw the heavy-footed policeman ploughing his way through her holy of holies. The thought was not a pleasing one.

She was already wishing herself well out of the affair. Anger was giving place to self-pity.

Bindle was doing some rapid thinking. He had no desire to spend the remainder of the night in a police cell; he realised that Mrs. Bindle was out for blood. On the other hand, he could not very well refuse her admission to her own home.

The problem was full of difficulties. It——

"Are you coming down?" The impatience of the policeman's tone was unmistakable, "or must I come and fetch you?"

"Wot's 'e done?"

"Don't you let 'er in?"

"Let 'em climb up the water-spout!"

Fenton Street was now enjoying itself.

"'E's comin' down!"

The cry rose from a dozen regretful voices as Bindle disappeared. A few seconds later he was once more at the window.

"'Alf a tick, then," he cried. "I got to put my duds on. I can't come down without my trousers, I ain't a 'Ighlander,"

and he disappeared again and proceeded to clutch the various items of his wardrobe and make for the door.

A few seconds later he was climbing down a ladder, which Mr. Sawney, his right-hand neighbour, had planted against the back bedroom window, and by which he himself had entered. Bindle's first disappearance was in answer to the "I'm 'ere, Joe," uttered in a whisper suggestive of the seven miseries of Egypt.

Just as Bindle disappeared from the window, there was a movement at the outer edge of the crowd. A police-sergeant on his rounds had seen the crowd, and was proceeding to investigate by cleaving his way through it. Walking up the path he held a muttered conversation with his subordinate, who was already beginning to wish himself out of the adventure.

"Who stole the tea-caddy?" enquired the sergeant, turning to Mrs. Bindle.

"Bindle!" Into that one word she precipitated the venom of a rattlesnake.

The sergeant began to fumble at the tails of his coat, and presently brought forth a notebook and pencil.

"Name?" he said, as the policeman lighted up the page of the notebook.

"Bindle," was the prim reply, "Elizabeth Bindle."

"Same name, then," said the sergeant, looking up from his notebook. "Any relation?"

"He's my husband," announced Mrs. Bindle, with the air of one who is disclaiming a Past from the "Saved Bench."

"What?" There was a rasp in the sergeant's voice, which increased Mrs. Bindle's misgivings.

"He pawned it and lost the money in betting!" she cried. "I valued that tea-caddy," she added unsteadily. "It was made by my grandfather."

The sergeant cast a scathing glance at the young policeman as, with a disgusted movement, he snapped-to his notebook and proceeded once more to fumble with the tails of his coat.

"You had better apply at the police-court to-morrow for a summons," he said and, seizing the knocker, he proceeded to unloose some of the indignation he felt. He was proud of the uniform he wore and, in his view, the Metropolitan Police Force had not been embodied for the purpose of settling domestic disputes.

Once more the Bindles' knocker raised the echoes of Fenton Street.

As there was no response, the sergeant suggested breaking the window, as had done his subordinate.

"You dare!" cried Mrs. Bindle, placing herself between the two officers and her parlour window, "and I'll report you."

"Here's a ladder," cried a voice from the darkness, and, a moment later, Mr. Sawney was seen struggling beneath the self-same ladder down which Bindle had climbed a few minutes previously. It was Mrs. Sawney's idea that he should offer it as an aid to the police. In its personal disputes Fenton Street was to a man and woman anti-police.

Mr. Sawney planted the ladder in position, wrecking Mrs. Bindle's flower-beds in the process. Testing its strength with his hands, the sergeant prepared to climb.

"Don't you go up there!" cried Mrs. Bindle. "You'll knock things over." Again the instinct of the housewife prevailed.

"Well, you'd better go up yourself," said the sergeant gruffly.

For a moment she appeared to hesitate, then, with a sudden movement, she began to climb the ladder.

Mrs. Bindle was not accustomed to climbing ladders, even without the restraining influence of a mackintosh. At the second rung she stepped on the front of her waterproof, and a sharp "zip" announced a tear.

With inspiration the young policeman switched on the lamp, and the sergeant followed suit.

"Turn the light out!" Mrs. Bindle almost screamed, and Fenton Street gave vent to its Rabelaisian mirth in shrill cries and rough guffaws.

For a frenzied second Mrs. Bindle paused, then, realising that the lights were not to be turned off, she dashed up the ladder with an agility that astonished Fenton Street.

As the ladder reached only to the window-sill, there was nothing to hold on to, and the only way that she could see was to crawl in on her hands.

The sight of two white-clad legs, terminating in elastic-sided boots, waving in the air, aroused Fenton Street to the enthusiasm of a Brock's benefit. A moment later the window was banged down, and the sergeant and policeman began to disperse the crowd.

"I never seen Lizzie so free with 'er legs before," said Bindle, turning to Mrs. Sawney, from whose bedroom window he had watched Mrs. Bindle climb the ladder. "I wouldn't have missed it for any think."

"You wait till to-morrow," said Mrs. Sawney grimly.

"If that bloomin' 'orse don't win, I'm for it," he muttered, as he turned into the room preparatory to accepting Mrs. Sawney's hospitality and sleep in the parlour.

III

"Mrs. Bindle!" piped a shrill voice.

"Well?" demanded Mrs. Bindle suspiciously. Telegraph messengers with parcels were something new in her life.

"Sign there, please," said the lad as he handed her a parcel and a buff form.

Mrs. Bindle retreated to the kitchen and, five minutes later, returned with the paper duly signed, having discovered the ink on the top shelf of the larder and the pen in one of Bindle's boots, into which it had fallen. Having satisfied the official instincts of the lad, she returned to the kitchen.

Seizing the carving-knife, she cut the string and tore open the paper. There was her tea-caddy! Her first feeling of surprise over, she proceeded to examine the inside to assure herself that it was in no way damaged.

Raising the lid of the left-hand compartment, she started, then thrusting her hand in she brought out a number of Treasury notes. Opening the right-hand compartment, she did the same with that. She counted the notes. There were ten one-pound notes and one ten-shilling note. Then Mrs. Bindle sat down, her eyes fixed on the tea-caddy as if somewhere on its polished mahogany surface lay the secret of this sudden wealth. She was stunned by the magnitude of the sum.

All that day she had been planning what she would do and say to Bindle when he returned, and now——

Already she was spending the money. There was a new hearth-rug for the kitchen, a new tea-service with a deep cerise band and a lavish expenditure of gold on each article, a second enamelled saucepan, she had twice burnt the milk that week, a new——

For nearly an hour she sat, the notes lying on the table before her. Presently she rose, gathered them together and stuffed them into the bosom of her dress.

Closing the tea-caddy, she gave it a polish with her apron and took it into the parlour, where she placed it in its accustomed position.

That night when Bindle put his head round the scullery door, having entered by the back way so as to leave open his line of retreat, he was greeted with:

"How much longer are you going to keep me waiting for supper? Do you want me to boil the bottom out of every saucepan I've got?" and Bindle slipped round the door. That night, he ate of his favourite dishes, stewed-steak-and-onions and apple pudding, made as only Mrs. Bindle knew how to make them.

Neither "Oh Hell" nor the previous night's adventure was mentioned, nor ever afterwards. As Bindle pushed his plate from him, as a sign that he had lifted his spoon for the last time at that meal, he was conscious of a feeling of intense satisfaction.

He had put sixteen shillings on "Oh Hell" at 100 to 6; but the starting price being 100 to 8, he felt quite justified in pocketing the balance, and at that moment five ten-shilling notes reposed in his right-hand waistcoat pocket.

For weeks afterwards Bindle was puzzled at the persistent manner in which the tea-caddy seemed to present itself to his gaze. It appeared to rove from room to room and was always the most conspicuous object.

But Bindle contented himself with winking at it knowingly and muttering: "No, you don't, Lizzie. I'm too fly."

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. BINDLE DRESSES IN MUSLIN

I

For weeks Mrs. Bindle had been exercised in her mind upon the subject of clothes.

The management of Harridges' Stores had decided to invite to their Annual Outing the wives of their employees. It was their conception of celebrating the signing of Peace.

"Funny sort of way to celebrate the signing of Peace," grumbled Bindle when he first heard of the decision. "'Ow can you 'ave a beano with yer missis watchin' every pint you drinks an' every gal you kisses?"

When Bindle made the announcement to Mrs. Bindle she had greeted it with: "I shan't go."

He permitted himself no false hopes, however.

He was too well accustomed to Mrs. Bindle's general attitude towards life. He knew she *would* go, and she knew he knew she would go.

Mrs. Bindle's perturbation was caused by the problem of how to dress for the very festivity whereat she had declined to be present. Margate had been the place selected, and Mrs. Bindle was troubled as to the sartorial requirements of the occasion and the place.

Long and deeply she pondered the question. Time after time she would lay her wardrobe out on the bed and go through it, article by article, item by item.

From days that had been less austere there had come down the ladder of years a white muslin dress, flowered with

anæmically blue forget-me-nots. With it had come a lace-bordered petticoat. Although Mrs. Bindle had arrived at a stage of mental and emotional development when lace and coloured ribbons upon the more intimate feminine garments were anathema, she cherished for this particular petticoat something of the same feeling that she had for the sprigged muslin.

Between them they constituted the one link between the Now and the Then.

She possessed three other dresses, one a brown alpaca with a lace yoke and green silk background, giving her the appearance of an ancient piano with a fretwork front; a purple alpaca built high in the neck; and a black merino much the worse for wear.

Time after time her eyes would wander speculatively over the four frocks, and time after time they would return to the sprigged muslin and the lace-bordered petticoat.

In personal matters Mrs. Bindle could be a casuist. Without realising it, she was in her own mind seeking an excuse for appearing at Harridges' Annual Outing in the sprigged muslin. It was long in the skirt and high in the neck. The sleeves were puffed out at the shoulder and tight at the wrist.

Margate would be warm, she argued, too warm for alpaca. She did not wish to appear a "dowd." In her youth she had been what Bindle described as "dressy." It would attract attention, she argued, if she were in dark clothes while everyone else was wearing summer garments. In any case, there could be no harm in overhauling the dress and the petticoat. They might——

Therefore she washed and ironed the precious possessions, which dated back to the days when she was being courted by Alfred Hearty and Joseph Bindle, and had taken, as she expressed it herself, "the wrong man."

The ironing of the sacred garments was something of a religious rite. Time after time she "tried" the iron by holding it near her cheek and then testing its heat upon the ironing-cloth. She soaped it, she rubbed it on sandpaper, she examined the edges, she tried it on a pillow-case, and, even then, she began upon the inside of the skirt, lest the "wretched thing" should misbehave itself.

To Mrs. Bindle an iron was the personification of the devil. On this occasion, however, the iron behaved itself, and Mrs. Bindle's sprigged muslin appeared to her eyes as it had appeared some twenty years before.

The next problem that presented itself was the lace on the petticoat. Strive as she would, her casuistry failed to reconcile it with virtue and decorum.

There might be a wind, she argued, there probably would be a wind at the seaside, and in some wanton moment it might raise the skirt the necessary few inches to display the flaunting symbol of sin, that damning border of lace.

Many hours she spent in turning over the problem in her mind, and it was not until three days before the date of the outing that inspiration came to her in the form of a short goffered flounce.

That evening Mrs. Bindle was almost genial—at least until she remembered that the two bonnets she possessed, strange affairs, high of superstructure and narrow of beam, like a modern destroyer, were quite unsuited for wearing with a frock of sprigged muslin, and a white petticoat with a goffered frill.

The next afternoon she went through Fulham and Putney with a tooth-comb, penetrating even as far as Wandsworth, in her search for appropriate headgear. That day she proved the despair of the milliners in the South-Western district. She insulted assistants right and left. One girl, who, after listening to Mrs. Bindle's description of the sprigged muslin, produced a large leghorn affair, all flop and blue streamers, had been addressed as "hussy," and was left staring at Mrs. Bindle's retreating back, wondering what she had done and how she could explain it to the manageress.

The final choice fell upon a small boat-shaped contrivance of brown and white speckled straw, with a brown ribbon terminating in two ends at the rear and capable of fluttering coquettishly in the breeze. It was an unfortunate choice, requiring as it did a plentiful supply of hair on which to pin it, and Mrs. Bindle's locks were noticeably scanty.

II

On the morning of the outing, Bindle was brought back from the land of free beer and no work by Mrs. Bindle shaking him vigorously by the shoulder.

"It's time to get up," she snapped. Mrs. Bindle was never at her best in the early morning.

"Gerrup!" he mumbled, turning from his back, where he had been snoring comfortably, on to his right side, and keeping his eyes tightly shut. "Wassertime?"

"It's a quarter-past four."

Mrs. Bindle did not mention that she had taken the precaution of putting the clock on half an hour. She hated being late.

With a sigh of contentment, Bindle proceeded to get to sleep again.

"Do you hear?" she cried, once more giving him a dig in the shoulder, which brought him on to his back again, where he lay with his mouth open and his eyes shut.

"Wassermarrer?" he mumbled.

"It's time to get up," she repeated, speaking with ominous distinctness.

"Wassertime?"

"I've just told you, a quarter-past four." Mrs. Bindle was getting cross.

Slowly Bindle opened his eyes and gazed at her in wonder. "Train-don'-go-till-quarrer to nine," he muttered, trailing off sleepily.

"I've got to get breakfast and leave the place tidy," she said.

"That-won'-take——," he paused, trying to subtract a quarter-past four from a quarter to nine, "all-tha'-time," he added, giving up the problem.

"Yes it will," she said. "I've got to dress."

"Well, dress then," Bindle muttered, on the borderland of sleep.

"I can't dress while you're here," was the retort, as she gave his shoulder another vigorous shake.

"I'll shum-my eyes."

"Don't be disgusting."

Without more ado, she slipped out of bed, a chaste figure in her calico nightdress, which began decorously early and ended virtuously late, and moved swiftly across to the wash-hand-stand.

Slowly Bindle raised his right eyelid. A moment later he had sprung out of bed on the opposite side, just as Mrs. Bindle turned; in her hand was a glass of water.

"Oh! so you're up, are you?" was her grim comment, as she turned and replaced the glass on the wash-hand-stand.

"What's the use of getting up at a quarter-past four to catch a train at a quarter to nine?" he grumbled, as he looked

round for his trousers.

"It's all very well for you," was the retort. "All you've got to do is to fill your stomach and wash your face. I've got to leave the house tidy and dress."

"Ought to make Margate sit up, if it's goin' to take you four hours and a half to put your duds on," he muttered, having satisfactorily settled the arithmetic of the affair.

"That's right, go on, spoil my day for me as you always do. It's little enough pleasure I get in life, pinchin' and pinchin' and wearing my fingers to the bone. A lot you care. If I was to die to-morrow you'd pick up with some wanton hussy and——"

"I'd bury you first," broke in Bindle cheerfully, at the same time accelerating his own movements. Excitement always rendered Mrs. Bindle "a bit short-like in the way she looked at things," as he expressed it.

"Wot am I goin' to do until we start?" he grumbled as he picked up his coat and collar and tie, preparatory to going down in the kitchen to have his morning "rinse." "The pubs'll all be shut, and there ain't no pretty gals to look at so early, 'cept those wot ain't got 'ome yet," he added with a grin, as he reached the door.

Before Mrs. Bindle had time to retort he had slipped out and closed the door quickly after him.

That morning, try as he would, he could do nothing right.

First he was accused of dawdling over breakfast, and then, when he endeavoured to speed up, he was warned he would have indigestion and probably be sick.

Mrs. Bindle went about her early morning duties with her eyes on the clock and her thought upon the sprigged muslin, the white petticoat with the goffered frill, and the boat-shaped hat that lay in the bottom drawer upstairs.

"You'd better get a paper and see what the weather's going to be like," she snapped as Bindle took from her his third cup of tea.

"But it ain't 'alf-past five yet," he protested gloomily. "There ain't no shops open."

"There'll be paper-boys," was the response. "Walk about until you find one."

He rose from the table, his habitual good-humour modified by the prospect of walking the streets of London at half-past five in the morning in search of a newspaper-boy.

Added to this, he was wondering what he should do until it was time to start for the station, a little after eight. As a special train was to take the party, there was no anxiety about seats.

Picking up his cap, he went out.

"Two and a 'alf hours to put 'er bloomin' duds on," he muttered, working it out on the fingers of his left hand. "Well, I'm blowed! She ought to turn out a regular old fly-trap after that."

While Bindle tramped Fulham in an endeavour to obtain a newspaper that should set Mrs. Bindle's mind at rest upon the subject of the weather, she herself was occupied with the important function of dressing.

Everything had to be newly donned, even to the chest-flannel which she habitually wore.

The excitement had mounted to her face, rendering it almost purple, while in her eyes was a hard, unnatural glint. She had made the bed and tidied up generally, and now there remained a good two hours in which to perform her toilet.

For fully half an hour she stood at the looking-glass in a petticoat bodice and brown under-skirt, engaged with her hair; for with Mrs. Bindle every hair had to be in place.

Then she turned to the white petticoat with the muslin frill. That took upwards of a quarter of an hour to get properly balanced upon her flat and inconspicuous hips. As a precaution against the tapes refusing their responsibility at some psychological moment, she attached it by safety-pins to either side of her petticoat bodice.

As she laboured her thoughts were with the sprigged muslin lying in the bottom drawer.

At a few minutes past seven Bindle put his head round the bedroom door and announced that it was going to rain.

She turned swiftly and eyed him searchingly, her imagination conjuring up a picture of the sprigged muslin and the boat-shaped straw under the influence of a deluge.

"It's all right, Mrs. B.," he reassured her, having entirely regained his good-humour. He had just succeeded in a little affair of dialectics with a motor-bus conductor. "I must 'ave my little joke, you know."

"What does it say?" she demanded.

"Fine *as* fine? Blue sky, light breezes, 'ot as 'ell!" and with that he withdrew his head and departed to the nearest omnibus stop, in the hope of another battle of tongues.

Half an hour later the bedroom door opened slowly and Bindle's head once more appeared round the corner. As he caught sight of Mrs. Bindle, engaged in a final survey of her person, his eyes dilated with wonder. Taking from his mouth a cigar with a red-and-gold band round its middle, as if it obstructed his view, he stared again.

Advised of Bindle's presence by the smell of tobacco, Mrs. Bindle turned.

"Well?" she demanded.

He gazed at her with an expression of awe, his eyebrows lifted and his forehead crinkled into lines of astonishment.

"What's the matter now?" she demanded, her own misgivings returning at the sight of Bindle's steady scrutiny.

"My! ain't you It!"

The words were uttered slowly and impressively—a genuine tribute to Mrs. Bindle's sartorial genius.

"I suppose you'd like to see me go out in rags," she retorted cuttingly.

"That ain't wot I meant, Lizzie," he said with an unaccustomed humility and earnestness that almost convinced her. "You look like a two-year-old. Fancy us bein' married all these years!"

She passed over the sporting allusion and accepted the tribute to her youthful appearance; while Bindle, conscious that he had by good fortune stumbled upon one of those rarely felicitous phrases that had earned for him Mrs. Bindle's approval, quickly withdrew.

He whistled softly as he turned to descend the stairs.

"No wonder she 'ad to get up early," he muttered; "'oly ointment! won't she be an 'andful if it starts rainin'," and he returned the cigar to his mouth, leaving clouds of acrid smoke behind to offend Mrs. Bindle's sensitive nostrils.

A few minutes later, with flushed face, she descended the stairs. Bindle made no further comment upon her dress, although he mentally noted that elastic-sided boots did not seem quite in keeping with a muslin frock.

Over her arm she carried a dingy brown mackintosh. Half-way down the handle she grasped her second best umbrella, which terminated in what the artist had intended to represent a parrot's head.

From her wrist dangled a string-bag, in which reposed a pair of goloshes and a small shawl done up in brown paper. Evenings by the sea were chilly.

Bindle had once remarked to Dr. Little that "a cove wot's sure of 'eaven always puts on an extra pair o' pants so as 'e shouldn't get a chill."

At the door, Mrs. Bindle gazed apprehensively up at the blueness of the sky. The action caused her hat to tilt backwards, showing a gap between her head and the inside of the brim.

"Ain't it got an elastic?" queried Bindle solicitously.

She ignored the question, and proceeded to readjust the hatpins—there were five.

After several dashes upstairs for forgotten portions of her raiment, Mrs. Bindle announced herself ready, and Bindle, assuming his hard hat, although he would infinitely have preferred a cap, locked the front door, kissed his hand to Mrs. Sawney, who stood behind the curtains at Number Nine, and followed Mrs. Bindle along Fenton Street.

From time to time Mrs. Bindle glanced apprehensively up at the sky. She possessed an almost childlike belief in what the newspapers contain; yet she realised that the English climate was so variable as to be capable of deceiving even the most astute of meteorological experts.

She was also concerned about her hat, which manifested a marked tendency to wobble at every movement she made.

All the way from Putney Bridge to Victoria she was in a fever lest the train should start without them.

Mrs. Bindle's attitude of mind was that fate was against her. She always expected the worst, yet it invariably caught her unprepared. To-day she saw herself having to return to Fenton Street humiliated, an object of mirth to the neighbours.

At Victoria Station, the sight of the large crowd of Harridges' employees in strange and varied raiment inspired her with a feeling of self-consciousness.

For the first time she became doubtful about the string-bag.

Bindle's cheery greetings to his many acquaintances seemed to emphasise her own isolation.

With a woman's instinct for comparison, she found herself weighing her own elastic-sided boots with the high-heeled shoes she saw everywhere about her, and the boots were found wanting.

Incontinently she blamed Bindle, although she had more than once condemned high-heeled shoes as the attributes of the Mammon of Unrighteousness.

"My missis!"

The words irritated her as, time after time, Bindle, with a nod in her direction, or a jerk of his thumb, explained her presence to his friends. She strove to bow with dignity; but the insecurity of her hat added stiffness to her demeanour. Too much graciousness would inevitably cause it to slip over her eyes.

It was all so different from what she had imagined. In her mind's eye she had seen herself, a dignified figure of some importance, patronising Bindle's friends and the wives of his friends. As it was she stood alone, inwardly raging at Bindle's popularity.

"'Ere, come along, Lizzie!" he cried at length. "Somebody'll be pinchin' my seat in the Pulman," and with that he started off down the platform, followed by Mrs. Bindle, doing her best to move on an even keel.

Bindle secured her a corner seat opposite a lean little man with small, twinkling eyes.

Bindle grinned. "Now don't you get a-carryin' on with my missis, 'Arry, an' don't let anybody pinch my seat."

With that he got out of the carriage, and Mrs. Bindle registered another black mark against him for leaving her to the

sole companionship of the little man with the twinkling eyes, who volunteered the information that he was employed in the stables.

III

"I call it disgusting." Mrs. Bindle drew herself up to the full height of her virtue, exposing the uppers of her elastic-sided boots. The general effect was lessened somewhat by a playful pocket of wind coquetting with her hat, giving it a heavy list to starboard.

"Wot's disgustin'?" enquired Bindle, gazing about him anxiously, lest he should miss something.

"The way you talk about bathing," she replied. "It makes me hot all over." She clutched fiercely at the handle of her umbrella, as if she had been Caligula and the neck of the parrot personified mixed bathers. Bindle had persuaded her to leave the string-bag in the cloak-room at the station.

"Personally, myself," he continued, "I says 'put me among the gals.' We got two hours before dinner; better come an' see——"

"Bindle!"

"It's all right, Mrs. B.," he retorted, "I ain't a-goin' in with 'em. When you got various veins in your legs you ain't so popular with the gals."

"Stop it!" The admonition escaped Mrs. Bindle's tight-shut lips.

"Well, I think I'll jest take a run down to see that there ain't nothing goin' on wot I ought to 'ave stopped." As he spoke Bindle moved off.

"If you dare to go——" began Mrs. Bindle; but Bindle was gone, and Mrs. Bindle found herself alone among the holiday-makers; but bereft of the holiday spirit.

For nearly a minute she stood looking about her, then, with sudden determination, she made for the beach. Bindle, however, was nowhere to be seen. The interest and attention of everybody on the beach focused upon the bathers, particularly the women bathers. Several men she observed had field-glasses, and one old man with a white beard had his right eye glued to an enormous telescope.

Bursts of shrill laughter were wafted towards her from the beach, and the line of Mrs. Bindle's lips hardened. In protest at the immodesty of her sex, she selected a chair and sat down, her back turned ostentatiously to the sea. Opening her umbrella, she rested the handle upon her shoulder as if to shut out the sounds of revelry from the bathing machines.

Only by the tapping of a patent leather toe-cap did she give indications of the smouldering fires of disapproval within.

Already she was wishing she had not come. Everything she saw seemed to jar upon her. During the journey down, Bindle and the other men in the carriage had played cards *for money*, while the women had said things to one another and to the men that had rendered her hot with shame.

She had been obliged to sit well forward on the seat during the whole journey, otherwise the cushion at the back of the carriage persisted in tipping her hat over her nose, and her neck was stiff.

She was hesitating as to whether or no she should go in search of Bindle, when a banjo began to twang just behind her. She took no notice, continuing to sit like a figure carved in stone.

Presently a wheezy voice broke into rasping song:

"Valentina Audrey May
Had a fortnight's holiday;
So she went to Margate Town,
For to get her tootsies brown.
Valentina Audrey May
Went a-paddling one day;
Arthur Hector Eustace Brame
Tucked up his bags and did the same.
There came a wave and Audrey May
Lifted her skirt and did display—
Tut-tut, and did she faint or cry?
Not she, and I will tell you why;
For she wore lace on her don't-tell-me at two-and-nine a yard,
Yes; she wore——"

"You beast!" Mrs. Bindle rose and turned to face a fat little man whose face was smeared with burnt cork and vermilion. On his head was a miniature straw hat stuck at a rakish angle.

The minstrel seemed as surprised as Mrs. Bindle. He gazed at her as if she had been Venus newly risen from the waves, while she regarded the oyster-shell button of his frock-coat, and the full-sized banana he wore as a tie-pin, with loathing and disgust.

"Go away!" she cried.

He continued to gaze at her stupidly, making no movement of departure.

"Go away, or I'll call the police." Closing her umbrella, she seized it in the centre, and made a vicious lunge in the direction of his solar plexus. This seemed to convince him, and with a grumble in his throat he waddled off.

Mrs. Bindle returned to her chair and settled down once more to the smoulder of her own thoughts. The day was made for pleasure, yet here she was—— Suddenly she became conscious of a new note in the shrieks of the distant bathers. Raucous joy had given place to terrified appeal; men, too, were shouting hoarsely. Someone was in danger! Someone was being drowned!

She started up and, clutching her umbrella, ran towards the point whence the shouts came. Regardless of her hat, regardless of her skirt, regardless of decorum, she ran. In her heart was Fear.

Others were running too, running towards what was obviously the centre of the tragedy, a shouting, gesticulating crowd by the water's edge. She noticed the old man with the white beard, gasping as he ran, his unclosed telescope carried like a rifle at the trail.

Once she stumbled and nearly fell; but recovering, she lurched on.

Still the cries continued, shrill screams of women, hoarse cries of men.

"They've got 'em both!"

The words seemed to stab through the medley of sound, and Mrs. Bindle's left hand went to her heart. She was sobbing for breath.

A second later there was a cheer, followed by hysterical shrieks, and then silence.

"What is it?" gasped Mrs. Bindle. She had arrived at the fringe of the crowd and was at work with energetic elbows.

"Chap nearly drowned saving a gal." The girl who answered did not look round, but continued to bob her head from side to side in an endeavour to catch a glimpse of what was taking place in front. "'Ere, don't shove!" she added, as Mrs. Bindle made further efforts to push her way to the front.

"Silly fool!" growled a man with a violent blue tie that rose well above the top of his collar behind. "Goin' in when 'e knew 'e couldn't swim," he added. "That's like old Joe Bindle, 'e'd——"

With a shriek, Mrs. Bindle began clawing fiercely at the back in front of her.

"Let me through!" she cried. "Let me through! It's my Joe. I'm his wife!" With both hands she seized the blue necktie and the collar of the man in front and tugged.

"'Ere, make way!" cried a loud voice. "It's old Joe's missis."

Mrs. Bindle was pushed and hauled through the sympathetic crowd. A minute later she was on her knees beside a very pale and a very wet Bindle.

"'E'll do now," said a voice reassuringly.

"Joe!" she cried wildly, "Joe, it's me, Lizzie! Don't you know me? Oh, he's dead!" she screamed, then, seizing him by the shoulders she shook him roughly. "Say you ain't dead, Joe!"

Bindle's eyelids fluttered, and then opened wearily. For a second he looked at her without recognition, then the grey line of his lips bent into the ghost of a grin.

"I ain't been bathin' with 'em, Lizzie," he murmured weakly. "It was a young—I——" his eyes closed again as he sighed.

From that moment Mrs. Bindle took charge of the situation. She it was who gave orders for someone to go to an hotel and tell them to prepare a hot bath and blankets; she it was who held a glass of brandy-and-water to Bindle's lips; she it was who saw that his collar was loosened, and she it was who gave the word for him to be carried to the hotel.

When Bindle was comfortably tucked away in bed, protesting volubly, Mrs. Bindle heard the story of what had happened.

A girl, it appeared, had been seized with cramp. At the sound of her screams, Bindle had grasped a life-belt and plunged in. The girl was very little out of her depth, and he managed to reach her. As he did so she clutched him wildly. The life-belt slipped from his grasp, and both had sunk like stones. When rescued they were unconscious.

From the moment that she had fallen upon her knees at Bindle's side everything changed for Mrs. Bindle. As the "missis" of the hero, she found herself a celebrity.

The managing director of Harridges' himself shook her warmly by the hand, and congratulated her upon being the wife of "such a splendid fellow." Everybody wanted to stand her a drink, and she could have had enough ices to freeze the tropics.

When Bindle, having broken blanket-bounds, eventually appeared in a suit of borrowed clothes, several sizes too large for him, the enthusiasm was, as a local newspaper described it later, "catastrophic in its intensity." The Harridge employees carried him shoulder-high along the front, and Mrs. Bindle followed immediately behind, her hat on one side, and the parrot-headed umbrella tucked under her arm. She was drunk, drunk with notoriety.

At luncheon the managing director spoke as a man who had drunk a bottle of 1900 champagne should speak, with enthusiasm and emotion. He praised Bindle's heroic act, and linked it up with what he termed "the Harridge spirit." A little irrelevantly he referred to his own youth, and concluded by announcing his intention of taking the necessary steps to bring Bindle's gallantry to the notice of the Royal Humane Society.

In a flash Mrs. Bindle saw herself accompanying Bindle to Buckingham Palace to receive the medal at the hands of the King—she was a little confused in her own mind as to Civil and Service decorations. She saw her portrait in the papers, and she then and there decided to insert a new yoke in her brown alpaca dress and retrim her best bonnet.

She was aroused from her contemplation of the glory that was to be hers by someone filling her glass with Guinness' stout.

Everybody wanted to drink Bindle's health, and Mrs. Bindle came in for the overflow, heralded by: "'Ere's to 'is missis!"

At dinner the managing director, having drunk another bottle of 1900 champagne, proposed Bindle's health, and it was drunk with thirst and acclamation. In the subsequent speech that was forced from him Bindle made a great hit with his last phrase.

"Never drank so much water in all my puff," he grinned, "an' then my missis comes along with the brandy, an' her temperance."

They roared their mirth; but when they learnt that Mrs. Bindle really was temperance they yelled—never had there been such a joke. Even Mrs. Bindle smiled—the joke was indeed good. Never had she known such a day. She forgot Mr. Hearty, she forgot his three prosperous businesses—in short, she forgot everything except the fact that she had become a woman of some importance.

As the dinner drew to a close it became uproarious. Wine, whisky, and beer had flowed like water, for the firm had determined to celebrate the signing of Peace in a manner worthy of its traditions for generosity to its employees. The cumulative effect was that all were, as Bindle expressed it, "oiled in every joint."

Ginger was fighting-drunk, Wilks was boasting that he had drunk six bottles of beer, and Huggles found difficulty in controlling both his legs and his smile.

The girls and women were flushed and loud of voice; yet in the heart of Mrs. Bindle there was nothing of the indignation she would ordinarily have experienced at such an exhibition of self-indulgence.

She heard remarks bandied between men and women that, a few hours before, would have caused her to shudder. Now she was not even aware of being shocked.

She was no longer conscious of her clothes. Her hat wobbled as it would, the sprigged muslin might be the most conspicuous garment in Margate, and her elastic-sided boots an anachronism—what cared she?

When they left the Greensea Hotel, with just sufficient time in which to catch the train a few heavy drops of rain were falling.

This in itself might have constituted an additional grievance with Mrs. Bindle, as it was Bindle who had suggested that she should leave her mackintosh and string-bag in the station cloak-room; but it did not.

"You mustn't get a chill," was all she said, as she opened the parrot-headed umbrella.

By the time they reached the station, she realised that her wet skirts were clinging to her legs in a manner that at any other time would have made her blush to think of.

Standing in the darkest corner of the booking-office, she sent Bindle to get the brown mackintosh, telling him she would wait there for him. Five minutes later he reappeared, panting for breath.

"Urry up, Lizzie!" he cried, "you'll lose the bloomin' train. I been waitin' for you."

"Where's the mackintosh?" she cried.

"It's keepin' a seat for you," and then Mrs. Bindle realised that she would have to walk the length of the platform with her sprigged muslin doing all it could to emphasise the form that nature had bestowed upon her.

As a matter of fact, she had to run. As they reached the platform, the guard, whistle in mouth, shouted to them to hurry up.

From every carriage window heads protruded, and stimulating cheers sounded, together with much comment and advice.

Mrs. Bindle ran as she had never run in her life. The sprigged muslin was mounting to her knees; but she could do nothing.

She had the entire length of the platform to run, Bindle having secured seats in a compartment near the engine. Just as she tumbled into the carriage, Bindle almost on top of her, the guard blew the whistle.

"Stick to yer legs, them light things does," sympathetically remarked a fat man opposite, as Mrs. Bindle sank breathless into a seat, feverishly pulling down her skirts from above her knees—and she blushed.

For one thing she was grateful. When they returned home darkness had enveloped Fenton Street, and she was spared the ignominy of appearing a bedraggled wreck before the critical eyes of her neighbours.

"I'm afraid it's ruined your duds, Lizzie," sympathised Bindle, as they entered the gate.

"I hope you haven't caught a chill," was her response. "I'll put the kettle on and make a cup of tea," she added, as she passed into the kitchen.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he muttered, as he followed her along the dark passage. "'Ere 'ave I been livin' with Mrs. B. for twenty years and ain't got to know 'er yet. Ain't women funny?"

CHAPTER IX

MRS. BINDLE MEETS HER MATCH

I

"If you goes, I'll go, Martha; but I ain't a-goin' to take on no more 'olidays alone with Lizzie."

Mrs. Hearty heaved and undulated, as if Bindle had just given utterance to something that was intensely funny.

"One's enough for me," he continued. "Lizzie's made funny-like—she ain't never really 'appy only when she's miserable."

"That's like Alf," wheezed Mrs. Hearty as she beat her chest with clenched and grubby fist. "I've been feelin' a bit run down, Joe, an' a fortnight at Margate would——"

Bindle was not to hear what a fortnight at Margate would achieve for Mrs. Hearty, as she loudly lapsed once more into wheezing and breast-beating.

How she managed to absorb sufficient oxygen to keep her alive was a secret between herself and her Maker.

"I was sayin' so to Alf only yest'day," she gasped presently. Then, after a pause, she added: "But I wouldn't go with

Alf alone." She shook her head with decision. "Too dull," she added.

"I shan't 'ave no peace till Lizzie's 'ad 'er 'oliday," grumbled Bindle. "She's at me the 'ole bloomin' time. Says I spoilt 'er bust in the summer-camp."

"Oh, Joe, don't!" cried Mrs. Hearty.

Any reference to the Bishop of Fulham's summer-camp always reduced Mrs. Hearty to a state of pulsating helplessness. With Bindle the experiences of the campers had lost nothing in the telling.

Thus it came about that August saw the Bindles and the Hearty's installed in Margate lodgings. Mrs. Bindle found comfort in the presence of Mr. Hearty, just as Mrs. Hearty saw in Bindle one who would add to the brightness of her holiday.

Mrs. Hearty had spent much money and little thought upon her wardrobe. Her sartorial conception of a holiday was capable of removing the glory from a rose and the beauty from a landscape. Her colour-sense was primary.

She invariably began with some violent aniline effect, which quieted down into a tweed skirt, only to break out again with redoubled force when it came to her stockings and shoes.

Mrs. Hearty had ankles eminently suited to the support of her bulk. These she persisted in clothing in the thinnest of fabrics and the brightest of colours.

Mrs. Bindle had expostulated; but she was good-humouredly told to look after her own legs—a remark that had seemed to her both coarse and unnecessary.

On the journey down the whole compartment had been amused by Bindle's tongue and Mrs. Hearty's heaving agony of mirth. Mrs. Bindle and Mr. Hearty had sat through it as expressionless as Corinthian columns, Mrs. Bindle from time to time feeling "hot all over," as she would have expressed it, while Mr. Hearty was conscious of the masculine equivalent of the same emotion.

From the moment they entered their lodgings, which were engaged on the principle that the food the lodgers bought the landlady cooked, Bindle foresaw trouble.

The landlady was a heavily jowled woman, with an aggressive chin and a quality which proclaimed to the world that if she were a widow she knew how to look after herself. Mrs. Bubbidge went through life avoiding being what she called "put upon." Any little leisure she had apart from this and her domestic duties she spent in reducing the food-stocks of the lodgers; but she did it with such artistry as to make it almost impossible to detect.

If she took vinegar she considerately filled up the bottle to the high water-mark with cold tea, carefully strained. The same applied to spirits. Sugar was not so easily handled; but then it was not so carefully watched.

Coffee presented no difficulty, the dried grounds of yesterday's issue could be used to make good to-day's shortage. Mrs. Bubbidge's great asset, however, was the faculty she possessed of assuming the indignation of the innocent.

The few who ventured to protest had bitterly regretted it. In the course of Mrs. Bubbidge's tirade they had learnt how close was her intimacy with the police, even with the chief constable himself.

Mrs. Bubbidge was a woman who was thorough in all things. She was also obliging. If a guest used condensed milk, Mrs. Bubbidge always volunteered to open the tin and decant it. She did the same with salmon, sardines, and tinned fruits. There were few who could open a tin more deftly than Mrs. Bubbidge, or more swiftly transfer to her own store the tribute which she felt was her due.

From the first Mrs. Bubbidge had taken Bindle and Mrs. Hearty to her large but dubious heart. Bindle had not been in the house five minutes before she was telling him to "Go hon!"—with Mrs. Bubbidge an indication of high good-humour, especially when addressed to one of the opposite sex.

Mrs. Hearty she addressed as "dear" within half an hour. This, with her, was equivalent to the eating of bread and salt.

Mr. Hearty she regarded with suspicion. She liked "a man that is a man," to use her oft-repeated phrase. Mrs. Bindle she frankly disliked. From the moment their eyes first met it was war.

When Mrs. Bindle had deliberately smoothed with the ball of a critical foot a well-worn patch of oilcloth, which rose in canvas ripples in the narrow hall, she had earned Mrs. Bubbidge's lasting hate, an affair which, like that of Dante, would pass with her through the curtains of eternity and become a perpetual attendant on the withering soul of her who had merited it.

In Mrs. Bindle, however, Mrs. Bubbidge had met a foe worthy of her steel. She watched her tea and sugar as aspiring knights of the round table watched their arms.

Within twenty-four hours Mrs. Bindle detected the first theft of tea, and she paid a visit to a chemist. The next day Mrs. Bubbidge had a "bilious attack."

On the third day Mrs. Bubbidge had another bilious attack, and Mrs. Bindle indiscreetly let drop a hint that those who stole other people's tea must expect to suffer. Then Mrs. Bubbidge knew that she had been "poisoned," as she expressed it.

On the afternoon of the fourth day the whole party had bilious attacks. That is to say, they were intensely and painfully ill, Mrs. Hearty in particular suffering agonies. She had not been constructed for physical reaction.

If Mrs. Hearty suffered the greatest pain, Mr. Hearty made the most noise.

"'E's like the bloomin' Yarmouth boat in a storm," had been the description of Mr. Hearty's efforts, which were strangely reminiscent of whooping-cough in a professional baritone.

The trouble arose through Mrs. Bindle, confusing the duplicate tea-caddies she had brought with her, filling the teapot from that specially prepared for the landlady.

Mrs. Bubbidge was not long in arriving at the true cause of the trouble, and Mrs. Bindle quickly gathered that Mrs. Bubbidge knew, while Mrs. Bubbidge knew that Mrs. Bindle knew she knew.

As a landlady and a widow of fifteen years' experience, there were in Mrs. Bubbidge's armoury many weapons.

Whatever Mrs. Bindle's precautions regarding the non-perishables, she had to entrust the perishables to Mrs. Bubbidge's mercy and discretion. It is difficult to mark uncooked meat, for instance, and Mrs. Bubbidge always repatted the butter. She never regretted the money spent on butter-pats.

Potatoes could be counted, also plums; but it was difficult to reconstruct a pie-dish of sliced apples, cooked to a mush, into "eight good-sized apples." Mrs. Bindle had to confess herself beaten.

Again, the weather was hot and, by leaving a cooked joint out of the cool larder, a prey to bluebottles, or by permitting butter to remain in the sun after it had been patted, Mrs. Bubbidge was able to take an ample vengeance for the waste of a luncheon due to the emetic qualities of Mrs. Bindle's tea. Besides, the luncheon had, like the beast of the Apocalypse, been a composite affair derived from the stores of Mrs. Bubbidge's several lodgers.

As the week progressed the enmity between the two women became more marked. Mrs. Bindle was grim and silent, Mrs. Bubbidge angry-eyed and outspoken. She informed her other guests of the depths of pity her heart contained for "such a nice-spoken man tied to a rag and a bone like her."

She arranged that Mrs. Bindle should over-hear portions of her conversation with a flat-footed, slatternly creature, whom Bindle referred to as "the skivvy," but who was known to her godfathers and godmothers as "Ethel Amelia," and she took care that they should be pungent and unmistakable in their application.

"I can't think how he can keep so cheerful," was a phrase Mrs. Bubbidge repeated many times, and she would go on to say that she would be glad when "that sandy gawk" had gone back to London.

Mrs. Bindle on her part was able to counter these pleasantries with veiled references to the indifferent quality of Mrs. Bubbidge's cooking. This had to be done with subtlety, and frequently Bindle was the unconscious mouthpiece of her rebukes; for she led him to express his opinion of her own cooking by the mention of various dishes of which he was particularly fond.

Mrs. Bubbidge realised that Bindle was the unwitting tool of "that thin-faced cat," and she bore him no malice.

To Mr. Hearty meals became a torture. He was in hourly dread of an explosion between the two women, and Mr. Hearty's soul had been moulded to pacifism in its every form and manifestation.

Bindle saw only vaguely the drama that was taking place before his eyes; but Mrs. Hearty watched it with good-humoured anticipation. She realised that the storm must break sooner or later; but, as there was no chance of her being personally involved, she could afford to extract from the situation all the amusement it contained.

II

"She's left the salt out of the potatoes again!" announced Mrs. Bindle on the Saturday at dinner-time.

At that moment, to Mr. Hearty's intense apprehension, the door opened and Mrs. Bubbidge entered.

"Well, there's salt before your eyes, ain't there?" she demanded, standing in the door-way, her arms akimbo.

"Don't you talk to me like that!" cried Mrs. Bindle, going very white and her lips disappearing.

"I shall talk to you how I like in my own house," was the angry rejoinder.

"Oh, no, you won't!"

"And who'll stop me?" demanded Mrs. Bubbidge.

"Never you mind!" retorted Mrs. Bindle darkly. "I won't be spoken to in that way by you."

"Er—may I have another potato, Elizabeth?"

It was Mr. Hearty's contribution of oil upon the troubled waters; but, unfortunately, Mrs. Bubbidge set fire to it.

"Have you got enough salt?" she demanded aggressively.

"I—er, yes, thank you," said Mr. Hearty, miserable at being drawn into the controversy.

Suddenly Mrs. Bubbidge had an inspiration. With a swift movement she picked up the salt-cellar and emptied its contents into the dish of potatoes.

"Now p'r'aps they'll be salt enough for you," she shrilled and, a moment later, she left the room, banging the door so that the whole building appeared to shake.

"You got 'er rag out, Lizzie," murmured Bindle.

"Don't you use such disgusting expressions in my presence," was the retort.

Bindle helped himself to another potato and proceeded to scrape from it the mass of salt with which it was

encrusted.

"Better not say any think to 'er," Bindle suggested and, for the first time in his life, Mr. Hearty found himself in entire agreement with his brother-in-law's sentiments.

"I shall say what I like to her," announced Mrs. Bindle angrily. "I'm not going to be insulted by a low creature like that. Her cooking's a scandal. A widow for fifteen years," she cried scornfully, determined to leave Mrs. Bubbidge no remnant of character. "I don't believe she's a widow at all; that wedding-ring wasn't made fifteen years ago, it's too new."

"Steady on, Lizzie," protested Bindle. "Jest because she don't put salt in the potatoes don't mean that she ain't married."

"You stop it, Bindle," she retorted angrily; "you're as bad as she is."

"No, I ain't," he protested. "There ain't no doubt about me being married. Is there, 'Earty?" and he turned to his brother-in-law for corroboration.

A moment later something warm and gritty caught him on the side of the nose. Mrs. Bindle had picked up a potato from the dish, and for once a woman had hit the mark she sought.

Taking out his handkerchief, Bindle wiped the side of his nose, picked up the potato, and was about to restore it to the dish when Mrs. Bindle clapped on the lid.

"When I want any remarks from you, Bindle, I'll ask for them," was her grim comment.

"You always was a fool, Lizzie," wheezed Mrs. Hearty and, losing her aim with a fork full of peas, she dropped most of them down the elaborate V of a canary-coloured silk blouse. Then she began to laugh and beat her breast.

"Mind them peas, Martha," counselled Bindle, whereat Mrs. Hearty laughed the more. "They're pease-pudden by now," he added.

The meat course concluded, Mrs. Bindle rang the bell; but no one answered. Several times she rang, and at length Bindle went to make enquiries. After a short absence he returned with the news that Mrs. Bubbidge had decided that they could wait on themselves in future.

"Then she shan't be paid her bill," announced Mrs. Bindle.

"Look here, Lizzie," protested Bindle, "don't you start a-scrappin' with Mrs. Bubbidge. She's all right if you don't rub her the wrong way."

Mrs. Bindle was about to retort when Mr. Hearty entered the conversation.

"I think, Elizabeth, that—that——" He paused, as Mr. Hearty so often paused, at a loss for the right word; but Mrs. Bindle saw that the opinion of the company was against her, and for the rest of the meal she was content to sit, a tight-lipped and angry observer of her husband and brother-in-law doing the duties for which they paid Mrs. Bubbidge.

That afternoon the party went on an excursion to Broadstairs, where Mrs. Bindle's thoughts were preoccupied with schemes of revenge upon Mrs. Bubbidge.

It was nearly ten o'clock when they returned to Margate by tram.

"'Ullo, wot's up?" cried Bindle, as they turned into Paradise Avenue. "Blowed if it ain't our 'ouse!" Bindle's ready forefinger was pointing to a small crowd at the farther end of the avenue.

Instinctively the party quickened its pace, Mrs. Hearty gasping painfully.

As they drew near they saw that just inside the garden was a pile of what looked like somebody's luggage, which

had been partially unpacked.

"Wot's up?" enquired Bindle, who was the first to reach the fringe of the crowd.

"Dunno!" said the man addressed. "Been a fire, I think," and he indicated with a nod the pile of personal effects in the front garden.

With characteristic vigour Mrs. Bindle elbowed her way through the crowd. A moment later she gave utterance to an angry cry.

"It's that woman!" she cried. "I knew she'd be up to some mischief."

There, in the front garden, lay piled the joint luggage of the Bindles and the Heartys. There was a tin trunk, a Japanese dress-basket, a brown wooden box, a Tate sugar-box, two cardboard hat-boxes, a black leather bag without a handle, and several brown-paper parcels. On the top were a number of loose garments, which Mrs. Bubbidge had apparently gathered up in the Bindles' and Heartys' rooms and dumped on top of the boxes.

Mrs. Bubbidge prided herself upon her honesty. On the top of the garments she had placed the materials for her visitors' Sunday dinner: a loin of pork, poking itself out crudely from a welter of green peas, three small onions, a brown-paper bag containing potatoes, and a number of apples.

"Well, I'm blowed!" muttered Bindle as he regarded the miscellaneous assortment. "She might 'ave packed the bloomin' things up."

With a self-conscious feeling that was almost a blush, Mr. Hearty recognised a long pink nightshirt that was very dear to him, and he turned his head resolutely from the pile of personal effects, lest he should see things not intended for male eyes.

The sight of the uncooked pork and green peas seemed to goad Mrs. Bindle to madness. With quick, jerky strides she marched up to the front door of No. 4 Paradise Avenue and gave a loud rat-tat-tat that could be heard streets away.

The door was thrown open instantly, and by Mrs. Bubbidge herself. She had been watching the drama from the parlour window and, seeing Mrs. Bindle approach, had gone forth to do battle with her enemy.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded Mrs. Bindle.

"What's the meaning of what?" temporised Mrs. Bubbidge.

"Putting our luggage in the garden."

"Your luggage, was it?" enquired Mrs. Bubbidge in a tone that could easily be heard at the end of the Avenue. "I found a lot of old rags and things in the rooms you 'ad, so I threw 'em out there."

"We took those rooms for a fortnight!" cried Mrs. Bindle.

"Ho no, you didn't!" retorted Mrs. Bubbidge. "You took 'em for a week, and paid a week in advance. I 'ad my suspicions about you, I did," she added darkly. "That's why I made you pay in advance. I knows who to trust, although I am a widow."

"How dare you!" cried Mrs. Bindle, conscious that she was getting the worst of the argument. "I'll give you in charge for—for——"

"Not putting salt in the potatoes," suggested Mrs. Bubbidge, who had entirely regained her good-humour now that she saw her enemy defeated.

"You can't turn us out at a moment's notice!" cried Mrs. Bindle, taking up a new line of attack.

"That's true," agreed Mrs. Bubbidge, who always prided herself upon her knowledge of the law.

"I'm going to have these things brought in!" announced Mrs. Bindle.

"Ho no, you're not!" said Mrs. Bubbidge.

"We've got nowhere to go." Mrs. Bindle was weakening.

"That's as it may be. You shouldn't have come down to a place like Margate without making arrangements," said Mrs. Bubbidge, with the air of one giving sound advice. "There's hundreds of people sleeping on the beach through being such sillies."

Mrs. Bindle looked about her helplessly.

Suddenly she caught sight of the helmet of an approaching policeman. With a swift movement she turned on her heel and walked to the garden gate, conscious that Paradise Avenue had turned out in force.

"Here!" she cried, beckoning the policeman as if he had been a taxi. "That woman's turned us out," she added a moment later as the policeman reached the gate.

The policeman scratched his chin, his eyes fixed upon the loin of pork.

"I want you to make her take us back," Mrs. Bindle continued, as the policeman did not reply.

"That's an affair for the civil courts," he announced.

"But—but where are we to sleep, constable?" Mr. Hearty broke in; he began to realise that his personal comfort was menaced.

The policeman shook his head, as if the question were frankly beyond him.

"The town's very full, sir," he said. "Last night about five hundred slept on the beach, and every shelter was crowded. Why, we even had 'em in the police station," he added, with the gusto of one who bears ill-tidings joyfully.

"You won't catch me sleeping on the beach!" announced Mrs. Bindle resolutely. "That woman's got to take us in, or I'll know the reason why," and once more she marched up the garden path and proceeded to hammer at Mrs. Bubbidge's front door.

Mrs. Bubbidge's head appeared from the first-floor window.

"What do you want now?" she demanded.

"I want the rooms we engaged," and Mrs. Bindle's teeth snapped on the last word as if it had been Mrs. Bubbidge herself.

"You engaged rooms for a week," announced Mrs. Bubbidge. "Besides, I've let 'em."

"I'll stay here till you let me in," was the retort.

"Stay and welcome," came the placid response.

Mrs. Bindle looked about her angrily. She was conscious that from every window heads were thrust, while on several doorsteps little groups of interested spectators were gathered, prepared to see the drama played out to the final fall of the curtain.

"Are you going to let us in?" demanded Mrs. Bindle.

"It wouldn't be safe!" was Mrs. Bubbidge's retort. She was about to play her trump card.

"Safe!" cried Mrs. Bindle. "What do you mean by safe?"

"You'll find out," she retorted darkly, "when the chemist tells me what you put in the tea. I took a bit for him to look at."

Fear suddenly clutched at Mrs. Bindle's heart. Through her mind flashed accounts of murder trials she had read in which the criminal had gone to the chemist and asked for poison for other uses than that to which it was put.

Defeat was inevitable; but she was determined that her retreat should be orderly.

"Then I shall go to the magistrate," she said as she turned.

"Personally, I shall leave it to the police," countered Mrs. Bubbidge, and Mrs. Bindle knew that it was not only a defeat, but a rout.

III

"There is times, 'Earty, when a drop o' beer 'elps you to forget," remarked Bindle as he replaced the screw stopper in a pint beer-bottle and proceeded to wipe his lips.

Mr. Hearty shuddered, realising that there was no nepenthe capable of blotting from his mind the realisation that it was nearly midnight, and he was to spend the rest of the night camping out on Margate beach.

There was nothing *alfresco* in Mr. Hearty's nature. To him it was almost indelicate to think of sleeping without having gone through the preliminary of donning a night-shirt.

Even in this Mr. Hearty's sense of delicacy prevailed; contrary to the convention of masculine night-shirts, he always insisted on having the front flap as long as the back. Furthermore, he would not permit the slits at the side indelicately to expose to view more than some ten inches of hirsute leg.

"Oh, Joe!" wheezed Mrs. Hearty, "ain't it a lark?" and she screwed up the piece of newspaper from which she had made a very comfortable supper of fish and chips, threw it at him and missed. "Where's my bottle?" she cried.

"Ush, Martha!" protested Bindle. "You been weaned," whereat Mrs. Hearty lost all sense of physical rigidity, and fell back upon the sands, a helpless, undulating mass of laughter.

"Oh, don't, Joe!" she gasped presently. "Stop, or you'll be the death of me," and she proceeded to beat her unfortunate chest with a fist that reeked of fried fish.

Mrs. Bindle sat upright and hard-eyed. It was not the disaster that had descended upon her which was bitter to her soul; but the knowledge that Mrs. Bubbidge had won in a battle of tongues.

She, Elizabeth Bindle, had been forced to pack intimate garments in public and leave the enemy in possession of the field of battle, and the remembrance was a bitterness to her soul.

"I've always heard it's very cold just before dawn," murmured Mr. Hearty. Then, as no one made any comment, he plunged deeper into the mire of pessimism.

"I hope it won't rain," he added, looking up at the brightly-starred heavens.

"Look here, 'Earty," protested Bindle, "if you're a-goin' to be so cheerful as all that, you'd better go an' start a bloomin' camp of yer own. Now, Martha," he added, "what about bed?"

Owing to the foresight of Bindle, a double bathing-machine had been requisitioned to shelter the two women.

"All right, Joe, jest a minute. Let me get my breath," gasped Mrs. Hearty as she struggled to regain an upright position.

Somewhere in the distance came the shrill cry of "Chocklits, cigarettes!" It was almost midnight, and the commercial instincts of the Margate traders were not to be denied.

With much groaning, and with the aid of the rope attached to the side of the bathing-machine, reinforced by Bindle "boosting" from behind, Mrs. Hearty regained an upright position. Mrs. Bindle also rose, and they mounted the steps leading to the bathing-machine, which was divided down the middle by a partition.

After having stuck in the doorway, Mrs. Hearty's redundant figure was eventually forced into the section apportioned to her.

"I shan't sleep a wink," she announced, gazing down at the hard floor, moist with damp sand.

Mrs. Bindle closed her door without so much as a "good night!" and Mr. Hearty, prompted by a sense of delicacy, moved higher up the beach.

"Where you goin', 'Earty?" cried Bindle.

"Just over here, Joseph, it's—it's——" Mr. Hearty paused.

"Wot's the matter with where we are?" grumbled Bindle.

"It's softer here," said Mr. Hearty. A moment later he dropped, a disconsolate figure, upon the sand.

"You're—you're not going to undress, Joseph?" he asked suddenly as Bindle proceeded to remove his collar and tie.

From all about them came the murmur of voices, with every now and then a little yelp of laughter. Occasionally the flash of a match would stab through the curtain of the night, while the sea crooned a lazy lullaby.

"Don't you undress when you goes to bed, 'Earty?" Bindle demanded. "I always thought you was clean in yer 'abits."

"Yes; but—but not on the beach," protested Mr. Hearty.

"Well, any'ow I'm going to take orf my collar an' tie. 'Ullo, 'oo 'ave we 'ere?"

Mr. Hearty paused in the act of undoing his necktie.

"Going to be a rough night, I'm afeared, sir," said a voice, and a moment later a figure, clad in oilskins, appeared from the darkness.

"Do you think it'll rain?" enquired Mr. Hearty anxiously, gazing apprehensively at the man's oilskins.

"Rain!" said the man. "Lor' bless you, sir," and there was both conviction and pity in his tone, "I wouldn't turn a dog out on a night like wot we're going to 'ave. Never knowed the glass to fall like wot it 'as the last two hours. Shouldn't be surprised if the sea was to come clean up to where we're standing."

"Dear me," cried Mr. Hearty. "We—we should get wet."

"Not wetter than wot you'd get with the rain, sir," was the dolorous response. "There's 'undreds a-sleeping out on this beach to-night, and I pities 'em. I pities 'em from the bottom of my 'eart I do, sir. Why, sir," he added with inspiration, "at this very minute they're a-collectin' lifebelts along the front—in case."

"But—but what are we to do?" cried Mr. Hearty, hurriedly retying his cravat. "I—I'm afraid I shall catch cold if I

get wet."

Bindle grinned. He was content to leave his brother-in-law to the gloomy longshoreman.

"Ah!" said the voice, "there's many a grave wot'll be dug through this 'ere storm that's coming on. Why, if you'll believe me, gentlemen, I've just had my double bathing-machine brought up twenty yards higher than wot it's ever been in the 'istory of Margate. I says to myself, 'Willum,' I says, 'you was always one for being on the safe side,' I says. Well, good night, gentlemen, I'm just orf to let that bathing-machine for a quid."

Five minutes later Mr. Hearty, twenty shillings the poorer, and Bindle were climbing up the steep steps leading to the bathing-machine which, like John Brown's knapsack, was numbered 99. The longshoreman's oilskins and lugubrious forebodings, coupled with Mr. Hearty's natural timidity, had achieved the man's object.

The next morning Bindle was awakened by the sound of male voices in altercation. For a moment or two he strove to collect his thoughts. What had happened? Where was Mrs. Bindle? He stretched out first his right hand and then his left. Each encountered a partition of roughly-planed boards.

Suddenly light dawned upon him, hastened by the intolerable stiffness of his limbs.

"Blessed if I 'adn't forgotten we're 'avin' a 'oliday," he muttered. "Oh, my Gawd!" he groaned, "I aches all over. It's a 'oliday all right," he added whimsically, as he threw off the blanket which Willum had thoughtfully provided.

The sound of voices was still clearly discernible, although he could not make out what was the subject of the discussion. Clambering to his feet, he opened the door of the bathing-machine just in time to hear Mr. Hearty protesting plaintively: "But I can't, I'm in my—er—my underwear."

"I can't 'elp whose wear you're in, sir," came Willum's voice; "I got a gent waiting for this 'ere bathing-machine, and I wants to run her down."

"But somebody's stolen my clothes," wailed Mr. Hearty. "I can't come out."

"'Ullo, 'Earty, wot's the trouble?" cried Bindle, holding the door in such a way as to shield the greater part of his body from the gaze of the group of men and children awaiting developments.

"Somebody's stolen my clothes, Joseph," cried Mr. Hearty, a note of poignant anguish in his voice.

"Never was such a chap as you for losin' things, 'Earty. Wot jer want to take 'em orf for?"

"I—I thought they would get creased," said Mr. Hearty, "and—and there was a blanket."

"Ain't you got nothink on?" enquired Bindle solicitously. "Did you take 'em all orf?"

"N-no," stuttered Mr. Hearty, "I—I slept in m-my——"

"Look 'ere, sir," broke in Willum, "I can't wait 'ere all day. Either you comes out or I runs you down into the water."

"'Alf a mo', old sport," cried Bindle, as his head disappeared round the door, and he proceeded rapidly to don his missing garments.

During the few minutes he was absent from the scene the discussion between Mr. Hearty and Willum continued, with threats on the part of Willum and increasing plaintiveness from Mr. Hearty.

It was Bindle who eventually solved the problem by suggesting that Willum should obtain for Mr. Hearty some clothes, the loan of which would enable him to get to the railway-station cloakroom, where he would have an opportunity of making good the articles of his wardrobe that were lacking.

With a grumble in his throat, Willum shambled off.

Half an hour later, as with mincing steps Mrs. Bindle descended from her bathing-machine, she was startled by being accosted by a particularly ruffianly-looking man in voluminous grey tweed trousers, with a rusty patch in a conspicuous position, a short blue guernsey, and a large tweed cap with a peak of prodigious size, which almost obscured the wearer's eyes.

As she made to descend the steps the disreputable-looking creature extended a hand towards her.

"Go away!" she snapped.

"It—it's me, Elizabeth," plaintively cried the disguised Mr. Hearty.

In her excitement Mrs. Bindle missed her footing and landed with a devastating thump on the last step but one.

When, a few minutes later, Mrs. Hearty appeared she collapsed in the doorway, and for a further ten minutes bathing-machine No. 98 was out of commission. She laughed and heaved and choked in turn, from time to time ejaculating: "Oh, Alf!" or "Oh, Joe don't!"

At length Mr. Hearty turned from her with such dignity as he still possessed. The sight of the rusty patch sent Mrs. Hearty off into further paroxysms, and it was not until Mrs. Bindle had smitten her vigorously between the shoulders that she regained sufficient breath and self-control to leave the bathing-machine.

Never had Mr. Hearty suffered as he suffered that day on the way to the railway-station, there to retrieve from his belongings such articles of raiment as would enable him to return what he had borrowed from Willum. It had been decided that the whole party should return immediately to Fulham.

Just as the train was due to start Willum was seen loping along the platform with a black bundle under his arm.

"Found 'em under the last bathing-machine in the row," he explained as he thrust the garments in at the carriage window. "Somebody must 'ave stolen 'em."

Mercifully the train started before Mr. Hearty discovered the threepenny-piece for which he was searching.

"It's that Bindle," murmured Mrs. Bindle to herself, "or my name's not what it is," and she registered another mark against him whose duty it was to share all her sorrows and some of her joys.

CHAPTER X

MRS. BINDLE KEEPS CHICKENS

I

"Oh my Gawd, wot a stink!"

"What's the matter now?" cried Mrs. Bindle, as Bindle started back in his chair and regarded a boiled egg, the top of which he had just removed.

"I'm gassed!" cried Bindle, waving his hand back and forth in front of his face. "You ought to 'ave put that egg in the oven, Mrs. B., an' then it would be a chicken in the mornin'."

"That's right, go on. I suppose you expect me to be inside the egg."

"If you was, Mrs. B., you'd soon peck yer way through."

"I gave threepence ha'penny for that egg," said Mrs. Bindle inconsequently.

"You don't say so." Bindle regarded the egg dubiously. "Well, the stink's worth the money."

"I wish you wouldn't use such words before me."

"Wot words?"

"Why, the common words you use."

"Wot jer mean, stink?"

"Why can't you say smell?"

"Because it ain't a smell, Lizzie. It's a bloomin' old stink. There's a rare difference between a smell and a stink. A smell's the sort o' thing wot you don't notice much although you wish it wouldn't; but it's a stink when it gets you on the point of the jaw an' knocks you clean out."

Mrs. Bindle lifted her chin and drew in her lips.

"You don't 'appen to 'ave any wot ain't quite so far gone?" enquired Bindle tentatively.

"Perhaps you think I'm made of money and that I buy threepenny ha'penny eggs by the gross."

Bindle said nothing, devoting himself to his bread and margarine, whilst Mrs. Bindle, with the air of one grievously martyred, rose, picked up the egg-cup containing the egg under discussion, and carried it into the scullery, taking care, however, to keep it a reasonable distance from her.

"If I was you," remarked Bindle, some minutes later, as he rose from the table, "I should take that there egg back to the man 'oo sold it to you an' rub 'is nose in it, then p'r'aps 'e wouldn't do it again."

"Don't be disgusting!" was the retort, although with the sentiment behind the words Mrs. Bindle was in full accord. She had every intention of conveying to the grocer, who had sold her the egg as "guaranteed new laid," her opinion of his conduct as a tradesman and a Christian.

That egg which had misfired (miscarried) was to be fraught with dramatic consequences to the Bindles. For one thing it inspired Mrs. Bindle with the idea of keeping fowls, and thus saving herself from being imposed upon at the rate of threepence ha'penny each for eggs which were not fit even for cooking.

In these uncertain times, fowls would be a great asset, she argued. Knowing nothing of poultry, she was under the impression that they could be kept alive and in good laying condition on scraps from the table.

If Bindle fell upon another period of unemployment, a regular supply of eggs would make all the difference.

In her inexperience, she took it as a matter of course that each hen meant seven eggs a week. If she kept three hens, she told herself, there would be twenty-one eggs a week. They would supply the breakfast-table regularly and enable her to make a custard every other day.

It did not strike her that if hens were not properly fed they could not be expected to produce a constant supply of eggs.

Mrs. Bindle gave the matter long and careful thought. When she had no further use for the fowls, they could be either sold or killed. Argue the matter as she might, she could see nothing but advantage from the starting of a fowl-run.

In the daytime the birds could wander about the garden, and contribute to their own sustenance. At night there was the coal-cellar, in which Bindle could fix up an old broom-handle she possessed as a perch.

When Bindle raised the objections of common sense, she ignored them and snubbed him.

"Wot the 'ell they're a-goin' to pick up in our garden except dirt does me," he muttered, "an' as for sleepin' in the coal-cellar, you'll 'ave the bloomin' eggs piebald."

She had met these objections with the invariable remark that Bindle always opposed her in everything she planned.

For three consecutive weeks she took *Poultry and How to Make it Pay*, carefully studying the different advertisement columns, until at length she became inspired with something of the enthusiasm of the editorials.

It was, however, the advertisement columns which most intrigued her interest. They were full of enthusiasts who apparently were desirous of disembarassing themselves of their feathered retainers. These birds had clearly made their owners fortunes, as nothing else could have prompted them to part with treasures of which they wrote so glowingly at the cost of a shilling a line.

Within half-an-hour of the newsboy delivering the third issue of *Poultry and How to Make it Pay*, Mrs. Bindle had decided to acquire fowls which were to supply the table with eggs that would be above reproach.

II

"Crate of fowls, missis."

Mrs. Bindle's heart fluttered as she gazed at the speckled mass with here and there a blob of red, to be seen through the bars of the crate the railway man had deposited upon her doorstep. "Three-and-fourpence to pay," he continued, producing from behind the upper part of his apron a buff-coloured document. "Sign at No. 19 please."

"They're carriage paid," said Mrs. Bindle.

"No they ain't, missis."

"I tell you they are. It said so in the advertisement."

"Can't 'elp that, missis. 'Ere it is on my sheet, three-and-fourpence to pay."

"Well, when you get back, tell them that they're carriage paid."

"All right, missis," said the man, as he turned on a deliberate heel. "Come along you bloomin' old egg-trees," he said, as he picked up the crate.

"Here, leave the fowls," cried Mrs. Bindle.

"I can't without the money, missis."

"But I tell you they're carriage paid, the advertisement says so."

"If I was to leave them fowls without the money, I'd 'ave to pay it out of my own pocket, and I've got a wife and family to look after, missis."

The reasoning seemed to strike Mrs. Bindle. For a moment she stood irresolute, then, turning on a quick heel, she passed along the passage into the kitchen, from which she reappeared in a few moments carrying the necessary money to liquidate the man's claim and free her fowls.

Five minutes later she was engaged upon an industrious search of the advertisement columns of *Poultry and How to Make it Pay*. Eventually she found the advertisement, and discovered that the price of the fowls was given as "Carriage forward."

"There," she remarked, as she looked across at the crate. "I knew it was carriage paid."

That evening, when Bindle returned from work, he found Mrs. Bindle engaged in writing a lengthy and acid letter to the railway company on the subject of ethics in money matters. It took him fully a quarter-of-an-hour to explain that, as a term, "carriage forward" was entirely different from "carriage paid," and that both the previous owner of the fowls, and the railway company, were within their rights, the one in sending the birds without the carriage, the other for mulcting Mrs. Bindle with the amount.

When at length Mrs. Bindle became convinced that the labour she had spent upon the unaccustomed occupation of writing a letter had been wasted, she looked about her for a scapegoat, and found it in Bindle.

"Well, aren't you going to unpack them?" she demanded, as he crossed the kitchen to the sink for his evening ablutions.

"I'm jest a-goin' to 'ave a bit of a rinse," he explained.

"And I suppose the poor birds can die while you're doing it," she snapped.

"When did they come?" he enquired casually.

"About three o'clock," she replied, off her guard.

"If they've waited four hours, Lizzie, let 'em wait another four minutes. It won't bust 'em, and perhaps it'll improve the quality of their eggs."

"A lot you care for the sufferings of poor dumb animals."

"They ain't dumb, leastwise, them wasn't wot was at the summer camp," he flashed, "and they ain't animals. Male birds, some of 'em, by the looks of it. My Gawd, Lizzie," he cried, gazing down at the crate. "Wot you been an' done?"

"What's the matter now?" she demanded.

"Bless me if there ain't three cocks an' three 'ens."

"Well, I ordered three pairs."

Bindle straightened himself and gave vent to a prolonged whistle.

"An' didn't the cove wot you bought 'em orf 'ave anythink to say?"

"He wanted me to have five hens and one, one male bird."

"An' wot did you say?" said Bindle, looking at her curiously.

"I told him I wanted three pairs. I suppose," she added a moment later, "he had more hens than roosters."

"Well, I 'ave 'eard that it's been a better year for hens than roosters," said Bindle dryly. "P'r'aps it's the war."

Mrs. Bindle's knowledge of the ways of fowls was limited; but it embraced one important piece of information—that without "roosters," hens would not lay. When Bindle had striven to set her right, he had been silenced with the inevitable, "Don't be disgusting."

She had reasoned that if hens were stimulated to lay by the presence of the "male bird," then a cavalier each would

surely result in an increased output.

His mind was working rapidly as to how to explain to Mrs. Bindle tactfully, but at the same time illuminatingly, that the ways of fowls were not the ways of men, and that the polygamous instincts of the one were not to be constrained by the ethical code of the other.

He made several attempts, all of which ended in failure, largely due to Mrs. B.'s extreme sense of delicacy and the success of his own camouflage. Finally he gave it up as a bad job. Mrs. Bindle's views on sex matters were well known to him. They had been responsible, some years ago, for the sudden termination of his activities in the matter of keeping rabbits.

"Well, are you going to leave them there all night?" demanded Mrs. Bindle presently.

Without a word, Bindle picked up the chicken-crate and carried it into the garden, where with much silent protest he had for days laboured on the construction of a fowl-house.

"My Gawd!" he murmured, as he walked towards the door of the chicken-house. "There'll be a bit o' first-class scrappin' when they begin to settle down a bit, an' I don't seem to be able to tell Mrs. B. wot's wot. P'r'aps I'd better ask 'Earty to 'ave a try," he muttered a moment later with a grin. The thought of Mr. Hearty endeavouring to explain to Mrs. Bindle a matter of such intense delicacy amused Bindle, with the result that by the time he returned to the house with the news that the fowls "'Ad all been tucked up an' given 'ot water bottles," he was almost jovial.

That night at supper the conversation dealt exclusively with fowls and eggs in the relation of cause and effect. Bindle made several further efforts to enlighten Mrs. Bindle upon certain rather important matters connected with the marital relationship of what she insisted on calling "male birds"; but without success.

The tact with which he approached the subject, resulted in Mrs. Bindle being entirely mystified, except on one occasion when she told him not to be disgusting.

"Well, well," he murmured, as he locked up that night. "It ain't my job to stop at 'ome an' keep them there cocks from fightin'. The neighbours'll jest split their sides; but I done my best."

Later, as he climbed the stairs, he added, "I'm sorry for Mrs. B. though, she's goin' to get a nasty jar."

From the hour that the fowls arrived, Mrs. Bindle found herself with a new interest and a new responsibility. She was for ever darting out into the garden, attracted by some fowlish outcry.

To her, all vocal effort on the part of fowls betokened the laying of eggs and, during the early days, she spent much time in going through the back-garden with a toothcomb, searching for the eggs she felt her birds were striving to tell her they had just laid.

She had read of the peculiar habits of white leghorns in hiding their eggs, or at least in manifesting their own ideas as to where they should be laid.

From their bedroom windows, Mrs. Sawney and Mrs. Grimps would help her in the search, suggesting all sorts of impossible places where the birds may have secreted Mrs. Bindle's treasures.

It soon became evident, however, to Mrs. Bindle that all was not well with her poultry.

The trouble had begun on the morning following their arrival. Mrs. Bindle had awakened early, and her first thought was of her new venture. She had promptly sent Bindle down to "let the poor birds out."

Grumbling in his throat, Bindle had drawn on his trousers, and donned a pair of ancient carpet-slippers.

Unlocking the door of the coal-cellar, his glum mood vanished as by magic.

"Oh! my Gawd!" he cried, as a dissipated-looking cock darted past him.

Its comb was bleeding, and the purity of its plumage had been grievously sullied by contact with the coal-dust.

"I knew they'd get scrappin'," murmured Bindle, as another white shape darted past him and made for the other bird. "There's goin' to be a bloomin' ole row about these 'ere mormons."

That morning there was no further sleep for either Bindle or Mrs. Bindle. Pandemonium had broken out in the garden.

At first the neighbours had been inclined to show a marked antagonism towards Mrs. Bindle's fowls; but this very soon developed into interest. The women were never tired of watching Mrs. Bindle dart out from her scullery door and proceed to police her garden with the aid of mop or broom.

The men lost many a half-hour at dinner-time in order to watch either the fights that were raging between the belligerent cocks, or the fights that they hoped would shortly be staged.

Sometimes they brought their friends, and there were occasions when Mrs. Bindle's back-garden had all the appearance of a cock-pit. The natural concomitant of sport soon manifested itself.

On the second day, Mr. Grimps announced to Mr. Sawney across Mrs. Bindle's garden that he was prepared to lay a bet on ole Ruddysnout. Ruddysnout was the most hostile of the three cocks and, in consequence his head was a gory travesty of what Nature had intended it to be.

From that moment the birds were always the centre of speculation. When they fought, bets were made as to the probable victor. During the periods of peace, bets were made as to which would start the next "scrap."

At first Mrs. Bindle had continued her ministrations in spite of the spectators; but the remarks were so direct, and the tendency of the humour so ribald, that she had adopted various means of endeavouring to persuade her fowls to keep the peace.

She would go up to her bedroom window and throw things at them, things that would not seriously maim the birds if by chance she were to hit one. Her aim, however, had proved so indifferent that it added to the amusement of the "gallery," and increased the Rabelaisian quality of the humour.

III

"Mrs. Sawney, Mrs. Sawney. Oh, do come and look!"

Mrs. Crimps, who lived at No. 5 Fenton Street, clutched the low fence with both hands and gazed at the Bindle's back garden, where two cocks were engaged in what appeared to be a battle to the death.

They ran at each other, they trampled upon each other, they clawed each other. The three hens stood in a cluster awaiting the result, whilst the third cock seemed a little uncertain as to what part he was expected to play.

"They'll kill each other," cried Mrs. Sawney, appearing at her back door and gazing down at the whirling centre of hate, from which a dust of feathers rose testifying to the vigour of the struggle.

"Wot she want to buy three cocks for, silly fool," said Mrs. Grimps contemptuously. "It's jest askin' for trouble."

"She ought to 'ave known better, 'er been married nearly twenty years," was Mrs. Sawney's comment.

"She's too busy prayin' to think about things like that," said Mrs. Grimps. "Silly fool!" she added a moment later.

Mrs. Grimps possessed one term of opprobrium, "Silly fool," which she used indiscriminately upon her neighbours, prime ministers, and the dustman if he failed to remove the week's accumulation of household refuse.

At that moment Mrs. Bindle appeared at the back door, attracted by the squawking uproar from the newly arrived "egg-machines," as Bindle called the fowls. One swift glance was sufficient to acquaint her with the state of affairs.

Without a moment's hesitation she doubled back into the scullery, appearing almost immediately armed with a mop, with which she charged the belligerent roosters, just as they met in a whirling mass of flying feathers.

The mop got one bird full on the stern, sending him hurtling forward to ram his astonished opponent.

A moment later six fowlish voices were raised in a unison of protest; loudest amongst them was that of the third cock, who now saw his position perfectly clearly defined.

"I'll teach you to fight in my garden," cried Mrs. Bindle, as she made a dive at one of the hens, sending it squawking madly towards the scullery door.

Suddenly Mrs. Bindle seemed to become conscious of the presence of her neighbours. For the most part she treated them with contempt; but to-day in a vague way she was conscious of being humiliated by the unwarrantable action of two members of the colony from which she had such expectations in the shape of eggs.

"Well?" she demanded, planting herself opposite that portion of the fence over which Mrs. Sawney's sour face was to be seen.

"Don't seem to be gettin' on very well, do they?" remarked Mrs. Sawney. "'Ad any eggs? Me and Mrs. Crimps 'eard the noise and cam out to see what it was all about."

"Well, now you've seen," snapped Mrs. Bindle, and, with a hasty glance at her now thoroughly cowed poultry-run, she turned on her heel and marched indignantly towards the scullery door, which, a moment later, she banged to with all her force.

"Wot's stung 'er, I wonder," was Mrs. Grimps's comment, as she withdrew her eyes from the scullery door and glanced across at her neighbour. "Silly fool!" she added.

The fowls, however, disappeared as suddenly as they had come, and thereafter Bindle realised that it was neither safe nor politic to refer to the subject. It had taken a plate of rice, hurled at his head from the other side of the kitchen, to bring him to this philosophical frame of mind.

CHAPTER XI

MRS. BINDLE'S REVENGE

I

"Don't you talk to me!"

"I was talkin' to Mrs. Grimps. I've got somethink better to do than talk to a thing like you."

"Then it's a pity you don't do it," was the rejoinder, and Mrs. Bindle turned from her frowsy and dishevelled neighbour, Mrs. Sawney, and walked to the end of the garden, where she bent over the small vegetable-bed which had been the cause of all the trouble.

Her face was white, her mouth set, and her eyes two angry points of light. For days past her normal state of armed neutrality towards her neighbours had been steadily gravitating towards war.

Mrs. Sawney and Mrs. Grimps resented Mrs. Bindle. In her housewifely qualities and the neatness of her appearance, they saw a direct reproach levelled at their own happy-go-lucky methods and personal untidiness.

For the most part, Mrs. Bindle adhered to her precept of "keeping herself to herself," as she put it. In consequence, her more aggressively minded neighbours were able to score a tactical triumph.

Their method was to discuss Mrs. Bindle across her own garden and in her own presence. For the most part, Mrs. Bindle preserved a dignified and scornful silence.

That morning, however, her restraint had been undermined by the presence of a dead cat upon her beloved vegetable-bed. The appearance of Mrs. Sawney, followed a moment later by that of Mrs. Grimps, had been the signal for Mrs. Bindle's offensive, and when it came to a clash of tongues, both her neighbours recognised that in Mrs. Bindle they had met their match.

Neither had forgotten the time when Mrs. Bindle had deliberately lighted a fire in her back-garden and the smuts had ruined the week's wash. They had long cherished thoughts of revenge; but it was not until Mrs. Bindle started her miniature vegetable-garden that they saw their opportunity.

Mrs. Bindle's conception of life was to look about her and see how she could add to her own work. This in itself was a direct challenge to her neighbours, who held diametrically opposite views upon the subject of stewardship.

To Bindle his wife's energy was a never-failing source of apprehension; for it invariably involved him in some unsought occupation. The vegetable-bed had been a particularly tiresome business.

"Nearly broke my bloomin' back over it," he confided to Ginger one Saturday night at The Yellow Ostrich; "an' Fulham beatin' Notts Forest one nought," he added as an afterthought.

On that Saturday afternoon he had dug and sorted bricks and stones from such mould as was available, always under the compelling and censorious eye of Mrs. Bindle.

At four o'clock Mrs. Bindle had given him tea, in spite of his protest that "this 'ere's a bloomin' beer job."

On the Monday Mrs. Bindle had purchased packets of seeds from Mr. Hearty, and some diminutive lettuces, which she planted with affectionate care.

The next morning the garden presented the appearance of a piece of waste land in a slum. Tins, stones, pieces of paper, an old hat, two boots and a number of other less recognisable objects lay on and in the vicinity of the vegetable-bed. Three lettuces had been nipped off in their wilted babyhood, and Mrs. Bindle's heart swelled with anger.

With tightened lips she had cleared up the debris and put it in the dustbin.

The next day the same thing occurred, and the next, after which the disordered state of Mrs. Bindle's garden became less marked with the passage of each day—her neighbours were running out of ammunition.

From that point on, the young Sawneys and the young Grimpses were instructed to collect all the voracious garden pests they could lay hands on, and soon Mrs. Bindle's vegetable-bed became the happy hunting-ground of myriad snails, slugs and worms.

Still she preserved a scornful silence. She was biding her time. It was not until she found the dead body of a large sandy cat, an offence alike to sight and smell, that Mrs. Bindle gave tongue; then she turned upon her neighbours and rent them. She hinted at their past, dwelt upon their present, and touched with some imagination upon their future. She accused them of neglecting their homes and imperilling their souls. She threatened them with the magistrate in this world and everlasting torment in the next.

As Mrs. Grimps told her husband that evening at tea, "you couldn't get a word in edgewise."

When from sheer lack of breath Mrs. Bindle had paused, Mrs. Sawney had weakly striven to plant a dart, which Mrs. Bindle had countered with, "Don't you talk to me!" and Mrs. Sawney had responded with the assurance that she "had somethink better to do."

Suddenly Mrs. Bindle turned on her heel and, looking from one to the other of her antagonists, she cried shrilly:

"If you throw anything more into my garden, I'll fetch a policeman. I've got all the evidence I want," she added darkly.

"Oh! you 'ave, 'ave you?" cried Mrs. Sawney. She paused a moment, then, with inspiration, added: "Then make buns of it."

Whenever Mrs. Sawney was at a loss in the matter of dialectics, she invariably told her opponent to make buns of something or other.

That day Mrs. Bindle re-entered her house with the knowledge that she had spiked her enemies' guns.

Mrs. Sawney and Mrs. Grimps were each conscious that they had not covered themselves with glory in the encounter.

"Come over an' 'ave a cup o' tea, Mrs. Grimps, at 'alf-past five," said Mrs. Sawney, as she prepared to resume her neglected occupations.

"Thank you, Mrs. Sawney," had been the reply. "I should like to," and Mrs. Grimps turned from the fence and went into her house, with the feeling that dramatic events were pending.

As she had once remarked to her husband: "Mrs. Sawney ain't the one to take it laying down."

II

Since starting her vegetable-bed, Mrs. Bindle's first act each morning was to look out of the scullery window to see what the night, like Santa Claus, had brought her.

On the morning after the episode of the dead cat, she experienced a grim sense of satisfaction as she gazed towards her vegetable-bed. Everything was as she had left it the afternoon before. After dark she had herself, with the aid of a shovel, thrown the dead cat into Mrs. Sawney's garden as near to the back door as possible.

"That'll show her," she muttered, as Bindle entered the kitchen.

"Wots up now, Lizzie?" he cried cheerily. "You been scrappin' again with Mrs. Sawney?"

Mrs. Bindle sniffed scornfully as she proceeded to prepare the breakfast. In her own mind she was wondering if the offensive qualities of the sandy cat were sufficiently powerful to make themselves manifest in Mrs. Sawney's kitchen.

"Of course I might have expected that you'd side with that woman," she said presently.

"Me!" cried Bindle, as he tucked up his shirt-sleeves preparatory to his morning rinse at the sink. "I ain't a-sidin' with nobody, Lizzie."

"Oh yes, you are!" she retorted. "You encourage her!"

Bindle gazed across at her, a half-framed protest on his lips. Then, as if thinking better of it, he turned and plunged

his face into the tin bowl he had just filled with water.

"If you were a man you wouldn't let them do it," continued Mrs. Bindle, when he had got through the preliminary splutters and hissing which always attended such operations.

"Do wot?" he enquired, drying the soap from out of his eyes. He was never able to wash without the soap getting into his eyes.

"Throw dead cats into my garden," was the angry retort. "But I'll show them!" she added, and in his heart Bindle realised that, in all probability, she would.

Several times that morning Mrs. Bindle made entirely unnecessary visits to her vegetable-bed; but the enemy did not appear. She longed once more for the shock of battle; for during the night she had thought of many things she might have said. Although Mrs. Bindle was a quick thinker in debate, she was an even quicker thinker when it was all over.

Mrs. Sawney and Mrs. Grimps, however, still remained behind their entrenchments, and the only solace their neighbour had was the thought that they were "afraid to show their ugly faces," as she expressed it on several occasions in a tone loud enough to be heard three gardens away.

On the second morning after the altercation, Mrs. Bindle, following her recent practice, glanced out of the scullery window. She was surprised to see, lying in the middle of the garden, a fair-sized lump of coal. Instinctively she drew in her lips. The enemy was "at it again."

For nearly a minute she stood gazing at the lump of coal, a slight frown contracting her eyebrows. Why should anyone throw away good coal? What possible damage could a piece of coal do in the middle of the garden?

Had it been lying on the vegetable-bed, she would have regarded it as a deliberate attempt to do damage to her unhappy lettuces; but to throw away a good-sized lump of coal, which cost money!

Mrs. Bindle was puzzled.

Taking up a piece of paper, she marched down the garden, picked up the coal and brought it into the scullery, where she placed it underneath the copper. It could wait. For the present she had Bindle's breakfast to think about.

That morning Bindle was conscious that Mrs. Bindle had something on her mind. She did not bang a single utensil upon either stove or table, and she was unusually silent.

As she stooped to pick up the lump of coal, she had caught a glimpse of Mrs. Sawney, her head in curl-papers, peeping through the slit of the blind.

Mrs. Bindle was suspicious.

Three times that morning she warned Bindle that he would be late, and twice she drew his attention to the clock in proof of her words.

"Somethink's up!" was his unuttered thought, as he took his cap from its peg and, with an "It's 'ard to 'ave to leave you, Lizzie," he made a characteristic "get-away," as he called it.

With swift methodical movements, Mrs. Bindle washed up the breakfast things and tidied the kitchen. This accomplished, she placed a piece of newspaper on the table. Going into the scullery, she picked up the lump of coal and returned with it to the kitchen, where she placed it upon the table.

It was rather an alluring piece of coal, very bright and giving promise of good burning qualities. It measured about six by four inches, just the size to go conveniently into a kitchen stove without breaking.

With the intentness of a Sherlock Holmes, Mrs. Bindle subjected it to an elaborate examination, a thoughtful furrow

between her eyes.

One particular spot seemed to absorb her attention. Picking up the poker, she rubbed it gently upon the side of the piece of coal. Replacing the poker, she rose and went into the scullery, returning a moment later with an old table-knife.

With this she proceeded to scrape the spot which had absorbed her attention, exposing a greyish circle of about the diameter of a half-penny. At the sight of it her lips set grimly, whilst through her mind there flashed the text of the sermon Mr. MacFie had preached a few Sundays previously—"His enemies shall lick the dust."

With great deliberation she went out to the coal-cellar, returning a few minutes later with some coal-dust in a shovel. This she sifted through a thin-mesh tea-strainer, after which she stood for nearly a minute gazing down at the little black heap, obviously in thought. Suddenly she made a dive for the dresser, picked up an egg-cup and put into it a little brown sugar. Upon this she poured a few drops of boiling water, and stirred it with a spoon.

With a piece of paper she spread the sticky substance over the grey circle on the coal, and on it sprinkled the fine coal-dust. This done she replaced the lump under the copper and, grim-lipped and steely-eyed, she went about the day's duties.

There was little connected with the amenities of neighbours with which Mrs. Bindle was unacquainted. She had in her time lived in more than one tenement-house, where the locks used were those manufactured by the gross, and where the coal-cellar key was an Open Sesame as much to your own store as that of your neighbour.

To add a padlock was to throw down the gauntlet and render oneself an Ishmael. In consequence, other protective methods had to be adopted.

If a resident became suspicious that her coal was warming the limbs and cooking the food of others than members of her own family, she would take counsel with her lord, and frequently a trap was set.

This invariably took the form of boring a hole in a lump of coal, inserting a charge of gunpowder, then closing the aperture with cement, or plaster of Paris, smearing the cement with ink and then sprinkling it with coal-dust. This lump would be laid in a conspicuous position, and carefully avoided when the domestic coal-scuttle was filled.

When the lump disappeared, as it frequently did, the real excitement began. In due course workmen would appear, either with a new stove or with the materials to rebuild the old one, and soon after the occupant of that particular tenement would seek a new abode.

III

"I suppose 'Earty don't 'appen to 'ave given you a tip for Ascot?" enquired Bindle, looking up a few evenings later from an endeavour to spot a likely winner of the Hunt Cup.

With a jerk Mrs. Bindle turned inside out the sock she was mending; but she made no reply. For the last few days she had been almost cheerful, and her criticisms of Bindle had diminished nearly to the vanishing point.

"She's got somethink on 'er mind, Martha," Bindle had confided to his sister-in-law. "When Lizzie's like that, it means that somebody's goin' to get it in the neck," at which Mrs. Hearty had heaved and undulated and gasped imploringly, "Oh, Joe, don't!"

Two nights later Bindle awakened in the middle of the night with the consciousness that something unusual was taking place. It was a rare thing for his rest ever to be broken, except by Mrs. Bindle's elbow when he snored.

"Was I snorin', Lizzie?" he muttered sleepily; but there was no answer. As a rule on such occasions, Mrs. Bindle never failed to convey to him the inconvenience arising from being tied to one who "slept like a pig."

The unaccustomed silence caused him to stretch a tentative foot in the direction of his mate. To his surprise he found no resistance. A moment later he was sitting up in bed, gazing about him and trying to pierce the darkness of the room.

At that moment a sound reached his ears suggestive of the drawing of a reluctant bolt. The thought of burglars immediately flashed through his mind. Springing out of bed, he opened the door an inch or two and listened. Somebody was undoubtedly moving about below.

He felt about for his trousers. Bindle was not lacking in courage; but the idea of encountering a burglar in a flapping night-shirt was contrary to his sense of decorum.

It was one of Mrs. Bindle's complaints that, whereas she folded her clothes neatly, Bindle threw his wherever he happened to be at the moment of discarding them.

Having run his foot up against one of the castors of the bedstead, and knocked his head against the chest of drawers, in a vain search for the garment necessary to a hero about to capture a burglar, Bindle paused.

Suddenly he was struck with an idea. From the spare bedroom window, he could, in all probability, obtain a view of the back-garden.

He was greatly puzzled at the absence of Mrs. Bindle. When suspecting burglars, it was her invariable rule to prod him with her elbow and order him to go down and see. What had occurred to cause her to change her method of procedure?

Stealthily passing out of the bedroom, he crossed into the other room and passed over to the window.

"Oly ointment!" he muttered in astonishment, as he gazed out. There, just below him, was a dim figure carrying some long, strange-looking object.

As his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he recognised the object as a pair of steps, and the figure, in shape and poise, was obviously that of Mrs. Bindle.

Scarcely daring to breathe, Bindle watched her proceed half-way down the garden, where, apparently, she became occupied in placing the steps over the fence into Mrs. Grimps's garden. This done, she mounted something, apparently a chair, and proceeded to get up on to the fence. She then climbed down the steps into the next garden, where she disappeared into the shadows.

A minute later he observed her mounting the steps and climbing back into his own garden, after which the steps were lifted back and carried in the direction of the scullery door.

Without waiting for more, Bindle returned to bed, greatly puzzled at what he had seen. Five minutes passed, then the door creaked and Mrs. Bindle entered stealthily. A moment later she proceeded to creep into bed. It was obviously her wish that Bindle should not discover that she had even temporarily forsaken the marital couch. To undeceive her would precipitate a domestic crisis.

Several times he heard her teeth chatter; for, although July, the night was cold. Once he almost cried out when an icy foot touched the calf of his leg.

Convinced that "somebody was goin' to get somethink," Bindle dropped off to sleep again, only to dream that Mrs. Bindle wanted him to mount a fire-escape reared against the dome of St. Paul's in his night-shirt, to retrieve his trousers, which somehow or other had become attached to the cross.

IV

All the morning Mrs. Bindle had been moving about on tip-toe. She had put on a pair of old list slippers, and she

was careful to avoid all work of a noisy character.

She was almost blithe in her manner, and that in spite of the knowledge that she had a cold "coming on," due to the previous night's adventure.

She surprised the baker, who approached whistling "Here You Are Then," by rushing to the door and telling him to stop it. The clattering of the milkman's cans caused her to frown perceptibly. Her whole demeanour was that of one expecting the dramatic.

The morning dragged on slowly, and Bindle returned to dinner.

Several times during the meal she admonished him to silence with a sibilant "Ssssssssh!" and an upraised hand. At length, impressed by her listening attitude, he enquired if she were expecting anyone, whereat she told him to mind his own business.

Just as Mrs. Bindle was handing to Bindle a plate containing two large slices of treacle-pudding, there was a sudden dull sound from next door, which caused the plate almost to slip from her grasp. A moment later there followed a series of shrill screams.

Without a word Mrs. Bindle rose from the table and sprinted for the scullery door, where she paused for a moment to listen.

"Ere, don't block up the bloomin' doorway," cried Bindle, who had followed and was anxious not to miss anything. She stood aside to allow him to pass her.

"It's that woman that's done it!" came the shrill voice of Mrs. Grimps. "I'll show her! I'll tear her eyes out!"

"Ullo!" cried Bindle over the fence. "Anythink wrong, Mrs. Grimps?"

"Wrong!" cried Mrs. Grimps, appearing at the scullery door, her face purple with passion. "Wrong! That she-devil's put gunpowder in my coal. Peas, potatoes and boiled scrag all blown away, and the stove smashed. I'll show the cat. Wait 'till I get my nails at her ugly face!"

From behind the scullery door Mrs. Bindle listened. The vindictiveness of Mrs. Grimps's voice caused her to clutch more tightly the door-post.

"She said she'd do it to 'er!" screamed Mrs. Grimps enigmatically, "an' now she's done it to *me*; but I'll show her! Just because I smacked her brat for breaking Ethel Mathilda's doll!" and Mrs. Grimps disappeared once more into the house.

For two or three minutes Bindle continued to gaze over the dividing-fence; but as it seemed unlikely that any further dramatic happenings were pending, he returned to the house, lured by the thought of the treacle-pudding he had left untasted.

Mrs. Bindle had already returned to the kitchen. Bindle was just in the act of reseating himself at the table when a wild outcry, apparently from the front garden, caused him once more to straighten himself.

Mrs. Bindle darted into the passage and to the front door, Bindle following. He was just in time to see Mrs. Crimps, her sleeves tucked up and a tweed cap pinned to her hair, come out backwards from Mrs. Sawney's house, dragging at something with all her might. A moment later he realised that the something was Mrs. Sawney's back-hair.

Both women were screaming; but from the medley of sound Bindle could gather nothing.

"I'll teach you to blow my stove out and ruin my dinner! Peas, potatoes and scrag! You dirty dog! I'll teach you!" and she tugged viciously at her neighbour's back-hair.

"Let me go!" screeched Mrs. Sawney, waving her hands and appearing as impotent as a beetle on its back. "You're hurtin'!"

"Hurtin'! I'll hurt you! Just because I slapped that little cat Harriet for breaking Ethel Mathilda's doll. I'll hurt you!"

She gave another tug at her enemy's back-hair.

"You told me it was for 'er stove," she continued, "that cat next door, or I wouldn't 'ave got Grimps to bore a 'ole in the coal. I'll show you!"

Mrs. Sawney was beginning to recover from the unexpectedness of the attack. Grasped by her back-hair, she was helpless as far as her hands were concerned; but she quickly realised that the enemy was open to an attack in the form of a kick. She let fly with her right leg, catching her tormenter upon the knee-cap.

With a howl of pain Mrs. Grimps relinquished her neighbour's back-hair. A moment later she was lying on the garden path with Mrs. Sawney on top.

"I'm a dirty dog, am I?" cried the thin, wiry Mrs. Sawney, her knees planted firmly upon Mrs. Grimps's generous person. "I'm a dirty dog, am I?" and, raising her head by the hair with both hands, she bumped it hard upon the ground.

"I'm a dirty dog, am I?" demanded Mrs. Sawney for the third time. "You'll apologise for that before you move from here!"

Mrs. Sawney's knees were sharp, and they penetrated into Mrs. Grimps at each movement, rendering speech impossible.

The neighbours flocked out from their houses. It was not often that drama presented itself so early in the day.

After the tenth demand for an apology, accompanied by a tenth bump of her enemy's head upon the garden path, Mrs. Sawney noticed a limpness in the foe which caused her to scramble to her feet; but Mrs. Grimps made no effort to rise. She had fainted.

It was Mrs. Bindle who brought her round and assisted her into her own house. It was Mrs. Bindle who, next day, was the principal witness at the police-court, where she was complimented by the magistrate upon the impartial way in which she gave her evidence; and it was Mrs. Bindle who, that afternoon, made herself a specially strong cup of tea. Her enemies had been, if not sufficiently, at least considerably, punished, both physically and financially; for the magistrate had imposed a fine of twenty shillings and costs upon each, in addition to binding them over for a period of three months.

"Funny thing for a daughter of the Lord to do," muttered Bindle on the day of the assault, as he returned to work, "tryin' to blow the 'ole bloomin' place to blazes." But Bindle knew only half the story.

CHAPTER XII

THE PROMOTION OF COMPANY SERGEANT-MAJOR HIGGS

I

"'E's at me the ole ruddy day, damn 'im!" All the vindictiveness of which he was capable Ginger precipitated into his remark.

"Old up, Ging," admonished Bindle, cheerfully. "Never see such a cove as you for language."

"If you stands 'im a drink, or a cigar, 'e'll give you leave," growled Ginger vindictively; "if you don't 'e'll give you 'ell an' C.B., an' you not allowed to answer back or break 'is blinkin' jaw. I don't 'old wiv the army," he concluded with conviction, as he buried his freckled face in his tankard.

"Cheer up, ole sport," said Bindle. "Why don't you 'old with the army? It ain't done you no 'arm; made a man of you it 'as, Ging." Bindle winked gravely at Huggles, as they stood together in the public bar of The Yellow Ostrich.

Huggles and Ginger were two of Bindle's mates in the furniture-removing profession. Ginger had enlisted, just why no one knew, as he never sought to disguise his anti-militarist tendencies.

By a slow process of piecing together Ginger's detached utterances, Bindle and Huggles learned of the tragedy his life had become under the iron rule of Company Sergeant-Major Higgs. Ginger described in great detail, and with a wealth of verbal adornment, his opinion of Sergeant-Major Higgs, his venality, his harshness, his ancestry (mythical), and his fate (prophetic) if ever "D" Company should get him out to France.

From Ginger's halting but well-adorned periods, it appeared that Company Sergeant-Major Higgs was one who placed a high value upon money, or what it would produce. He bullied unceasingly all who were unable to placate him with raw whisky, his one and only drink, or cigars, his one and only smoke. Those who were able to temper the wind of his displeasure with the things his nature craved were favoured to a degree that roused the other and less fortunate members of "D" Company to a frenzy of hate.

The amount of ammunition that "D" Company was sworn to expend in sending its unpopular sergeant-major to his last parade was a menace to the next offensive.

"Well," said Bindle philosophically, "don't you lose 'eart, Ging. There's generally a way out o' most things."

"There ain't no ruddy way out o' 'D' Company," growled Ginger, gazing malevolently into the depths of his empty tankard. "Think o' wot 'e done to me an' Nigger Alf last week."

"Wot was that?" enquired Bindle, having answered with an affirmative nod the barman's interrogation as to Ginger's pewter.

"Nigger was wrong inside, an' I 'ad a sore 'eel, an' that scarlet tyke got the M.O. to give 'im some ointment an' me two No. 9 pills. My Gawd!" Ginger groaned at the recollection. "Threatened us wiv pack-drill an' C.B. if we didn't obey orders. 'E'll obey orders out there," and Ginger nodded darkly in what he conceived to be the direction where France lay.

"Why don't you report 'im?" enquired Bindle.

"'Cause you can't speak to an orficer only through 'im, blast 'im!" Ginger explained. "I don't 'old wiv the army," he added.

"I suppose," queried Bindle meditatively, "if anythink was to 'appen to 'Iggy, an' 'e sort o' got into trouble, 'D' Company wouldn't break their little 'earts?"

"My Gawd!" For a moment a light of hope shone in Ginger's eyes, only to die out the next. "'E's too clever. You ain't goin' to get 'im only wiv a bullet."

There was silence for a few minutes, broken by the hum of conversation of those around them, the clink of the beer-engines as the handles were released, and the thud of glasses and tankards on the leaden counter.

"You can do any fink in the army if you got money," growled Ginger. "Stays out all night, I've 'eard 'e does, an' no one reports 'im. Afraid of 'im, they are, every ruddy one of 'em, orficers an' all."

Ginger lifted his tankard. Beer alone could wash from his mouth the flavour of the obnoxious company sergeant-major.

"Look 'ere, Ging," said Bindle, "you're low-spirited, that's wot's the matter with you. There ain't no army in the world like ours. If the King was to 'ear about ole 'Iggs, 'e'd 'ave 'im put in quod, would George Five; p'r'aps 'e'd send 'im to the Kayser as a sort o' valentine."

"You should 'ear 'im talk o' wot 'e done at Loos. Says 'e ought to be a major wivout the sergeant, 'e does. I'd make 'im a major," growled Ginger; "I'd make 'im a stiff-un—an' I will too," he added, "out there."

That evening as he returned home, Bindle pondered deeply upon Ginger's unwonted loquacity, and the enormities committed by Company Sergeant-Major Higgs.

"It didn't ought to be allowed, that," he muttered to himself, "with all them boys a-doin' their bit. Somebody's got to stop it."

Just as he reached his own door he broke into a shrill rendering of "Arizona," which he tactfully modulated into "Gospel Bells," Mrs. Bindle's favourite hymn, as he entered the kitchen.

With Bindle, when meditation developed into whistling, it invariably indicated that his mind was made up, and his course of action decided upon.

The next evening he spent two hours in close converse with Dr. Richard Little, his partner in many a "little joke," and his friend James Holcroft, a man who at St. Timothy's Hospital was marked out for Harley Street on account of his wonderful hypnotic powers in cases of chronic neurasthenia.

II

As he strutted across the barrack-square towards the gate, an ebony-and-silver swagger-cane under his left arm, his right hand twirling the end of his luxuriant brown moustache, Company Sergeant-Major Higgs was at peace with the world. His day's work was done, and there was the evening's revelry before him. There had been a time when he had almost trembled for the hair of his face, for it had been suggested that a few short bristles in the centre of the upper lip alone were likely to lead the British armies to victory. That, however, was past, and now Company Sergeant-Major Higgs could bathe in his favourite whisky a full measure of curving auburn hairs. His strength lay in the hairs of his face.

Instinctively the men knew that if "the major" were to lose his moustache his spirit would be broken; yet none dare sacrifice himself for the benefit of the whole company. None possessed sufficient money to make him drunk; for the period of Higgs's sobriety under continuous libations was as immeasurable as time. He had been known to be elated, depressed, to falter in his speech, sway a little in his gait; but never had he been drunk.

"We'll 'ave to wait till we get 'im out there," muttered Nigger Alf regretfully, as he watched his arch-enemy disappear through the gates.

Higgs swaggered out of the barrack-yard and turned to the left, overwhelmed with the sense of his own importance. He was a warrior, and he meant that all the world should know it. His self-consciousness rendered it impossible for him to view the universe other than as a background for himself. His favourite subject of thought and conversation, previous to Loos, was the old army and what the world had lost by its absorption into the new. After Loos this was replaced by the prodigies of valour that he, Company Sergeant-Major Sidney Higgs, had performed in capturing a German machine-gun.

Among themselves "D" Company whispered that it was shell-smashed, this machine-gun, and had been forsaken by the enemy, which may have accounted for the fact that Company Sergeant-Major Higgs had received no official recognition of his gallant act.

In the first days of elation he had seen himself raised to commissioned rank, with the coveted purple ribbon on his left breast; later he had explained the lack of the one and the absence of the other by the magic words "no influence."

"There are less-experienced soldiers than me commanding brigades," he confided to Sergeant Daney, his particular crony.

Sergeant Daney was a man possessed of an unfluctuating thirst, a wife, and eight children. As he feared his wife even more than he felt his thirst, it was inevitable that he should follow the path of the least resistance. Higgs always had plenty of money, and he hated his own company. Furthermore, as Sergeant Daney fed the insatiable furnace of his vanity, it was natural that they should be much together, and that the one should drink at the expense of the other, the money being passed from hand to hand in a manner that would not outrage those who had ordained that Britons should drink only at their own expense.

Company Sergeant-Major Higgs strolled along Wimbledon High Street in the direction of the Western Hotel, where the happiest hours of his life were spent. He pushed open the door, walked along the passage, passed through a further pair of doors into the comfortable saloon-bar.

"Good evening, major," cried the barmaid, who had picked up this mode of address from the men.

"Good evenin', my dear," was the response. Higgs regarded with a leer the half-woman that he was able to see above the counter.

Miss Connie Watson was remarkable in two ways, in neither of which had she consulted the wishes of Providence. She had been sent into the world brown-haired and lean; she appeared behind the bar of the Western Hotel fair-haired and plump. The one phenomenon was achieved by peroxide, the other by what were known to the elect as "Madame Fitz-Parmington's Patent Plumpers."

"The old poison, my dear." Company Sergeant-Major Higgs was a man of the world in battle and in bars.

A double "Pink Horseshoe" was handed to him, which he drank at a gulp and then, pouring a little water into his glass, sent it careering after the "Pink Horseshoe." He replaced the glass on the counter, which was promptly filled by the assiduous Connie.

"We've got strangers here to-night," she confided, nodding significantly in the direction of a group of three men sitting at a small round table. "Big bugs, I think," whispered Connie.

Higgs glanced in the direction indicated, where three men appeared to be in earnest conversation. One, a wiry little fellow with a humorous face, fringed by a sandy grey beard and a patch over his left eye, wore a sporting black-and-white check suit, a red tie, a light dust-coat, and a Homburg hat. By his side, resting against the chair, was a Malacca cane heavily ornamented with "yellow metal." The others were less noticeable in their attire, and seemed to listen with interest to their companion's conversation. One of the two was a small man with beetling brows and a gaze that seemed capable of piercing a stone wall.

Company Sergeant-Major Higgs turned back to his second "Pink Horseshoe." He had a profound contempt for civilians, and proceeded to light a cigar. He had just removed it from his mouth to assure himself that it was well alight, when his attention was arrested by a remark of the sporting black-and-white man.

"'Iggs was 'is name, Company Sergeant-Major 'Iggs. Bravest thing 'e ever saw, my friend told me; yet 'e never got so much as 'thank you.' That ain't the way to make us win the war," he added, as he picked up his glass and drained it at a gulp.

"Tell us about it, sir," said the taller of the two men, whose well-cut, fair war-beard suggested the navy, and whose voice bore a strong resemblance to that of Dr. Richard Little of Chelsea.

"Well, it was like this," began the black-and-white man: "The 88th Londons went over the top; an' a 'ell of a day it was. Men was droppin' like rain, they were, when a German machine-gun started a-squirtin' death at 'D' Company.

"'My Gawd,' says the captin, 'our number's up.'"

"But it wasn't! This cove 'Iggs dashed forward with a clubbed rifle, goes right up to the German machine-gun, 'e does, an' starts sendin' Germans to 'ell like giddy-o. Took the gun, 'e did, an' saved 'D' Company. I'll lay my life," continued Bindle, for it was he, "that 'e belongs to the old army. You don't get no clubbin' rifles now. They don't teach 'em."

"And did he get the V.C.?" enquired Dick Little.

"'E got nothink. 'E 'adn't no influence, pore chap, so 'e's just wot 'e was before; but 'e saved 'D' Company. 'E's a man, 'e is, an' I'd like to find out where 'e was, so as to shake 'im by the 'and, an' give 'im the longest drink 'e ever 'ad in all 'is puff."

With one movement Company Sergeant-Major Higgs was across the bar, standing before Bindle.

"I am Sergeant-Major Higgs!" he announced, conscious that this was a dramatic moment.

"Oh, you are, are you?" remarked Bindle scornfully. "You didn't ought to try an' listen to wot other coves is talkin' about. I suppose it's that long drink wot tempted you. Now run away 'ome an' don't interrupt."

Higgs flushed, taken aback by this sudden and unexpected rebuff.

Dick Little looked at Bindle curiously.

"But I *am* Sergeant-Major Higgs," spluttered the crestfallen warrior. He gave a hurried look round, as if seeking for evidence, then, suddenly diving into the breast-pocket of his tunic, he brought forth a handful of letters, which he held out before him.

Bindle glanced at them, then, with a sudden movement, he sprang to his feet with extended hand.

"Put it 'ere!" he commanded, and Sergeant-Major Higgs put it there, and the men shook hands cordially.

"Proud to know you, Major, proud as proud. These are friends of mine."

Dick Little and Holcroft shook hands cordially.

"A bottle of whisky," called out Bindle; "a bottle of whisky for an 'ero."

"I'm afraid I can't serve you, sir," replied the interested but regretful Connie. "Treating's not allowed."

Bindle looked blankly from one to the other. "Well I'm damned!" he vociferated. "That's a mean thing, when you meets a man you been wantin' to meet for months, an' can't offer 'im a drink."

Bindle looked despairingly from one to the other.

"Why not come round to my digs," suggested Dick Little; "there's plenty of good stuff there. May we have the pleasure, sir?" he enquired, turning to Higgs.

Two minutes later the four were walking in the direction of the rooms Dick Little had taken in Clarendon Road. Arrived there, they proceeded to make the hero comfortable.

For the first time in his life Company Sergeant-Major Higgs was really superlatively happy. Down his throat he poured neat whisky and from his lips streamed the story of his heroism at Loos, and the injustice of which he was the victim.

Bindle, Dick Little, and Holcroft listened attentively, and saw to it that the gallant soldier's glass was never empty, save during the period of transit from his lips to the table.

"Won the bloomin' V.C., 'e did," remarked Bindle, turning to Dick Little during one of the rare intervals in the flow

of the narrative.

Higgs assumed what he conceived to be the air of a doughty hero.

"Reg'lar ole fire-eater, ain't 'e?" remarked Bindle to Holcroft. "Glad I ain't an 'Un, case I might 'ave been sent to Loos."

Higgs leaned forward and, placing a grubby forefinger impressively upon Bindle's knee, said, "If—hadn't—been—Loos—Germans—broken—through." He wagged his head impressively. "Broken through," he repeated huskily, temporarily forgetful that at Loos the Germans were on the defensive.

The whisky he was pouring down his throat by the half-tumblerful was beginning to have a dazing effect upon the gallant Higgs. His words ran into each other thickly.

"You don't say so?" Bindle's tone was one of awe and admiration.

"Swear it," responded Higgs, pressing his finger harder upon Bindle's knee, partly to emphasise his point, but more particularly to preserve a dubious equilibrium. "Fact," he added solemnly, endeavouring with his disengaged hand to find the starboard end of his waxed moustache, which, having lost its rigidity, was coyly trying to slip into the corner of his mouth.

"French knew it, damn 'im," he added; "s'jealous."

"Ah!" There was a world of meaning in Bindle's exclamation. Sergeant-Major Higgs had explained all.

"Don't you worry, ole sport," said Bindle reassuringly; "they 'aven't forgotten you—not they."

Higgs wagged his head, as if it were too heavy for his neck to support.

"S'jealous—fact!" he added, searching behind his ear for the lost moustache-end.

"Looks like a cat a-washin' of 'er face, don't 'e?" whispered Bindle to Holcroft.

Dick Little, Bindle, and Holcroft continued to assure the injured hero that he had not been forgotten at Headquarters. At any moment he might hear of his promotion to commissioned rank, not as a mere lieutenant or captain; but in all probability as a general.

"General! that's it, vict'ry-next-week," Higgs mumbled, as he strove vainly to capture with his lips the errant end of his moustache. "Win-the-war-in-week—fact!"

"Gentleman to see Sergeant-Major Higgs," announced a maid as she stepped aside to admit a staff-captain, who gravely saluted the company.

Higgs made a gallant effort, half rising from his chair, only to fall back again. Aided, however, by the rebound, he managed to assume an upright position, and stood at an uncertain attention.

"Company Sergeant-Major Higgs?" interrogated the staff-officer.

"Sme!" responded Higgs, rolling his eyes.

"I have to inform you," continued the staff-officer, "that, in consideration of your gallant services at Loos, you have been promoted to the rank of Major-General, seniority to date from September 25th." The officer saluted Higgs and handed him a large official envelope marked "O.H.M.S."

Higgs took it and gazed stupidly from the envelope to the staff-officer.

"A uniform has been prepared; my servant will bring it in. You are requested to inspect your old battalion, the 88th

Service Battalion, London Regiment, at parade to-morrow morning. You will find full instructions there." He indicated the envelope.

The staff-officer saluted and left the room.

"You are now a general," said Holcroft, looking steadily into Higgs's eyes. "You are to inspect your old battalion at to-morrow morning's parade. Now repeat it."

"Mageneral," mumbled Higgs. "Inspect—old—battalion—t'morrow—parade," and he sank back into the chair and fell into a profound stupor.

III

A general officer was walking briskly down Wimbledon High Street in the direction of the parade-ground of the 88th Service Battalion, London Regiment. On his upper lip was a ridiculous tuft of brown hairs, leaving exposed a cruel mouth. In his eye was a vagueness, as if he were walking in his sleep. He looked neither to the right nor to the left. The policeman on point-duty by the railway bridge saluted, and to his surprise received in response the precise and elaborate salute of a private soldier.

"Well, I'm jiggered," he muttered, looking round vainly for some fellow-being to share with him his mystification.

At the entrance to the parade-ground the guard turned out at the word of command and stood to attention. "Major-General" Higgs acknowledged the salute as he had done that of the constable. The men regarded him with wide-eyed astonishment and, when he had passed, eagerly debated among themselves this incredible conduct on the part of a general officer.

"Major-General" Higgs strutted on to the parade-ground, his right hand grasping a yellow crooked-stick, his left fumbling about his upper lip for the absent moustache-ends. The battalion was formed in mass at ease, the C.O. chatting with the senior major. Their backs were turned to the approaching "Major-General." It was the adjutant who called the C.O.'s attention to the visitor. Seeing the rank of the stranger, the C.O. dismounted and went to meet him.

"Good morning, sir," he said, saluting. Only by a great effort of will did he restrain himself from starting back when the visitor saluted him with the suddenness and precision of an N.C.O. of the old army. He remembered, however, once hearing of a general officer who always saluted so, his contention being that there was one salute and one salute only in the Drill Book, and that was common to officers and men.

"Mornin'," snapped Higgs.

The C.O. wondered why no orderly or staff-officer accompanied the general, and what could prompt him to make a visit at so unearthly an hour and without notice. He was also vainly trying to place his visitor.

Company Sergeant-Major Higgs had never liked the C.O., and "Major-General" Higgs seemed determined that the circumstance should not be dissimulated.

The C.O. saw that the "Major-General's" breast was a rainbow of ribbons, four lines deep. His eyes were glued to these evidences of valour and war. There was the purple of the V.C., blue and red of the D.S.O., and the blue and white of the M.C. with the miniature silver rose telling of a twice-won honour.

The service ribbons were bewildering in their variety. Apparently little in the way of war had happened during the last thirty years in which the "Major-General" had not taken part. "You're early, sir," remarked the C.O.; at a loss for something to say, as they strolled towards the battalion.

"I've come to inspect the battalion of blood-coloured horse-thieves," yapped Higgs, in what he felt was the correct

tone to adopt to an inferior.

This time the C.O. actually did start as if someone had hit him. He flushed a deep crimson.

"May I ask, sir——?" he began; but Higgs ignored him as if he had not existed.

Striding up to the battalion, he halted in front of "D" Company. With legs wide apart, his stick under his arm, he surveyed the men, deliberately, insultingly. It was the uncompromising gaze of a martinet, devoid of humanity and destitute of imagination. To a man "D" Company recognised that look as belonging to him whom they had sworn to send to the bottomless part of no parades. Ginger gazed at his arch-enemy with open mouth. Nigger Alf muttered under his breath and shivered. The iron of discipline had entered deep into his soul, and he was afraid—of what he could not say.

"It's 'Iggy," muttered someone.

"'E's mad drunk," muttered Private Ash to the man on his right.

"Look at 'is ribbons," whispered a third. "Like a bloomin' rainbow, ain't 'e?"

A thrill of excited expectation passed down the whole line. The men looked from Higgs to the C.O., now standing conversing with the senior major, and casting uneasy glances in the direction where Higgs stood. The C.O. was anathematising himself for having forgotten to call the battalion to attention.

He was frankly at a loss to account for this surprise visit, but still more for the conduct of the general who was making it. Tradition and custom had been thrown to the winds of heaven, and he cursed the New School, which he regarded as responsible for everything of which he disapproved.

The news that the officer in front was "Bully" Higgs of "D" Company sped down the line like an electric current.

"It's Higgs of 'D' Company," they told each other.

"Damn good job too!"

"Scarlet bully!"

"Save us shootin' 'im."

"Gawd! but 'e's in for it this time all right."

"It'll be court-martial."

These were some of the muttered remarks of the men. Heads bobbed from side to side, men bent back to converse with comrades in the rear rank.

Higgs turned to the C.O., who, with the adjutant and senior major, had drawn up to within a few yards of where he stood.

"Call your battalion to attention!" he ordered.

"Paraaaaade—shun!" The C.O.'s order was so unexpected and came with such suddenness that, had he not been too amazed to notice the ragged manner in which it was obeyed, he would have despaired of the whole battalion. As it was, Nigger Alf let slip his rifle, then caught it again by the sling in a manner that would have earned for him a round of applause from the most critical music-hall audience.

"Shun!" It was "Major-General" Higgs who now repeated the command.

If anyone in the battalion had been sceptical as to the identity of the stranger, this order promptly removed it.

As one man had remarked, "Higgs's 'Shun' is damn an' blast an' 'ell an' C.B. all rolled into one."

The captain of "D" Company had been one of the first to suspect the identity of the inspecting officer. He had noted Higgs's absence that morning, and had been puzzled to account for it, and now? Should he inform the C.O.? But what if he were mistaken? To leave the company in the face of such an order was rank insubordination. He decided to await developments.

"Battalion right dress!" yapped Higgs.

The order found the battalion equally unprepared, and they began to shuffle like a Salvation Army soup-queue.

The novelty of a general officer assuming the duties of putting a battalion through its paces required an elasticity of mind not possessed of the 88th.

"You crimson set of stutterin' defaulters," howled Higgs. He looked about him as if in search of something.

"Where's that ruddy band?" he bawled. "You lung-splittin' drum-thumpin' degenerates, where the 'ell 'ave you got to?"

He waved his stick at the band-master, who took it as a signal to play. A moment later the band broke out into the popular rag-time, "I Ain't No Good as a Soldier."

Higgs stepped back to the C.O. "Let's see what this blinkin' battalion is made of?" he said, his eyes still on the battalion. "Carry on."

Then the C.O. determined that the 88th should show this jack-booted martinet what it was made of. Opening his shoulders and filling his lungs, he thundered his orders.

"Battalion form open mass," he roared. "Echelon outwards at platoon distance. Two companies the right, remainder will retire, about turn, quick march."

Higgs turned and blinked at the C.O. as if surprised at the unusual nature of the command. Suddenly he became galvanised into life. Turning upon the battalion like fury he roared:

"As you were," then, after a slight pause, "Prepare to receive cavalry."

The 88th wavered. This new demand upon their self-possession was the last straw. Such evolutions had never been demanded of them at early morning parade. They hesitated, looked at each other, as if uncertain what to do. Their C.O. had handed them over to a maniac, and stood apparently calmly watching their discomfiture.

Then the 88th Londons went utterly to pieces. The officers repeated, some one, some the other order, some both. The men were bewildered. Those who endeavoured to retire found themselves mixed up with comrades who were striving to receive cavalry, those who were intent on receiving cavalry discovered that the echelon heresy was too strong for them. They gazed into each other's puzzled eyes, cannoned off each other's accoutrements. Several came to earth with a crash.

The C.O. had heard of officers in the British Army who were the envy of drill-sergeants on account of their comprehensive grasp of rhetorical denunciation, men who could besmirch an entire ancestry in a breath, and then wither unborn generations without replenishing their lungs.

Nothing, however, that he had ever heard or imagined equalled what he listened to that morning. He and the senior major stood spellbound before the inspiration of meaning eloquence that flowed from the lips of the unknown. In a way they were impressed. Such language in an N.C.O. would have been reprehensible; but in a general officer it inspired the respect of all ranks.

The sight of the chaos that he had engendered seemed to send Higgs mad with fury. He foamed at the mouth,

stamping up and down in short furious strides, bellowing opinions and orders. He drew a vivid picture of what the Huns could do with the 88th, and intimated that the devil would finish what they had begun. He expressed his view of what would be the fate in this world and the next of the officers responsible for a battalion of bespattered pick-pockets and imperfect cab-touts. He was frankly dubious as to the legitimacy of the C.O.; he foresaw a gigantic court-martial for everybody; in fact, he foresaw many and terrible things in the no very far-distant future, all of which suggested to his mind one thing—the annihilation, body and soul, of the whole of that "ruddy rabble of spavined, chicken-hearted sons of unmentionable domestic quadrupeds."

All the time the band instrumentally called attention to the military shortcomings of the 88th Londons. "I Ain't No Good as a Soldier," it blared.

Suddenly Higgs fixed his eyes upon the rabble that had once been "D" Company. Striding up to Ginger, he demanded:

"What the super-heated hereafter do you think you're doin', you red-'eaded son of a sink-cleaner?"

Ginger regarded his superior with dropped jaw and glazed eye.

"I'm retiring eshelong," he mumbled uncertainly.

"Oh, you are, are you? Sure you ain't quick marchin', or chargin'? You're absolutely certain," he continued with withering scorn, "that you ain't a retreat, or a little bit of over-the-top, or a blarsted tank?"

Higgs paused as if to let Ginger absorb what he had said.

"I'll tell you what you are," he continued, with a flash of genius: "you're a forlorn 'ope, that's what you are, and don't you forget it."

He turned on his heel and nearly ran into Nigger Alf, who, on one knee, his rifle and bayonet at the guard, was gazing into space.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he cried. "An' what the fermented 'ell might you be tryin' to do?"

"Receive cavalry, sir," replied Nigger Alf, full of confidence in the knowledge that, although alone, his position was correct.

Higgs regarded him with elaborate interest. "Well, when you're tired o' proposin' to nobody, p'r'aps you'll take your blinkin' bayonet where it won't take some defaulter in the rear, then you can 'ave a kip. It'll 'elp you to bear what's comin'."

Whilst "Major-General" Higgs was reducing the 88th Service Battalion London Regiment to the semblance of a mass-meeting in Hyde Park, the commander of "D" Company was engaged in conversation with the C.O. and the adjutant as to the identity of the cause of all the chaos. The senior major joined the group. Finally the C.O. strode up to Higgs.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded, now feeling sure that he recognised Higgs.

"Gawd knows, I don't," responded Higgs. "Seem to 'ave gone mad, don't they? Never see such a lot of dog-eared defaulters. This comes of——"

The C.O. was anxious not to make a blunder. He had heard of strange cases of mistaken identity, and determined to be on the safe side.

"What I am asking," he said, quietly so that the men might not hear, "is why you, Sergeant-Major Higgs, are masquerading as a general officer on my parade-ground."

"I've been promoted," hectorated Higgs, "for what I did at Loos," he added, by way of explanation.

"Promoted!" echoed the C.O. in amazement. He was at loss. "You will come with me to the Mess."

"I'll do no such damn thing," Higgs retorted.

"Then I shall put you under arrest. Sergeant-Major Higgs," he said, with great dignity and restraint, "proceed to your quarters and consider yourself under arrest for absenting yourself from parade without leave."

The officers gazed at Higgs with expressionless faces. The men stood round as if at a football match.

"Me absent from parade without leave?" bawled Higgs. "Me absent when I'm 'ere?"

Higgs looked about him vaguely, then he caught sight of a grinning face in the ranks. In an instant he saw red.

Dashing forward, he started hitting out right and left. As Nemesis would have it, his opponents were "D" Company.

From where he stood the C.O. saw a mass of men seething and eddying like a pond with a struggling fish in the centre. He saw that there was nothing to be done, as "D" Company seemed to have the situation well in hand.

"Stop that damned music," he cried to the adjutant, and the refrain of the band ceased.

Half an hour later a very shamefaced battalion was hearing in tense silence what its C.O. thought of it. The C.O. knew that he was wrong, that he was unjust, but something must be said, and discipline had to be restored. In the martial hearts of "D" Company there was a song of great gladness. Nigger Alf moved his jaw happily from side to side to remind himself of the blow he had received, and Ginger took pleasure in the knowledge that, like Polyphemus, he saw the world with a single eye. Both recalled with joy that these defects were the receipts for what they had lavished upon the person of Company Sergeant-Major Sidney Higgs.

IV

Bindle was fetching the supper-beer from the Yellow Ostrich in the manner he found most convenient—that is to say, a pint in the jug, and a pint at the bar. He was engaged in conversation with the landlord upon the price of beer in the near future, when the swing-doors were partially pushed open and Ginger's head thrust through the aperture. After glancing round, the head momentarily withdrew, the doors opened wider, admitting the whole person of the lugubrious Ginger.

"Blessed if it ain't my little yellow-'ammer," cried Bindle with obvious pleasure. Then, regarding with elaborate concern Ginger's blackened optic, he shook his head despondently.

"You didn't get that little ornament a-fightin' for George Five an' the twins, Ging," he said reproachfully. "Wot's 'appened?"

For a fleeting moment Ginger's face underwent a change. Not even those most intimate with him could have said with any amount of certainty what it actually betokened.

"E give it me," he remarked as the landlord of the Yellow Ostrich handed him a pint tankard of ale.

"Who's 'e, when 'e's got 'is right label?" enquired Bindle, curious as to the note of satisfaction manifest in Ginger's voice.

"The 'major,' ole 'Iggs," replied Ginger, burying his face in the tankard. "Gawd!" he burst out a moment later, "didn't we make a mess of 'im?"

In halting periods Ginger told of the rise and fall of Company Sergeant-Major Higgs.

Bindle listened with the keenest interest, with an absent-mindedness that later entailed the carrying home empty of the blue-and-white jug with its guardian red butterfly.

"An' wot 'appened after they tried to run 'im in?" he enquired eagerly of Ginger.

"'E come for the lot of us," was the happy response.

"Wot d'you mean, Ging?" enquired Bindle.

"Come for the 'ole ruddy company," said Ginger, with grudging admiration.

"An' wot 'appened?" queried Bindle.

"I got this." Ginger indicated his discoloured eye. "But," he added, as if in extenuation of the fighting qualities of "D" Company, "there wasn't much lef of 'im when we'd finished."

"An' wot did they do to 'im, Ging?" enquired Bindle.

"Court-martial an' 'e'll be rejoyced to the ranks." Ginger took another pull at his tankard, and, with Ginger, to take a pull meant to empty it. "I'd give a bob to know who done it," he remarked as he brushed the moisture from his lips with the back of his hand.

"Done wot?" enquired Bindle innocently.

"Made 'im drunk an' dressed 'im up, an' did somethin' to 'im wot made 'im think 'e'd been made a general—'im!" Ginger snapped out the last word with savage scorn.

"D'you think some cove in 'D' Company did it?" queried Bindle.

"No!" responded Ginger with conviction. "There was three of 'em. Think o' wot them duds of 'is must 'a' cost," he added. "Torn to bits they was too. When they put 'im on the stretcher 'e 'adn't only 'is boots an' socks left."

"Don't that show you, Ging?" demanded Bindle. "There's only two kinds o' soldiers: there's men and there's Germans; an' 'Iggs wasn't a man."

Bindle picked up the blue-and-white jug with the red butterfly on the spout. "Well, I must be gettin' 'ome," he said, "or who knows wot may 'ave 'appened to Mrs. B. an' the lodger?"

They pushed out of the swing-doors together.

"Well, so long, ole sport," said Bindle. "I s'pose you didn't get anything as a souvenir?"

"No," grumbled Ginger regretfully, "but," he added, brightening, "Nigger Alf's got a bit of 'is ear."

CHAPTER XIII

THE MUTINY OF THE *SYBIL*

PART I

JOSEPH BINDLE, STEWARD

I

"I'm fed up!" Guggers, so called from his inability to pronounce a "g" without a preliminary "gu-gug," leaned his enormous frame back in one of Dr. Dick Little's easy-chairs and sucked moodily at his pipe, a rich juicy affair possessed of three distinct notes.

"But p'r'aps 'e really did all them things wot 'e talks about," suggested Bindle, with a light in his eye that contradicted the words his lips uttered.

"True!" growled Guggers, "true! He couldn't stop a gug-gug-giddy gug-gug-goat with a machine-gun. The club's damnable since the war, and that blighter's everlasting stories of what a clever old bean he is——"

Guggers broke off and, in his anger, almost succeeded in extracting a fourth note from his pipe; instead, he only succeeded in getting what he called "juiced."

He had been narrating to Dick Little and Bindle how Montague Michael Furzon had fallen upon the quiet of Gray's Club and devoured it. The stories he told of incredible experiences with savages and ferocious wild beasts in various quarters of the globe had reduced Guggers and many other members of the club to a frenzy of despair.

"If it ain't a rude question, sir," said Bindle, "wot did Montague Michael do in the war?"

"Do!" cried Guggers scornfully, "his laundress most likely. He was private secretary to his uncle, old General Furzon. Gug-gug-grand old boy; brave as a lion," he added.

"Funny 'e didn't sort o' think o' sendin' Montague Michael to the trenches," mused Bindle as he lifted his tankard from the table.

"Family honour, and all that gug-gug-giddy rot," said Guggers, walking over to the fireplace and knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "Knew his man," he added by way of explanation.

"Why don't you give him the push from the club?" asked Dick Little.

Guggers shook a mournful head.

"Committee's never done such a thing. Nothing is ever done at Gray's that hasn't been done somewhere in the gug-gug-gloomy past," he explained. "That's why you can't get gug-gug-grape-fruit, although barley water flows like petrol in an R.A.F. camp. Might as well be a lot of gug-gug-gasping pussyfoots."

"Didn't it ought to be pussyfeet?" suggested Bindle, with a grin.

"You gug-gug-go to hell, J. B.!" was the uncompromising rejoinder.

"Wot about a little bit o' shakin' up for Montague Michael?" suggested Bindle. "Same as wot we did to little Reggie at Oxford."

"No gug-gug-good," growled Guggers; "too fly, the cunning devil! We tried it out in France; but it was a wash-out every time."

"Of course, tar is a bit expensive," murmured Bindle, "but my brother-in-law, 'Earty, 'as started keepin' chickens, an' I might be able to pinch a few feathers." He looked tentatively across at Guggers, who shook a despondent head.

"No," he grumbled, "I'm off yachting. I can't stand London with Furzon in it!"

For some time the three men smoked in silence, Bindle occasionally refreshing himself from the tankard at his

elbow.

Both Guggers and Dick Little had been demobilised; Dick Little returning to his practice in Chelsea; Guggers to the £20,000 a year that required spending.

Guggers was not himself. The fashionable unrest seemed to have descended upon him. Ever since he had entered Dick Little's flat, some two hours previously, he had been complaining. His customary cheery optimism had apparently forsaken him. Nothing was as he had left it in that fatal August 1914. The club cooking was uneatable, the club wine undrinkable, and the club bores unspeakable. The prince of these inflictions appeared to be Montague Michael Furzon, whose insufferable habit of bragging had aroused the usually even-tempered and tolerant Guggers to a frenzy of wrath.

"Wot about takin' 'im for an 'oliday in your yacht, sir?" queried Bindle at length.

"Gug-gug-good Lord, J. B., you're drunk!" Guggers gazed at Bindle as if he had been guilty of suggesting that Guggers should take with him the Nelson Column, or the Hippodrome chorus. Bindle merely grinned and continued smoking.

"What's in your head, J. B.?" asked Dick Little, looking at Bindle curiously.

"Well, sir," said Bindle quietly, "I 'ave always wanted to go yachtin' myself, ever since I see them coloured lights on the Big Wheel at Earl's Court a-tellin' us we 'adn't won the American Cup."

"Out with it," cried Guggers. "What's your game?"

"Well," continued Bindle, as he proceeded to fill his pipe from Dick Little's tobacco-jar, "I might offer to go as stooard: 'im wot 'ands round the basins when it's rough," he added by way of explanation.

"Yes, but what the blazes——?" began Guggers, the light of hope springing into his eyes.

"Well, somethink might 'appen, sir," said Bindle nonchalantly. "You never can tell 'ow things is goin' to turn out, and I been feelin' a bit pale lately for want of a whiff o' the briny."

Slowly Guggers raised his huge frame from the chair and, picking up the poker, stood over Bindle like the figure of Destiny.

"Gug-gug-get it off your chest, J. B.," he said, "or I'll——"

"Kamerad!" cried Bindle, holding up his hands.

Guggers replaced the poker and resumed his seat.

"Well," said Bindle, gazing across at Guggers over the flame of the match with which he had just lighted his pipe, "there might be a mutiny."

"A mutiny!" repeated Dick Little uncomprehendingly.

"Young Alf down at the yard the other day give me a little thing wot 'e 'ad been readin' to 'elp 'im to get 'ung sooner than wot 'e would. It was called 'Black-Beard; or the Pirate's Oath'—all about a mutiny, an' blood an' walkin' the plank, an' little things like that. Pleasant sort o' readin' it was too; made me feel——"

"But what's that gug-gug-got to do with Furzon?" demanded Guggers impatiently.

"Well, you see, sir, the crew of your little boat might turn pirates and make you an' all the others walk the—— 'Ere——wot the 'ell?" he broke off.

With a bound Guggers had started up and, seizing Bindle in his arms as though he had been a dog or a kitten, was waltzing with him round Dick Little's room to the tune of "You Made Me Love You," shouted at the top of his voice.

"You're wot I calls a bit 'asty, sir," said Bindle, when he had been replaced in his chair by Guggers at the end of the dance. "When there's any 'uggin' to be done I likes to 'ave a 'and in it myself; and," he added, looking up at the gigantic Guggers, "you wouldn't be my fancy; speakin' without 'eat, that is," and he proceeded with great care and deliberation to feel himself all over to ascertain that no bones were broken.

When his first enthusiasm had abated, Guggers objected that he could not ask a man on board his yacht in order to rag him; but Dick Little had overcome this by suggesting that several other fellows might be invited, without being taken into their host's confidence, so that instead of a rag the episode would appear in the light of a huge practical joke.

For the next hour they debated the details of the scheme. Guggers's despondency had fallen from him like a mantle. Time after time he proclaimed Bindle "a gug-gug-gallant fellow," whom it was a privilege to know.

When all the details were settled, Bindle rose and announced that he must return to "'ome an' beauty." As he reached the door he turned to the others.

"'Ere, I was almost forgettin' to ask," he said, "wot is walkin' the plank?"

II

Montague Michael Furzon was not popular. By virtue of an affected voice, a thick skin, an intolerable manner, and a patch-and-powder stare, he had to some extent impressed himself upon his contemporaries. At Oxford he had been one of a small and exclusive coterie, known as the "Blood and Bullion" set, to which birth and riches were the Open Sesame. Birth, however, to a large extent held aloof, whereas, on the other hand, riches saw in Montague Michael Furzon a golden key to the realms they sought to enter.

One night at Bungems, famous for its bump-suppers, a wag had risen to say grace and, amidst the hush at so unexpected a prelude to the festivities, had offered up thanks in doggerel that ran:

We thank the goodness and the grace
That sends to this our dining-place
Friend Montague Michael Furzon,
A most superior person.

From that moment Furzon had been known as the "most superior person."

His manner towards his social inferiors was one of supercilious disdain, to which Nature had connived by endowing him with a narrow head and a generally peevish expression to his pinched and sallow features. He was twenty-nine, a bachelor, placed women somewhere between an internal chill and an ill-laundered shirt, and possessed an unbounded confidence in himself.

"'E must make the Kayser feel an' also ran," was Bindle's summing up at the first sight of Montague Michael Furzon.

To ensure Furzon's acceptance of his invitation, Guggers had prefaced it with a casual remark to the effect that Lord Ralph Wilmer and Lord Windover were coming, and furthermore that it was to be a stag party. Furzon had gobbled the bait, and it was arranged that the guests should be on board the following Thursday afternoon.

Bindle and Dick Little travelled down to Southampton on the Wednesday, "jest to count the basins," as Bindle expressed it.

Bindle was strangely silent as they were being rowed out to where the *Sybil* was lying, looking dazzling white in the sunshine. He was drinking in the scene—the dancing water, the salt-scented air, the boats and launches hurrying hither and thither. It was all new and strange.

"Chaps like us misses a rare lot," he said at length; a little wistfully, Dick Little thought.

"As how?" he enquired.

"Well, look at all this 'ere," and he waved a comprehensive arm to include everything. "Think of all the coves wot turn up their toes without ever seein' it. It don't seem right some'ow," he concluded.

"You're becoming Bolshevik," laughed Dick Little, and strangely enough there was no reply.

As the boat neared the *Sybil*, the sight of Guggers seemed to bring Bindle back to realities, and he waved his cap in acknowledgment of the hail that came across to them against the breeze.

"Well, 'ere's for life on the ocean wave with the 'elp of a basin," he remarked, as he reached the deck and, a moment later, was being tortured by the sincerity of Guggers's welcome.

"Next time it'll do if you saloots me," he remarked ruefully, moving the fingers of his right hand as if to make sure that none were broken. "You forgets sometimes, sir," he added, "that I earns my bread with 'onest sweat, an' a cove can't sweat if 'is fingers is squeegeed to a jelly."

Guggers laughed and turned to greet Dick Little, whilst Bindle gazed about him curiously.

The *Sybil* carried her 800 tons as if they were nothing to her. She was as slim as a greyhound and as spotless as if just unwrapped from tissue-paper.

"Mrs. B. ought to see this 'ere," Bindle muttered, as he gazed from the flashing metalwork down to white decks. "Don't seem as if you ought to walk on 'em."

"Hullo, J. B.!" cried Guggers, breaking in upon his thoughts, "feeling sea-sick?"

"Well, sir, I was sort of wonderin' where I'd find them basins."

"Ha, McMurdo, here you are," as a short heavily built man in duck trousers and blue jacket with brass buttons appeared. "This is my gug-gug-great friend Bindle. He's gug-gug-going to be steward. Gug-gug-great Scott! don't do that," he cried, as Bindle extended a friendly hand.

"Don't do wot?" enquired Bindle in surprise, and allowing his hand to drop.

"Stewards don't shake hands with the captain," said Guggers with a genial grin.

Bindle surveyed Captain McMurdo with interest and elaboration.

"An' me thinkin' it was Lipton," he said in a hoarse whisper to Dick Little. "'Im wot my missis buys tea orf. It was them white pants wot done it." To the captain he said, as if by way of apology, "No 'arm done, I 'opes?"

Seeing the angry flush that suffused the Scotsman's face and neck, forming a vivid background for a veritable constellation of freckles, Guggers proceeded to introduce Dick Little, and a moment later Bindle was handed over to the chief steward, with instructions from Guggers that he was to be tenderly cared for.

Having shown Dick Little to his cabin, Guggers returned on deck, where he joined Captain McMurdo in his endless pacing to and fro.

From the first the skipper had disapproved of the whole scheme of the mock mutiny, and with unaccustomed loquacity.

"I'm not liking it, sir," he murmured, as Guggers joined him in his pacing. "There's ma certeeificate to be conseedered."

"Gug-gug-go to blazes!" cried Guggers genially.

"Ah'm here in the capaceety of——"

"Rats!" was the retort, and the skipper subsided, as he had subsided on previous occasions; but it was obvious that his natural Scots caution was troubled by a proposal deliberately to foment even a mock mutiny on a British ship.

With the exception of the captain, the whole of the *Sybil's* personnel had acclaimed the project with enthusiasm. Officers and men alike were devoted to Guggers (known to the Income Tax assessors as John Parsons Arkshaw).

The whole affair had been planned with care and an eye to picturesque detail. The chief engineer had spent a whole night in inventing and perfecting a contrivance that presented a very fair resemblance to a shark's fin, propelled through the water by a simple device of which a rubber band and a propeller made out of a cigarette-tin were the chief constituent parts.

"It's gug-gug-going to be the gug-gug-greatest show on earth," Guggers cried enthusiastically that night at dinner.

In addition to Furzon there had been invited Jack Raynes, who had been with Guggers in France; Lord Ralph Wilmer, a son of the Duke of Essex, late of the R.A.F.; and Lord Windover. It had been Guggers's wish that Bindle should be a guest also; but he had declined resolutely, insisting that he should be "Lord 'Igh 'Older of the Basin," as he expressed it.

Of the guests Dick Little alone was in the secret.

Next day was spent in perfecting their plans and trying the "shark's fins." Everyone was elated. Bindle's reception for'ard had been enthusiastic, and on his first evening he was unanimously elected to the chair at the informal sing-song that had been arranged.

"Ain't 'e a one!" the bo'sun had remarked admiringly to the carpenter, as Bindle resumed his seat after a few introductory remarks, and the deafening applause that followed showed that the crew of the *Sybil* were unanimous upon the subject of Joseph Bindle.

The next afternoon Bindle donned the blue and brass of stewardship, and all on board awaited the ringing-up of the curtain upon the first act of *The Mutiny of the Sybil*. They had not a care among them, except perhaps the chief engineer, who was preoccupied with the subject of how his mechanical fins would behave under the stress of drama.

When the cutter bringing the guests aboard was seen approaching, every pair of eyes on the yacht was directed towards her. All were eager to identify "Monty," as Montague Michael Furzon had been christened by the crew.

"Well," remarked the bo'sun when he had gazed his fill at the unprepossessing person of Montague Michael Furzon, "I'm prepared to own it, I've seen prettier birds in shows."

And this seemed to be the general opinion on board the S.Y. *Sybil*.

Having welcomed his guests, Guggers led the way below, apologising for not being able to accommodate their servants.

"Bindle will look after you and Little," he said to Furzon, "and my man, Thomas, will see to you other fellows."

Furzon looked at Bindle as if he had been a dubious collar.

Bindle registered that look on the tablets of his memory.

"An' me in my blue duds and brass buttons, lookin' like a bloomin' admiral," he muttered. "I shouldn't wonder," he continued, "if there wasn't some little accidents with Mr. Monty Furzon. You never can tell," he soliloquised, "me bein' new to the job."

On entering his cabin, accompanied by Bindle, Furzon's eye was arrested by the sight of two garish-looking basins resting on a chair beside his cot. One was some six inches in diameter, whilst the other was more than twice the size.

For some seconds Furzon gazed at their hideous pink and gold ornamentation in wonder; then he turned to Bindle, interrogation in his eye.

"I chose pretty-lookin' ones," Bindle explained. "Thought it 'ud sort o' cheer you up, sir, when lookin' into 'em. The little 'un's jest for ordinary days, an' the big 'un's for storms." Bindle smiled up guilelessly at Furzon, as if entirely unconscious of the angry frown that had settled upon his features.

"Take them away at once," he ordered, "and don't come back until it's time to dress for dinner."

"Well, p'r'aps they are a bit in the way now," admitted Bindle cheerfully, as he placed one basin within the other and picked them up; "but you'll be glad of them later," he added optimistically.

"Damn fool!" muttered Furzon under his breath as the cabin door closed.

"First blood to J. B.," murmured Bindle cheerfully as he carried the basins towards the pantry.

III

That evening Furzon missed his servant.

"Have you ever acted as batman before?" he enquired as Bindle handed him a pair of brown boots.

"As wot, sir?" enquired Bindle with a puzzled air.

"As batman, personal servant." Furzon gazed at him with his most arrogant patch-and-powder stare.

"Well, sir, I can't say I 'ave," Bindle confessed, changing the boots to his left hand to enable him to scratch his head with his right.

"If you had," was the retort, "you would know that brown boots are not worn in the evening."

"Now, ain't that jest like me?" said Bindle with a good-humoured grin, as he corrected his mistake.

"Can you shave?" demanded Furzon.

"Well, sir," said Bindle, rubbing a thumb and finger along a stubbly chin, "I can sort of scrape orf the top layer."

Furzon shuddered.

"I mean, can you shave me?" he said. "My man always does so."

"Well," said Bindle dubiously, "if you're a sport, sir, an' don't mind takin' risks, I'll 'ave a try; but when it gets to a razor I ain't got a wot you'd call a very steady 'and. Still, I'll get some alum and stickin' plaster, although I 'ave 'eard that salt rubbed in is the best thing. One cove I used to know always used salt and pepper, as if 'e was a cut from the joint."

Furzon stared at Bindle as if not quite sure of his sanity. Bindle looked back at him cheerfully, as though unconscious of having said anything unusual.

"Here, tie this," Furzon said at length, holding out a black evening tie.

"Wot about a ladder, or a pair of steps?" enquired Bindle, looking dubiously from the tie up to Furzon's six feet of

sallow slimness.

"I'll sit down." He did so; but bounded up with a yell and an oath, a large wooden bowl of bath-soap attached to his person. Bindle had taken the precaution of warming it well at the galley-fire.

"Now, ain't that careless of me," he said, "puttin' that there soap on the chair? Here, 'old up a minute, sir," he cried as the wooden bowl fell to the cabin floor, leaving a large portion of its contents attached to Furzon's evening trousers, and still connected to the bowl by long sinuous threads. "'Arf a tick, and I'll nip out an' get somethink to scrape it orf with."

"You damn fool!" Furzon managed to precipitate all the venom of his nature into the exclamation.

At that moment there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," cried Bindle. Guggers slid back the door and stood on the threshold.

"Everything all right, Furzon?" he enquired conventionally; then, becoming conscious of the expression on his guest's face, he looked interrogatingly at Bindle.

"We jest 'ad a little mis'ap, sir," explained Bindle. "Sat in the soap, 'e did. My fault for puttin' it there," he added.

"Sat in the what?"

"This 'ere," said Bindle, taking up the large wooden bowl to which still adhered such portion of the soap as was not attached to Furzon. "I'm jest goin' to scrape 'im. Now, sir, if you turn round an' stoop down," he said, addressing Furzon. "You don't 'appen to 'ave——" Bindle looked in surprise at the doorway. Guggers had disappeared, and from without could be heard the sound of a man gasping for breath.

"Here, get out, you damned fool! Clear out of this place!" Furzon took a step towards Bindle, who, however, had already gained the door. Just before he slid it to he put his head into the cabin.

"Better not sit down, sir," and with that he closed the door quickly.

Guggers apologised to Furzon for Bindle's stupidity and promised that his own man, Thomas, should in future look after him. Dinner passed off successfully, and by the time they went on deck to watch the faint line that was England fading away in the grey dusk, Furzon had entirely regained his normal pose.

In the afternoon of the following day there occurred an incident that caused Furzon some uneasiness of mind. Guggers was standing amidships when suddenly he turned and gave an order to one of the crew. The man insolently refused obedience, whereupon Guggers knocked him down. Two other members of the crew rushed to their messmate's assistance; but the chief officer, revolver in hand, had dashed forward and threatened to shoot the first man that moved. The three men were subsequently put in irons by the captain's orders.

From the upper deck the little group of guests had watched the scene in amazement. Windover looked curiously at Dick Little, who, however, was busily occupied in filling his pipe.

"Well, I'm damned!" said Raynes, looking from Furzon to Wilmer. "What the deuce is up with old Guggers?"

"Seems a bit high-handed—what!" said Wilmer.

At dinner Guggers treated the whole affair as an isolated instance of insubordination, explaining that he had been forced to take on a number of new men at Southampton.

"It's the gug-gug-giddy war," he remarked lightly. "Jack thinks he's as gug-gug-good as his master; but he'll soon find out he's wrong," he added grimly.

"Seems to have struck a yellow streak," muttered Raynes to Furzon.

"But I say, old man, isn't it a bit er——?"

"A bit what, Wilmer?" enquired Guggers coldly.

"Er—nothing. I'm just a land-lubber, you know, and it seemed——" Again he broke off.

"If there's any trouble, you fellows had better make for the chart-house," Guggers remarked casually. "You'll find a gug-gug-good supply of arms there."

"Do you think there is likely to be trouble?" Furzon enquired a little apprehensively.

Guggers shrugged his shoulders indifferently. Windover said nothing, but looked curiously at Guggers, and from him to Bindle, who was with difficulty learning how to place a plate before a guest without tilting its contents on to the table.

That night Furzon, Raynes, and Wilmer sat for some time on deck discussing in undertones the curious happenings of the day. Raynes and Wilmer were puzzled, Furzon was obviously extremely uneasy.

The next morning at breakfast there was another unpleasant incident. In handing a dish of sausages and bacon to Furzon, Bindle accidentally tilted it and deposited the contents upon a pair of white flannels, perfect in purity and fit.

Furzon had limited his protests to looks; but an ungovernable rage seemed suddenly to overtake Guggers. Having cursed Bindle, as few men outside a squad of recruits have ever been cursed, he ordered him for'ard. Muttering to himself and with the nearest thing to a scowl that he could manage, Bindle obeyed.

Windover screwed his glass into his eye, and looked occasionally at Dick Little, who, however, gave no sign. The meal was concluded in silence. All were conscious of the atmosphere of constraint that had settled upon them. Captain McMurdo was gloomy and silent, and the others limited their attention to the business in hand, eating.

Soon after Bindle had taken his departure the chief engineer entered, and, going up to the captain, whispered to him. Captain McMurdo turned to Guggers and said something in a voice too low for anyone to hear.

"Gug-gug-give them five minutes to return to duty," said Guggers shortly; "if they refuse, wireless to the nearest warship."

"The wireless is out of commission, sir," said the chief engineer. "Crane thinks the aerials have been tampered with."

Guggers jumped up, and, followed by the captain, left the cabin. A few minutes later the sound of a scuffle was heard on deck—then silence.

Those in the cabin looked from one to another a little anxiously, all except Dick Little and Windover, the last-named appearing absorbed in a cigarette.

"I don't like this at all," said Furzon in a complaining voice. "It's—it's——" He paused, and looked across at Wilmer.

"Most confoundedly awkward—what!" said Wilmer. "Wireless jammed too."

"Damned unpleasant," muttered Raynes.

"Looks as if we might have our throats cut before morning," said Dick Little. "I——" He stopped suddenly as Guggers entered the cabin, an unaccustomed scowl upon his countenance.

"I say," began Furzon; but at a savage glance from Guggers he subsided.

"Now then, come along, you fellows," he said, "let's get a breather. It's as hot as hell down here," and he led the

way on deck.

Furzon made a bee-line for Captain McMurdo, and enquired if he did not think it advisable to make for some port where assistance would be available if required.

"I'm no the owner, Mester Furzon," was the response, whereat Furzon had flushed angrily as the captain turned on his heel and calmly walked away.

"I'm damned if I like the look of things," said Raynes, a cheery, bald-headed boy, with blue eyes and a chin that failed. "Still, if there's going to be a scrap, well, here's for it," and he drew a cigarette-case from his pocket with a flourish as if it had been some lethal weapon.

"I think that Arkshaw's rather high-handed methods are aggravating things," said Furzon, declining the cigarette that Raynes proffered him on the score of its being American.

"And you a Divine Righter," murmured Windover with a smile.

"Oh! Furzon's turned Bolshevik," grinned Wilmer, a man with a bullet-shaped head with wits to match.

At that moment the chief engineer rushed out from the engine-room hatchway and made for the bridge, to which the captain had retired and was standing in conversation with the chief officer. A moment later McMurdo, an automatic pistol in his hand, made his way towards the engine-room.

Furzon, Raynes, and Wilmer exchanged anxious glances. Dick Little and Windover were discussing the Beckett-Carpentier fight.

"Where's McMurdo?" demanded Guggers, coming out of the chart-house.

"He's just gone into the engine-room with the chief engineer," said Raynes.

"He had a pistol with him," volunteered Furzon.

"It looks like trouble," added Wilmer.

"I say, Arkshaw, is there—er—er—any danger?" said Furzon.

"There will be for some of those swinehund," said Guggers grimly over his shoulder as he, too, walked towards the engine-room hatchway.

Five minutes later Guggers reappeared, followed by the captain.

"Where's that scoundrel, Bindle?" roared Guggers. "Send him aft. He's at the bottom of all the trouble."

"Pass the word for'ard for Bindle to come aft," ordered the captain. The men were clustered in small groups about the fo'c'sle, talking together in low voices; but no effort was made to pass the word for Bindle.

"This is rank mutiny," said Guggers, turning to the captain.

"I'm no likin' it at all, sir," said McMurdo, with gloomy sincerity.

A few minutes later Bindle appeared up the fo'c'sle hatchway; but he made no move to come aft, and Guggers returned to his guests.

The rest of the day passed without unusual incident. The stokers, it appeared, had downed shovels, refusing to work unless the men in irons were released, and only the persuasive eloquence of the chief engineer, assisted by the captain's automatic pistol, had persuaded them to resume their duties.

Furzon had suggested that under the circumstances perhaps it might be better to terminate the cruise and put them ashore, but Guggers ignored the remark. Apparently he had not heard.

"It's strange that Bindle should be mixed up in a mutiny," said Windover that evening to Dick Little, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe preparatory to turning in.

"It is," said Dick Little dryly.

"Looks as if there's going to be trouble," remarked Windover.

"It does," said Dick Little.

IV

How long he had been asleep, Furzon did not know, but suddenly he found himself wide awake with pandemonium taking place about him. Overhead there was a rushing of feet, pistol-shots stabbed the air; there was the roar of escaping steam, and, almost before he realised what was happening, his cabin door was torn open and men streamed in, with Bindle at their head.

"Come along; 'op out," he ordered, presenting a pistol within a few inches of Furzon's cheek.

At the sight of the pistol Furzon recoiled violently and bumped his head against the panelling.

"Come on; out with 'im," roared Bindle, and the slim form of Montague Michael Furzon, in silk pyjamas of alternate broad stripes of pale green and white, was torn from beneath the coverlet, and stood upright.

"My God!" he muttered through lips that were grey and trembling.

PART II

JOSEPH BINDLE, PIRATE

I

Furzon stared about him with a dazed and stupid expression. He blinked his eyes and looked from one man to another. Finally his gaze rested upon Bindle, whose head was bound with a red silk handkerchief, whilst his left eye was obscured by a black patch. Round his waist was a broad leathern belt, with a brass buckle that would have been the envy of any swashbuckler of the Spanish Main. Into this belt were thrust a veritable arsenal of knives and pistols.

Although less heavily encrusted with weapons, Bindle's companions presented an equally savage and cut-throat appearance. One man's head was tied up with a blood-stained rag, another had his hand wound round with a field-dressing, whilst the fair hair of a third was matted together with an ugly black-looking stain like congealed blood.

Furzon shuddered, and something like a sob involuntarily broke from him.

"Now then," cried Bindle, drawing from his belt a long knife that caused his victim to wince, "get 'im upstairs, an' mind 'e don't give you the slip."

At that moment unearthly howls and screams drifted down from the upper deck, followed a moment later by a splash and a pistol-shot. Furzon's lips moved, and he swallowed with a gulping sound that to him sounded like the report of a gun.

"That's one of the ruddy swine," growled a man in a red shirt and a hard hat, beneath which showed the edge of an orange handkerchief binding his head. "Silly sort o' game I call it. Gi'e me the knife every time."

"Personally, myself," said Bindle, "I likes to see 'em walkin' the plank. It's funnier. 'Ere, 'oof on, Monty."

Furzon hesitated, glancing over his shoulder as if he saw in the cabin his one chance of safety.

"'Ere, prod 'im behind with that knife," cried the man grasping Furzon's right arm. "Make 'im 'op."

Bindle dropped behind; but Furzon started forward desperately, dragging his captors with him. As he passed into the saloon he started back in horror. There, doubled up, apparently as he had fallen, lay a man with a dark stain oozing from beneath him. Furzon could not see who it was. A touch from Bindle's knife caused him to bound forward towards the companion-way and finally on to the upper deck.

Here a ghastly scene presented itself. The body of the captain lay half in, half out of the chart-house, whilst a few yards away the chief engineer, an automatic pistol in his hand, was writhing in agony. The second officer lay doubled up, but still breathing, his face unrecognisable from the blood with which it was covered. Several members of the crew were sitting or lying about, obviously wounded, and the deck seemed to be literally running with blood.

Furzon blinked his eyes and gazed about him. The sea was very still, and the *Sybil* lay motionless, a film of steam escaping from the side of her funnel. The sun was just tipping the horizon, flushing the sky and sea with pink. A faint breeze rippled the water fitfully, whilst gulls flew lazily overhead, or bobbed about on the surface. From somewhere came a curious clicking sound.

Automatically Furzon's brain seemed to register all these things.

The party passed round the deck-house to the port quarter. Furzon halted mechanically. There before him was a long plank balanced upon the bulwarks, to which it was lashed in such a way that one end overhung the water.

In a flash he realised its sinister meaning.

Grouped at the head of the plank he saw Guggers, Raynes, Wilmer, Windover, Dick Little, the first officer and the second engineer, all with their hands bound behind them. With the exception of the two officers, all were in pyjamas, some showing obvious signs of a struggle. Raynes was scarcely decent, whilst Dick Little seemed to have lost a lot of blood, to judge from the state of his clothing.

Furzon gave an agonised glance at Guggers, who, however, took no notice of his presence. His face was hard and set. He, too, showed signs of a struggle.

In the scuppers a huddled mass moved and a face appeared, ghastly in its death-like pallor. A figure raised itself upon an elbow, then with a groan collapsed again into a meaningless mass.

Behind the prisoners was grouped the greater part of the crew, many of them showing evidences of battle. One man had his arm in a sling, another a trouser-leg cut off at the knee and in its place a blood-stained bandage. All were armed with pistols, whilst vicious-looking knives, suggestive of the cook's galley, were thrust in their belts. Several of the stokers were naked to the waist, their moist and coal-smearred skins glistening in the morning sun.

"Now then, get on with it," cried the bos'n. "I'm as 'ungry as 'ell, and I smell rations."

"Well, since we're all 'ere an' there ain't none missin'," said Bindle genially, "let's proceed."

As he spoke he drew a wicked-looking automatic pistol from his belt.

"Who's for lead an' who's for water?" He turned enquiringly to the group of guests and ship's officers.

"Gug-gug-go to hell!" growled Guggers, his eyes staring straight in front of him.

Bindle turned to Furzon, who was making gallant efforts to keep his lower jaw still. Bindle eyed Guggers deliberately.

"You want to be shot, or would you like to do an 'igh dive?" he enquired cheerily.

"A shark! a shark!" yelled a man standing by the rail, pointing excitedly to the water.

A sinister black triangle was to be seen moving steadily from the *Sybil* in the direction of the rising sun.

"There's another!" yelled the bos'n, pointing to a second black fin on the port bow.

Several of the men strolled over to the side, and stood leaning against the rail, gazing with interest at the black objects.

"Somebody else wants their breakfast as well as me," said the bos'n casually. "All right, johnnies," he added, addressing the black triangles, "we ain't a-goin' to keep you long."

Bindle turned once more to Furzon, whose face was grey, and his lower jaw quivering.

"Will anyone give me a cigarette?" It was Windover who spoke. His habitual calmness had not forsaken him. From the moment of the first alarm he had been unmoved by the course of events. "My case is here," and he nodded his head in the direction of the breast-pocket of his pyjamas.

A man stepped forward and, taking out the case, opened it and placed a cigarette between Windover's lips, helping himself to one at the same time. He then placed the case in his own pocket and, striking a match, lighted both cigarettes.

"Thanks," said Windover, "that's awfully kind of you."

"Here, come on, get on with it," shouted the bos'n. "I'm hungry and——"

"Now, look 'ere, ole sport," interrupted Bindle, "I'm runnin' this 'ere little show, an' if you ain't got a fancy for the 'igh divin' business yourself, you'd better keep that little bit o' pink gristle between them ugly teeth o' yours."

"Well, get on with it," murmured several of the men; and one of them discharged his pistol just behind Furzon's head, causing him to start forward and very nearly bring his captors to the deck.

"Now then," cried Bindle in a business-like way, "owner first. Lead or water for you, sir?" he demanded, turning to Guggers.

"You damn scoundrels!" Guggers ground out between his clenched teeth. "You'll hang for this—everyone of you."

"Right-o!" said Bindle cheerfully; "water it is"; and Guggers moved towards the head of the plank.

"Let 'im go, boys," he cried as Guggers began to walk along the plank, which sagged beneath his weight. "If e' comes any of 'is tricks, shoot away."

Very calmly and deliberately Guggers walked the plank. When he reached the point at which it was bound to the bulwarks he paused, and, turning his head, said over his shoulder, "You'll hang for this—everyone of you"; then he took two or three quick steps forward and, almost before anyone knew what was happening, the end of the plank tilted and he disappeared. A second later a tremendous splash announced that he had reached the water. Those who were near the side gazed down excitedly. Presently there was a yell of, "They've got him"; and Furzon's heart grew sick within him.

"Now then, next!" cried Bindle, and Dick Little stepped to the head of the plank and, with a quick run, dived off the

bulwarks. In doing so he raised his hands above his head.

"Look, 'e's broken loose!" yelled Bindle. "Pot 'im, boys." There was a spatter of pistol-shots.

"All right, sharkie!" yelled somebody. "There's more coming!"

"Next!" cried Bindle, turning to the group of victims. "Wot about you?" he queried, pointing to Furzon with his automatic.

For a moment Furzon gazed about him as if seeking for help, then, with a wild scream of terror, he burst from his captors and dashed past Bindle towards the chart-house, then, doubling suddenly, he tore for'ard, the whole of the mutineers in full cry after him.

Pandemonium broke out. Yells, cries, and exhortations were heard on every side, above which could be distinguished the screams of Furzon. Then, as if by magic, a death-like silence fell over the *Sybil*. The prisoners looked at each other in surprise.

"What the devil?" cried Raynes, who was looking very pale but determined.

"In all probability it's the triumph of law and order," remarked Windover, as with his tongue he strove to detach the end of his still burning cigarette from his lower lip.

Just as he had reached the steps leading to the fo'c'sle, Furzon's legs seemed to sag beneath him, and he crumpled up on the deck. He had fainted.

The men clustered round the inert form, nonplussed at the turn events had taken, and feeling a little self-conscious.

"Fainted, ain't he?" queried a particularly ill-favoured ruffian of the bos'n.

"Fainted!" repeated the bos'n, regarding the man with withering scorn. "Course not. What made you think that? 'E's only jazzing,"; and with that he turned his back.

For a moment Bindle hesitated. Then, quick as a flash, he cried in a hoarse whisper:

"'Ere, get 'im back to 'is bunk an' clear up all this mess."

Two men picked up the inert form of Furzon and made for the companion-way. As they reached the saloon they saw the dripping form of Dick Little pass into his cabin.

Quickly Furzon was put into his bunk and covered with the bedclothes. The door was then closed and the men rushed back on deck to help with the swabbing. As soon as Furzon showed signs of returning consciousness, Bindle left him and returned on deck.

The "dead" captain and the "dying" officers and men had come to life. The bonds of the prisoners had been cut, and they were grouped round Bindle, listening to his explanation of "'ow it 'appened."

"Now you all 'op it into bed again, an' when 'e comes round we'll tell 'im it was a dream." He proceeded to tear the red handkerchief from his head and draw out the arsenal of weapons from his belt, which he placed on the chart-room table. The chief engineer bolted down to the engine-room. The chief officer took charge, and soon men were rushing round with swab and bucket making things ship-shape. Within ten minutes, the *Sybil* had once more resumed her course and her crew were busily occupied in holy-stoning the decks, particularly certain portions where dark red stains put up a good resistance.

"How was I to know he was gug-gug-going to turn out such an utter funk?" demanded Guggers, his face appearing between the folds of the towel. "Dick and I took the worst of it. Think of those gug-gug-ghastly sharks," he grinned.

"By the way, what about the sharks?" enquired Windover calmly.

"Baines's idea," said Guggers. "He's chief engineer, you know"; then he explained the mechanism.

"I see," said Windover. "In the meantime one of your cut-throats has got my cigarette-case," he remarked.

"What are you going to say to Furzon?" asked Raynes, just as Bindle, stripped of his pirate war-paint, entered.

"We'll tell 'im it was all a dream," he said with a grin.

"Gug-gug-great idea," cried Guggers, making a dive at Bindle to embrace him; but Bindle dodged and bolted up on deck.

"I'm going to have another sleep, what!" said Wilmer. "It's only three o'clock."

Soon there was silence in the saloon and cabins of the *Sybil*.

II

Some five hours later Bindle proceeded to knock at the cabin doors of the guests of the *Sybil*. He received various responses, varying from Wilmer's grunt to Guggers's "Go to hell!" Furzon had been reserved for the last call. Bindle had scarcely begun a tattoo with his knuckles upon the wooden panel of his door when there was a loud report, and a bullet whizzed past his head.

"'Ere, wot the 'ell?" he cried, starting back and dodging out of range.

A moment later there was a noise of cabin doors being pulled back, and soon Guggers, Wilmer, Raynes, Windover, and Dick Little, together with Thomas, were clustered round Bindle, demanding to know what had happened and who had fired the shot.

"Shot me when I was takin' 'im 'ot water," complained Bindle. With a wink, he added in a louder voice: "'E's done me in, sure enough."

Without a word, Guggers edged towards Furzon's door, taking care to keep close up against the partition.

"What the deuce are you up to?" he shouted.

The reply was a second shot, and a moment later a voice from within the cabin cried: "I'm armed, and I'll shoot anyone who comes near." The threat tailed off into a high falsetto.

"What the devil's the matter with you, Furzon?" shouted Guggers. "Have you gug-gug-gone mad?"

"If you come near, I'll shoot," screamed Furzon.

"He's gug-gug-gone out of his mind," said Guggers, turning to the others; then once more addressing Furzon, he said: "If you don't stop this fooling, I'll have the door broken in."

"Who's that speaking?" enquired Furzon.

"It's I, Arkshaw."

"He's dead!" was the retort. "They killed him this morning."

"Don't be a damn fool, Furzon," shouted Guggers. "Can't you recognise my voice? Here, you chaps, speak to him," he said to the others.

In turn Raynes, Windover, Wilmer and Dick Little expostulated with Furzon, who, under this mass of evidence, seemed to weaken.

"Here, Mac," cried Guggers, "speak to this damn fool in here. He's trying to pot us all through the cabin door."

As he spoke Captain McMurdo descended the companion-way.

"Keep out of range," warned Guggers.

The captain skipped aside with remarkable agility.

"Mester Furzon," he said persuasively.

"Who's that?" cried Furzon.

"It's me, McMurdo; I'm no wishing to be onreasonable; but I'll no ha'e promeescuous shooting on my vessel."

"He's killed one steward," said Dick Little loudly.

There was a sound of movement inside the cabin. Presently the door was drawn a few inches aside, and a hand protruded, holding an automatic pistol. Behind the pistol could be seen the terrified eyes of Furzon.

"Now then, Furzon," said Guggers, "don't be a gug-gug-giddy ass. Just drop all this foolery and put that thing away. There's been trouble enough already. You've killed one of my stewards."

"I'll kill anybody who comes near," announced Furzon.

"Maybe you'll no be onderstanding the reesk you're running, Mester Furzon," said McMurdo; then to Guggers he added under his breath: "I'm no liking this at all, sir. There's ma certeefficate."

Bindle had already collapsed upon the cabin floor, assuming an attitude that he conceived to be suitable to one overtaken by a sudden and violent death. Dick Little went over to him.

At the sight of Guggers and Dick Little the pistol dropped from Furzon's shaking fingers.

During breakfast, at which he sat like a ghost at a feast, Furzon told of the "mutiny," how he had been awakened by pistol-shots and the sound of a scuffle. He told how men had trooped into his cabin, Bindle at their head, had made him a prisoner and finally taken him on deck, where he had found the others awaiting their fate.

He described in detail the positions occupied by the captain and the other officers on the deck; how he had seen Guggers and Dick Little walk the plank, and how they had been devoured by sharks. As he told of how he had broken away from his captors there crept into his voice something that reminded Guggers of his club stories of hairbreadth escapes. He gave his hearers to understand that, single-handed, he had fought his way through the whole crew, and had finally found himself back in his cabin, where, securing a pistol he always carried, he had sat waiting to be attacked.

"That was when you woke up, you gug-gug-giddy ass," Guggers broke in.

Furzon ignored the interruption, and continued to tell how for a short time he had heard voices, which convinced him that an attack was being planned; but these had died down and he heard nothing more until he was awakened from a doze by someone knocking at his cabin door.

"And then you let fly, what!" said Wilmer, disgusted at the way in which Furzon was endeavouring to depict himself a hero, even in what he must now realise was only a dream.

"Well, if Bindle dies you'll gug-gug-get five years," said Guggers cheerfully.

Furzon looked appealingly to Dick Little; but he made no sign.

After the meal Furzon went on deck and, going down on his hands and knees, proceeded to examine various spots as if he had been a detective in a novel.

"You've had a bad dream, Furzon," said Raynes.

"But what about Bindle?" enquired Windover.

"Can't we just drop his body overboard and say nothing about it, what?" suggested Wilmer.

"I didn't hit him," protested Furzon. "I heard him speak."

"I hope they won't want me," said Windover to Guggers. "I hate inquests."

"It's Furzon they'll want, what!" said Wilmer.

"I say, Arkshaw," began Furzon, "you're only—— I didn't——"

"It's all right, sir, I always was pretty nippy on my feet."

Furzon turned as if someone had struck him, and stood looking down at Bindle's genial grin.

"My God!" he murmured, as he wilted into a chair.

"E's 'ad enough, sir," said Bindle to Guggers in a whisper. "It don't seem fair to rub it in too much."

"Then——then I didn't hit you?" he stammered, looking up at Bindle as if he had been a life-belt and Furzon in danger of drowning.

"It wasn't your fault," growled Guggers.

"No, sir," said Bindle cheerfully. "My missis used to practise on me once with plates, an' I learned to dodge. She's dropped it now, it cost too much, an' no 'its; but I ain't forgot 'ow to side-step when things is coming my way."

"I think, Arkshaw," said Furzon, recovering his assurance, "that it was extremely rotten of you to lead me to think I had——" He paused.

"Gug-gug-get out," laughed Guggers. "This isn't a ladies' school. Besides, it was as near a thing as Bindle is ever likely to have."

Furzon looked suspiciously at Guggers and then on to the others. He was not yet satisfied about that "dream"; yet he was puzzled to account for how he had come to be guarding his cabin door pistol in hand.

III

The *Sybil* was proceeding under easy steam in the direction of Southampton Water. Furzon had announced that it was necessary for him to be in town as soon as possible; but two days had elapsed. The owner of the *Sybil* had his own reasons for delay.

The atmosphere had been constrained and Furzon seemed to have become aware that he was not so popular as he might be with his fellow-guests, this in spite of the fact that Guggers endeavoured to keep the conversational ball tossing impartially.

That morning at breakfast Guggers had announced that he had a pleasant little entertainment for the evening in the shape of a cinema show.

"Are we as dull as that?" enquired Windover.

"As dull as what?"

"That we require a cinema to entertain us."

"Wait and see," was Guggers's response.

"He's mistaken us for a Sunday-school treat, what!" remarked Wilmer with a laugh.

Guggers picked up Wilmer as if he had been a cushion and, carrying him to the side, held him over the water, threatening to drop him in if he did not retract.

"Kamerad! Kamerad!" cried Wilmer, and he was deposited once more on the deck.

After dinner that evening a screen was fitted up in the saloon, and Guggers made a preliminary speech in which he said that art had always been to him mother and child. "*Ars longa, vita brevis*," he quoted, and proceeded to exhort his guests never to hesitate to make sacrifices in the interests of the sacred cause. She was the one mistress who never failed and he would now leave her to speak for herself.

His hearers looked at one another as if hoping to find some explanation of Guggers's words. Furzon was clearly ill-at-ease. He glanced apprehensively over his shoulder, as if to assure himself that retreat was still open to him.

The lights were switched off, and immediately a white disc fluttered upon the screen for a few seconds, then it resolved itself into a large skull and cross-bones, and beneath the words, "The Mutiny of the *Sybil*."

Furzon started violently, half rose from his chair, but subsided. His nerves were still a trifle ragged.

The screen began to show events of what to Furzon was to prove a memorable morning. First were shown the various members of the crew engaged in making up as pirates. Then the capture of the passengers; the attack on the officers and the murder of the captain, Furzon coming on deck, Guggers and Dick Little walking the plank and, finally, Furzon escaping from his captors, the pursuit, his collapse in a faint, and his being carried towards the saloon.

There followed the cleaning up of the decks, and later Furzon was shown down on his hands and knees investigating. Everything was depicted with damning faithfulness up to the point where Bindle appeared behind Furzon just before he collapsed into a chair. Then came darkness, out of which the voice of Guggers was heard.

"I must apologise to you fellows, Wilmer, Furzon, Raynes, and Windover, for this little rag; but since the war life's been a bit dull, so Little, Bindle, and I thought we'd pull your legs. It will be your turn next. I confess I had not anticipated Furzon trying to pot J. B."

"I 'opes they'll show that film in Fulham," said Bindle in a loud whisper from somewhere in the darkness.

"That's just what you would hope, you ruffian," cried Guggers. "In all probability it won't be shown anywhere."

"How the devil did you manage the cinema?" asked Raynes of Guggers.

"Quite a brain-wave, what!" said Wilmer.

Windover lighted another cigarette and said nothing.

"He was fixed up in one of the boats. I was afraid you'd hear his old machine," said Guggers with a happy grin.

"I s'pose I couldn't 'ave a photo of myself as a pirate?" said Bindle as he came up behind Guggers's chair.

"You shall have one framed, you blood-thirsty old ruffian," cried Guggers.

"You see, I've always 'eard that women is nuts on bloods, an' my little bit of 'eaven in Fulham would sort of raise 'er eyebrows."

The next morning they landed at Southampton. It was a very chastened Furzon that stepped ashore.

Subsequently at Gray's Club men marvelled at the change in Montague Michael Furzon. The great hunter had vanished, the valiant pioneer was no more, and all that was left was his six foot of thinness, with a narrow, sleek head, a peevish expression and, occasionally, the patch-and-powder stare, which never failed to vanish at the sight of Guggers.

Windover, however, was busy planning a return event for Guggers, and some day perhaps the story may be told.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. HEARTY LOSES HIS TROUSERS

I

"Well, 'Earty," remarked Bindle as he entered the Heartys' parlour and winked at Mrs. Hearty, "so you got to be a soldier."

Mr. Hearty's eyes shifted nervously from Bindle's face and back again.

"I—I think it's scandalous," he protested in woolly but indignant tones.

"Wot's scandalous?" enquired Bindle, seating himself, and, producing his pipe, he proceeded to charge it with great deliberation.

"The raising of the military age," said Mr. Hearty with unwonted decision. "How will they pay for the war?"

Bindle scratched his head meditatively. "I suppose they thought o' that before they did it," he ventured tentatively. "Still, you might send 'em a post card."

"What is to happen to my three shops if they take me?" demanded Mr. Hearty.

"Well," remarked Bindle judicially, as he struck a match and sucked contentedly at his pipe, "what would 'appen to your shops if the 'Uns was to come, 'Earty? You'd never be able to speak German through them whiskers o' yours," and he shook his head with mournful conviction.

"I shall appeal," announced Mr. Hearty. "Besides," he continued, "I have been far from well of late. I must have been overworking."

"Funny thing," remarked Bindle dryly, "wot a lot o' coves there is wot is feelin' far from well just now. Sort o' took 'em all at once, it did. Billy Stofton was askin' me to-day wot various veins is like and if you can catch 'em. Seemed to sort o' want to rub 'is legs against mine in the 'ope o' being able to get 'em."

"I'm flat-footed," announced Mr. Hearty, quite oblivious that Bindle had made a remark.

"You don't say so," said Bindle with concern.

"And my heart——" began Mr. Hearty.

"Your 'eart's in the right place, 'Earty," interrupted Bindle. "I always said that."

"Those medical examinations," said Mr. Hearty, "they're—they're disgusting."

"They're wot?" enquired Bindle with interest.

"They're disgusting. Having to go before doctors with—with nothing on," said Mr. Hearty.

"But they ain't women doctors," said Bindle with a puzzled expression.

"Joseph, how can you?" said Mr. Hearty reproachfully, conscious that Mrs. Hearty was wheezing and almost choking with laughter.

"It ain't disgustin' standin' up with nothink on before a man, 'Earty."

"It's not nice, it's most unpleasant," said Mr. Hearty with decision. "I shall protest."

"Well, they might allow you to wear some beads, or a bunch o' lilies o' the valley," said Bindle. "I 'ear that these 'ere medical chaps ain't so bad."

"It's no joking matter, Joseph. It worries me—it worries me very much," Mr. Hearty added after a pause.

"But wot 'ave you got to be ashamed of in your own body, 'Earty. You don't 'ave clothes on when you go in a bath, do you?"

"There's no one present, Joseph, and—and——"

"My, ain't we sensitive? You might be a young gal. Now, if you was like Percy Baynes, I could understand it. Pore old Perce is that big in front that 'e can't see 'is toes. 'E wouldn't know 'e 'ad 'em if it wasn't that sometimes coves tread on 'em to sort o' remind 'im. Now, 'e would be a pretty sight for the doctors."

"Joseph—I—I think you are quite—quite coarse," protested Mr. Hearty.

"Well, well, 'Earty, all I 'opes is that we gets called up for the examination together, then I'll stand by and tell 'em that you're sort of sensitive, and perhaps they'll let you open an umbrella an' take it in with you."

"I shall appeal," announced Mr. Hearty for the second time.

"It ain't no good, 'Earty, they ain't going to allow no appeals. Everybody's got to go."

"I'm sure to be Grade Three," said Mr. Hearty faintly, as if endeavouring to convince himself.

"Not a bit of it, 'Earty; there ain't no Grade Three about you. You're Grade One as sure as eggs. Everybody's going to be Grade One. We got to win this 'ere war."

Bindle was determined that Mr. Hearty should gather no comfort from his words.

"I think it's an absolute scandal," cried Mr. Hearty, looking about him like some hunted animal. "I shall write to the paper about it."

"I shouldn't," said Bindle. "Once you get into khaki with them whiskers, you'll be able to 'ave the pick of all the girls on Putney 'Ill. A civvy ain't got a ghost of a chance when there's khaki about."

"Well, I'm blowed," cried Bindle, "if this ain't jest IT."

Mrs. Bindle looked up from a piece of bread she was spreading with margarine.

"What's the matter now?" she snapped.

"Blest if ole 'Earty 'asn't been called up at the same time as me for medical examination. 'Old me, 'Grace!" he exclaimed. "That's going to be an 'appy day."

"When is he called up?" enquired Mrs. Bindle anxiously.

"Oh, Lizzie, Lizzie, ain't you a fickle woman? 'Ere's yer lawful wedded 'usband a-goin' to lay down 'is life for 'is bloomin' country, and you askin' when another cove's goin' to be called up. We're both going to 'ave our ribs punched and our chests tapped an' our tummies 'it on Saturday at two o'clock at the White City," he added.

"I think it's a shame," announced Mrs. Bindle.

"What's a shame?" enquired Bindle.

"That Mr. Hearty should have to go. He's much more useful where he is."

"We got to win this 'ere little scrap, Mrs. B.," announced Bindle, "and it looks as if Llewellyn John don't see 'ow 'e's goin' to do it without 'Earty, so 'Earty's got to go up, strip to the pink an' do a little song an' dance before——"

"Don't be disgusting, Bindle," snapped Mrs. Bindle.

"'Earty with clothes on ain't a pleasant sight; but wot 'e must be with 'is clothes orf—well, you may search me," announced Bindle, grinning happily at the prospect of what the following Saturday would hold for him.

"What does Mr. Hearty say?" enquired Mrs. Bindle.

"'E jest wants to know if I'll take 'im by the 'and and lead 'im up, undress 'im and dress 'im again, put on 'is pinny, and see that nobody don't steal 'im."

"Are you going to?" enquired Mrs. Bindle sharply.

"Well, I suppose I must, Lizzie. You see, you don't know wot would 'appen to a cove like 'Earty if 'e was to lose his clothes, an' 'ave nothink to come 'ome in except 'is umbrella, 'is top 'at, an' them whiskers. Modest sort o' chap, 'Earty; makes 'im blush if you mention legs, and as for——"

"Stop it, Bindle," cried Mrs. Bindle; "remember I am present."

"I ain't never likely to forget that, Mrs. B.," said Bindle with mock mournfulness. "You're one o' those women wot stamps themselves on a man's mind. You're a 'I-ain't-a-goin'-to-be-forgotten' sort o' woman. I'd never be able to take up with another gal. I'd be sure to bust out a-cryin' when I thought o' you."

Bindle rose from the breakfast-table and, taking his cap from behind the kitchen door, went out.

For the rest of the week Bindle hugged himself at the prospect of what Saturday would produce. He foresaw possibilities as the result of Mr. Hearty's extreme modesty. As for himself, he had little hope of passing above Grade Three. "Various veins," he had remarked, "is 'ell when you want to be a soldier."

At a quarter-past one on the following Saturday, Bindle presented himself at Mr. Hearty's shop in the Fulham Road, and found Mr. Hearty ready awaiting him.

"'Ullo, 'Earty!" he cried. "My, ain't we dressy?"

He surveyed Mr. Hearty with approval from the silk hat with the deep black band down to the black trousers and the white semi-clerical tie of nonconformity.

"Got an umbrella too, case it rains. They'll pass you Grade One on that get-up, 'Earty, sure as sure; but," and he took a step backwards in order to obtain a more comprehensive view of his brother-in-law, "it do look like a funeral, 'Earty, strike me lavender if it don't."

"Hadn't we better be going, Joseph," said Mr. Hearty, deliberately ignoring Bindle's pleasantries. "I don't want to be late."

"Well, well, p'r'aps you're right. The sooner they sees you the 'appier they'll be. 'Ullo, Martha!" he cried as Mrs. Hearty emerged from the back-parlour, having heard Bindle's voice. "Good job it ain't you wot's got to go an' be——"

"Joseph!" expostulated Mr. Hearty.

"All right, 'Earty, don't you worry. Martha ain't goin' to blush at anythink I say—are you, Martha?"

But Mrs. Hearty was already reduced to wheezes of laughter, which had caused her sudden subsidence upon a bag of potatoes.

On the tram, which was crowded, Bindle kept up a bright and cheerful conversation upon the subject of medical examination, much to the embarrassment of Mr. Hearty and the amusement of the other passengers.

"You do look like a funeral, 'Earty, you do really." Bindle turned and surveyed Mr. Hearty again with great deliberation. "I wonder where they'll send you—France, most likely; they're wantin' men there."

Mr. Hearty shuddered.

"When you comes back with the V.C., an' no legs, we'll 'ave a band, not one of them 'ole-sale orders like when you started that new shop in Putney; but jest one simple sort o' band a-playin' 'ymns, with you a-bowin' from the carriage, an' all the gals a-throwin' flowers and kisses. My, wot a time it'll be, 'Earty. You won't mind then 'avin' shown them legs o' yours and that manly breast."

"Joseph!" expostulated Mr. Hearty. "Joseph, don't, please."

By the time they arrived at Shepherd's Bush, Mr. Hearty had serious doubts of the wisdom of inviting Bindle to accompany him to the White City. When he left the tram it was to the accompaniment of nods and significant winks, to which Bindle responded in kind.

"Thirty-three, Medical Board No. 6," announced the door-keeper at the White City as he handed Bindle a ticket. "Round to the left, please." "Thirty-four, Medical Board No. 6," he announced to Mr. Hearty. "Round the corner to the left to the desk," he added.

Bindle walked on, Mr. Hearty following him, till he came to a table at which four girls and two soldier clerks were seated.

Mr. Hearty blushed at the thought of women being associated with anything so indelicate as a medical examination of men. In a vague way he heard Bindle giving particulars to a bright-eyed dark girl, who was filling in a buff-coloured paper. He wondered with horror to what lengths of intimacy these particulars would extend. It was with a sense of relief that he heard the girl direct Bindle to walk straight on to the room on the left and take a seat until he was called.

The girl had elicited nothing but the most commonplace particulars as to Bindle's address, age, employment, Christian names, etc.; still Mr. Hearty felt that it was not conducive to modesty or morality that girls should be employed in such an environment. He was interrupted in his speculations as to the probable effect of such associations upon a young and immature nature by the girl asking him his name, if his occupation were still the same, and a few other perfectly decorous questions. Then he in turn was told to pass along to the white rooms on the left, and take a seat until

he was called.

He found Bindle deep in conversation with a man whose diction was elaborately decorated. In the course of five minutes Mr. Hearty heard that the man had been in the ruddy navy, what he thought of stuttering medical boards, what should be done to the pinkish Huns, how he had been gassed in a blinkin' chemical factory explosion, with the result that a pint of scarlet beer now reduced him to a state of the bejewelled land-lubber in a choppy sea.

Mr. Hearty shuddered that such language could emanate from human lips. Bindle, on the other hand, listened with interest, conscious that there was no venom in the man, and that his language was merely the ordinary everyday idiom he adopted.

"Board 6, Nos. 31, 32, 33, 34," called an attendant a few minutes later.

Mr. Hearty shivered and stood up, then sat down again.

"That's you an' me, 'Earty," announced Bindle, rising with alacrity and walking towards the door of the building that had been indicated to him.

The attendant looked at their tickets, and in a business-like way bade them follow him. Nos. 31 and 32 were duly stowed away in a small cubicle about four feet wide and about six feet long, heavily whitewashed, with one clothes-peg and a wooden seat at the end. The attendant turned his attention to Mr. Hearty and Bindle and ushered them into a similar cubicle, dropping the curtain behind them and telling them to get undressed quickly. "Keep your coats on," he added. Mr. Hearty looked about him with marked disapproval.

"Can we—must we——"

"Seems like it," said Bindle, beginning to unlace his boots.

"Er—er—perhaps you had better undress first, Joseph. I will turn my back," said Hearty with great delicacy.

"Don't mind me, 'Earty. 'Ere, steady, ole sport; you're takin' all the whitewash off the wall."

Mr. Hearty moved quickly away from the wall and screwed round to get a view of himself behind. He had certainly removed a considerable portion of the Government whitewash.

"Look 'ere, 'Earty, you'd better get them duds orf as quickly as you can, otherwise they'll come for us, an' if you ain't ready, then they put you down as Grade One without givin' you a chance." Bindle winked at the clothes-peg on the wall.

"But—but——" protested Mr. Hearty.

"It ain't any good startin' butts on a job like this 'ere, 'Earty. You be nice to them, an' they'll be nice to you; but if you gets shirty—well—then you'll find yourself in Grade One a-'andling of a rifle and bayonet before you know wot's 'appened."

Mr. Hearty removed his hat and hung it on the peg. He then placed his umbrella in the corner.

"But—but we can't both undress together, Joseph," he protested. "It——"

"Very well, 'Earty," said Bindle, removing his collar and tie, "it's up against you, not me. You an' me 'ave got to go in an' do a little dance in front o' three or four gents wot'll tell us wot fine chaps we are. Wot they'll do is to 'it you 'ard in the stummick, an' if you faints you're Grade One; if you don't faint, they 'its you again, an' then when you comes out of 'ospital you goes into the Volunteers."

Slowly Mr. Hearty removed his coat and waistcoat, delicately keeping his eyes averted from Bindle.

"Thirty-one and thirty-two, Medical Board No. 6," called out the attendant from without.

"Now then, 'Earty, 'urry up or you'll be late. It's us next."

"If—if you'll wait outside, Joseph, I'll—I'll soon be ready," said Mr. Hearty, who had removed all his clothing with the exception of his shirt and trousers. These he considered necessary for decency.

"Bashful as young gals used to be before the war," muttered Bindle to the attendant with a wink as he lifted the curtain and passed out.

"The doctors are waiting," said the attendant.

"Right-o," replied Bindle, "we're worth waiting for, me an' 'Earty."

The attendant grinned good-humouredly.

"'Ere, come along, 'Earty, my legs is gettin' cold in this 'ere draught," expostulated Bindle.

At that moment Mr. Hearty appeared at the door, his frock-coat buttoned tightly across his chest, his legs and feet bare.

"Where's your 'at?" enquired Bindle.

"My hat?" said Mr. Hearty.

"You ain't goin' in there without your 'at, are you?" said Bindle, pulling his cap from his pocket and putting it on his head.

Mr. Hearty darted back and assumed his top-hat. Bindle turned away suddenly.

"Nos. 33 and 34, Medical Board No. 6," called the attendant from the entrance to the room in which the Medical Board sat.

"Come along, 'Earty," expostulated Bindle, making for the doorway.

They passed into a room intersected by chest-high flimsy green screens. As he entered the room Mr. Hearty stopped dead, and turned his head aside. Before him he saw two men in a state of nature being examined by doctors. He looked about him wildly, as if seeking for some means of escape.

"This way, sir, please," said the attendant. "Will you sit down there? The doctor will be free in a minute." He pointed to a chair within a few feet of what looked like a living skeleton, who was having his legs examined. An attendant whispered to Mr. Hearty to take his hat off, which he did and held upon his knees.

The doctor, a good-humoured man whom weeks of medical examining had not been able to sour, hid a smile. Bindle gazed round him with interest.

"Sort of White 'Ope, ain't 'e?" he whispered to the clerk seated at the table, nodding his head in the direction of the living skeleton who was having his legs examined. The clerk grinned, then, catching the doctor's eye, looked reproachfully at Bindle.

"Wait till you see my brother-in-law," said Bindle, indicating Mr. Hearty with a jerk of his thumb. "Regular 'Ackensmith, 'e is. There's nothing in Fulham wot can stand against 'im in the ring. Ain't that so, 'Earty?"

"If you talk to my clerk," said the doctor good-humouredly, "he'll get down the wrong figures, then perhaps somebody will be graded too high."

"You can't put me in too 'igh a grade, sir," said Bindle with a grin. "You make a Grade One o' me an' I'll thank you for the rest of my life."

The doctor looked at Bindle as if in doubt as to his seriousness.

"Various veins in me legs," explained Bindle.

The doctor nodded.

"Will you sign your name here please?" said the clerk to Mr. Hearty, who rose nervously and dropped his hat.

Mr. Hearty signed his name with shaking hand.

"Now take off your coat and put your hat down," said the attendant, seeing that the doctor had just completed the examination of the living skeleton.

"Not—not——" expostulated Mr. Hearty.

"Take your coat off, please," said the doctor.

"But—but—isn't it done in a private room?" stuttered Mr. Hearty.

"A private room," repeated the doctor, not understanding.

"'E's a bit shy, sir," explained Bindle, "sort o' blushes at the sight of 'imself, 'e does; but 'e don't mean no 'arm."

"You'll be all right here," said the doctor kindly. "Now take off your coat, please."

"But—but—the papers said that everybody turned their backs," said Mr. Hearty.

"How the devil am I going to examine you if I turn my back?" said the doctor with a comical expression of puzzlement.

"There—there are so many people," began Mr. Hearty.

"It's all right, 'Earty, they'll clap when they sees you. Come on, orf with yer duds, don't keep the doctor waitin'. Besides, I got a little thing in legs I want to show 'im wot'll make 'im sit up."

The chairman of the board at that moment came forward, and with a few tactful words soothed Mr. Hearty. He signed to the clerk to turn his back. Bindle put his hand across his eyes with the fingers wide apart.

"I ain't lookin', 'Earty," he said.

Mr. Hearty reluctantly removed his coat.

Bindle whistled. "My! 'e ain't much in 'is bath, is 'e? And you should jest see 'im eat too."

"You mustn't make remarks, please," said the doctor.

"Sorry, sir," said Bindle good-humouredly. "'E's my brother-in-law, and if you can't talk about yer own brother-in-law, I wonder 'oo the Ethel you can talk about."

"I'm—I'm not fit for military service," said Mr. Hearty nervously.

"Have you a medical certificate?" enquired the doctor.

"No," said Mr. Hearty. "I didn't bring any. I'm—I'm never really quite well."

"What do you suffer from?" enquired the doctor.

"Funk mostly," volunteered Bindle, "when the raids are on."

The doctor turned and silenced him with a look.

"I—I think I have a weak heart," said Mr. Hearty. "I never was strong."

For the next few minutes the doctor devoted himself to Mr. Hearty's heart.

"Have you anything else to complain of?" he asked patiently.

"I'm not a good walker," said Mr. Hearty. "I invariably take a bus."

"That's all right, 'Earty; there's a lot o' buses in France, all the way to the trenches."

The doctor bent to examine Mr. Hearty's feet and legs.

"Will you kneel, please."

"'E can do that, sir, right enough; 'e's always prayin' is 'Earty, a regular prayer 'og."

Mr. Hearty knelt swiftly.

"Now rise to your feet again," said the doctor.

Mr. Hearty did so awkwardly.

"Is there anything else?" enquired the doctor.

"I—I've got three businesses," said Mr. Hearty, "and—and I really couldn't go to the war."

The doctor concluded the examination, with "Flattish feet, soft."

"Soft *as* soft, sir," said Bindle; "there ain't nothing softer in Fulham."

"You really must not make remarks," said the doctor.

"But 'e's my own brother-in-law," expostulated Bindle, screwing up his face comically.

"It doesn't matter," said the doctor.

"Now, if you'll sit over there the chairman will see you in two or three minutes," said the doctor, motioning to Bindle to take Mr. Hearty's place.

Mr. Hearty made a dive for his coat and proceeded to wrap it round him with almost feverish energy. Then, taking his hat, he sat down with it upon his knees.

The doctor made a sign to Bindle to remove his coat.

"You needn't mention anything about these 'ere various veins in my legs, need you?" said Bindle.

"Not mention them?" asked the doctor.

"They got me into an 'ell of a mess. I tried to enlist 'undreds o' times, an' they always says my various veins will sort o' lose us the war."

The doctor bent down and examined Bindle's legs.

"Pretty bad," he murmured.

"Surely you ain't goin' against me, sir?" said Bindle anxiously.

"Going against you!"

"Yes," said Bindle, "all these other coves seem to 'ave got my various veins on their brains."

"You want to go, then?" said the doctor.

"*Rather*," was Bindle's response.

The doctor looked at him curiously. Not many men came before him who were anxious to be passed Grade One in spite of medical unfitness.

"I wish there were more like you," the doctor muttered.

"'Earty don't," said Bindle happily—"do you, 'Earty?"

But Mr. Hearty was absorbed in the contemplation of nothing in particular. He was brooding upon his ill-luck in being within the military age.

Bindle's examination was soon concluded, and he also was told to wait until the chairman had time to see him. Suddenly he started sneezing violently. After vainly searching his pockets, he slipped out with a muttered excuse that he had left his handkerchief in his trousers pocket.

A few minutes later he was back again, blowing his nose vigorously, just as the chairman told Mr. Hearty that he could get dressed.

Never had Mr. Hearty heard words that gave him greater satisfaction. He slipped out of the room and into the dressing-cubicle with a celerity that caused Bindle to remark: "I never see 'Earty so nippy on 'is feet."

Bindle's interview with the chairman was a short one. His medical sheet was not one calculated to fill the medico with hope. As he passed out into the corridor, he saw Mr. Hearty standing at the entrance to his cubicle in earnest converse with the two attendants.

"But they're gone," said Mr. Hearty.

The senior attendant turned to the junior attendant, who was in khaki. "Has anyone been through here?" he enquired.

"No one except those being examined."

"But I left them here when I went out," said Mr. Hearty in a woolly voice of protest, "and when I came back they were gone, they had disappeared," he added, as if to make the matter quite clear to the listening attendants.

"I'm very sorry, sir, I'll make enquiries," said the senior attendant.

"What's 'appened, 'Earty, wot's gone?"

"My trousers," said Mr. Hearty turning to Bindle a pair of serious and anxious eyes.

"Lost yer trousers, 'Earty," said Bindle.

"They've disappeared, Joseph."

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed Bindle. "If that ain't careless of you, 'Earty, losing things like them. Might a lost your coat; but to lose yer trousers, well, it don't seem to be quite decent to me."

"But they've been stolen," said Mr. Hearty. "They've been stolen while I was in the——"

"We are making enquiries, sir," said the junior attendant tactfully.

"Yes, but 'Earty can't go 'ome in enquiries, can 'e? It's trousers 'e wants," said Bindle.

"No doubt we shall find them," said the man hopefully.

"An' wot if you don't," persisted Bindle.

The man looked at him frankly at a loss.

"You see 'e ain't got the legs of an 'Ighlander, 'as 'e?" enquired Bindle as he looked down at Mr. Hearty's extremely thin legs showing beneath his frock-coat, "an' it's quite chilly to-day too. Good job you got a frock-coat, 'Earty, although," he added, as he examined its length critically, "it won't be much use on a tram."

"But—but I must have my trousers," said Mr. Hearty.

"Of course you must, 'Earty. Now look 'ere," said Bindle, turning to an attendant, "don't play any more jokes on 'im, 'e's sensitive like. Give 'im 'is trousers, like a good boy, or, if you can't give 'im 'is own, lend 'im yours. 'E'll send 'em back by parcels post. You'll 'ave 'em on Monday. Give you a day in bed to-morrow, it will. Now I'm going to dress. 'Ope they 'aven't taken my trousers." Bindle slipped into the cubicle and proceeded to resume his clothes.

Mr. Hearty stood in the corridor dexterously dodging behind the curtains when anyone approached.

"Look 'ere," said Bindle to the attendants, when he had finished dressing. "You'd better go and tell the doctor. 'Earty'll catch 'is death o' cold a-standin' 'ere. Besides, think of 'is modesty too. 'E ain't one to go about showin' 'is legs in that way, 'e ain't a gal."

The attendants, approving of Bindle's advice, fetched the chairman of the Medical Board, who came out.

"You don't 'appen to 'ave a spare pair of trousers about you, sir, do you?" enquired Bindle.

The president looked at him in surprise.

"My brother-in-law, 'Earty, 'as lost 'is. Careless of 'im to lose 'is trousers; but lorst they are, an' ow's 'e goin' to get 'ome?"

"And—and—my—my underwear was with them," said Mr. Hearty with a nice sense of delicacy.

"Lorst 'is pants as well," said Bindle. "This is a bit beyond a joke, sir," said Bindle, addressing the chairman. "Can't one of them chaps in there lend 'Earty 'is trousers an' sit in a towel till 'e sends 'em back?"

The chairman was a man of action. He gave instructions that all the cubicles were to be examined to see how many pairs of trousers were in each. In the cubicle on the right of that occupied by Mr. Hearty, three pairs of trousers were discovered. The two men who occupied it were recalled from their medical examination and asked to identify their own trousers, which they did. The third pair proved to be those of Mr. Hearty.

"But—but there is still my underwear," said Mr. Hearty.

A further search was unproductive. As Bindle explained, "It ain't every cove wot 'as pants to put on." It was not until Mr. Hearty was just on the point of leaving that the missing underwear was discovered in another cubicle and restored to him. Bindle borrowed some newspaper and made an inelegant parcel, which Mr. Hearty tucked under his arm.

Then followed the wait for the announcement of the grading, which Bindle filled in with some general remarks upon things lost and loseable.

"You can lose yer temper, 'Earty," he said, "or yer 'at or yer wife, an' no one won't say anything about it; but you

didn't ought to lose yer trousers."

When the orderly eventually came out with the papers, he whispered to Bindle that he had got a Grade Three, whereas Mr. Hearty proved to be Grade Two.

"I consider it a scandal, Joseph, an absolute scandal," said Mr. Hearty as he walked across the hall to get the three and sixpence doled out to British patriots as payment for their time. As they were walking back towards Fulham Mr. Hearty suddenly stopped.

"Lorst anything else, 'Earty?" enquired Bindle solicitously.

"I've just remembered," said Mr. Hearty, "that we've had no refreshments. I distinctly saw it in the paper that refreshments were provided."

"Well, well, 'Earty, it can't be 'elped. You was bound to miss somethink beside them trousers o' yours," remarked Bindle philosophically.

[End of *The Bindles on the Rocks*, by Herbert Jenkins]