Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch

Q's Mystery Stories

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Q's
MYSTERY STORIES

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SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH
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PREFACE

THIS volume contains some twenty stories hitherto scattered among my many writings; my first excuse for the assemblage being that they all belong to that debatable borderland which separates for some of us, and vividly, the experiences of daily life from those of the subconscious or of dreams. Actually a number of them have come out of dreams or in waking moments by surprise; always, of course, in fragments—as it were bits of stained glass needing to be fitted; and if in fitting the pieces together I have put the stories objectively—just framing the actions and enlisting the reader to share in the interpretation—that is the method which, as I believe in it, I have as a workman always obeyed.

Q.

1937.

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THE ROLL-CALL OF THE REEF

‘YES, sir,’ said my host the quarryman, reaching down the relics from their hook in the wall over the chimney-piece; ‘they’ve hung there all my time, and most of my father’s. The women won’t touch ’em; they’re afraid of the story. So here they’ll dangle, and gather dust and smoke, till another tenant comes and tosses ’em out o’ doors for rubbish. Whew! ’tis coarse weather.’

He went to the door, opened it, and stood studying the gale that beat upon his cottage-front, straight from the Manacle Reef. The rain drove past him into the kitchen, aslant like threads of gold silk in the shine of the wreck-wood fire. Meanwhile by the same firelight I examined the relics on my knee. The metal of each was tarnished out of knowledge. But the trumpet was evidently an old cavalry trumpet, and the threads of its parti-coloured sling, though frayed and dusty, still hung together. Around the side-drum, beneath its cracked brown varnish, I could hardly trace a royal coat-of-arms, and a legend running—*Per Mare per Terram*—the motto of the Marines. Its parchment, though coloured and scented with wood-smoke, was limp and mildewed; and I began to tighten up the straps—under which the drum-sticks had been loosely thrust—with the idle purpose of trying if some music might be got out of the old drum yet.

But as I turned it on my knee, I found the drum attached to the trumpet-sling by a curious barrel-shaped padlock, and paused to examine this. The body of the lock was composed of half a dozen brass rings, set accurately edge to edge; and, rubbing the brass with my thumb, I saw that each of the six had a series of letters engraved around it.

I knew the trick of it, I thought. Here was one of those word-padlocks, once so common; only to be opened by getting the rings to spell a certain word, which the dealer confides to you.

My host shut and barred the door, and came back to the hearth.

‘ ’Twas just such a wind—east by south—that brought in what you’ve got between your hands. Back in the year ’nine it was; my father has told me the tale a score o’ times. You’re twisting round the rings, I see. But you’ll never guess the word. Parson Kendall, he made the word, and locked down a couple o’ ghosts in their graves with it; and when his time came, he went to his own grave and took the word with him.’

‘Whose ghosts, Matthew?’

‘You want the story, I see, sir. My father could tell it better than I can. He

was a young man in the year ’nine, unmarried at the time, and living in this very cottage just as I be. That’s how he came to get mixed up with the tale.’

He took a chair, lit a short pipe, and unfolded the story in a low musing voice, with his eyes fixed on the dancing violet flames.

‘Yes, he’d ha’ been about thirty year old in January, of the year ’nine. The storm got up in the night o’ the twenty-first o’ that month. My father was dressed and out long before daylight; he never was one to ’bide in bed, let be that the gale by this time was pretty near lifting the thatch over his head. Besides which, he’d fenced a small ’taty-patch that winter, down by Lowland Point, and he wanted to see if it stood the night’s work. He took the path across Gunner’s Meadow—where they buried most of the bodies afterwards. The wind was right in his teeth at the time, and once on the way (he’s told me this often) a great strip of oreweed came flying through the darkness and fetched him a slap on the cheek like a cold hand. But he made shift pretty well till he got to Lowland, and then had to drop upon his hands and knees and crawl, digging his fingers every now and then into the shingle to hold on, for he declared to me that the stones, some of them as big as a man’s head, kept rolling and driving past till it seemed the whole foreshore was moving westward under him. The fence was gone, of course; not a stick left to show where it stood; so that, when first he came to the place, he thought he must have missed his bearings. My father, sir, was a very religious man; and if he reckoned the end of the world was at hand—there in the great wind and night, among the moving stones—you may believe he was certain of it when he heard a gun fired, and, with the same, saw a flame shoot up out of the darkness to windward, making a sudden fierce light in all the place about. All he could find to think or say was, “The Second Coming—The Second Coming! The Bridegroom cometh, and the wicked He will toss like a ball into a large country!” and being already upon his knees, he just bowed his head and ’bided, saying this over and over.

‘But by’n-by, between two squalls, he made bold to lift his head and look, and then by the light—a bluish colour ’twas—he saw all the coast clear away to Manacle Point, and off the Manacles, in the thick of the weather, a sloop-of-war with top-gallants housed, driving stern foremost towards the reef. It was she, of course, that was burning the flare. My father could see the white streak and the ports of her quite plain as she rose to it, a little outside the breakers, and he guessed easy enough that her captain had just managed to wear ship, and was trying to force her nose to the sea with the help of her small bower anchor and the scrap or two of canvas that hadn’t yet been blown out of her. But while he looked, she fell off, giving her broadside to it foot by foot, and drifting back on the breakers around Carn du and the Varses. The rocks lie so thick thereabouts, that ’twas a toss up which she struck first; at any rate, my

father couldn't tell at the time, for just then the flare died down and went out.

'Well, sir, he turned then in the dark and started back for Coverack to cry the dismal tidings—though well knowing ship and crew to be past any hope; and as he turned, the wind lifted him and tossed him forward "like a ball," as he'd been saying, and homeward along the foreshore. As you know, 'tis ugly work, even by daylight, picking your way among the stones there, and my father was prettily knocked about at first in the dark. But by this 'twas nearer seven than six o'clock, and the day spreading. By the time he reached North Corner, a man could see to read print; hows'ever, he looked neither out to sea nor towards Coverack, but headed straight for the first cottage—the same that stands above North Corner to-day. A man named Billy Ede lived there then, and when my father burst into the kitchen bawling: "Wreck! wreck!" he saw Billy Ede's wife, Ann, standing there in her clogs, with a shawl over her head, and her clothes wringing wet.

' "Save the chap!" says Billy Ede's wife, Ann. "What d' 'ee mean by crying stale fish at that rate?"

' "But 'tis a wreck, I tell 'ee. I've a-zeed 'n!"

' "Why, so 'tis," says she, "and I've a-zeed 'n too; and so has every one with an eye in his head."

'And with that she pointed straight over my father's shoulder, and he turned; and there, close under Dolor Point, at the end of Coverack town, he saw *another* wreck washing, and the point black with people, like emmets, running to and fro in the morning light. While he stood staring at her, he heard a trumpet sounded on board, the notes coming in little jerks, like a bird rising against the wind; but faintly, of course, because of the distance and the gale blowing—though this had dropped a little.

' "She's a transport," said Billy Ede's wife, Ann, "and full of horse soldiers, fine long men. When she struck they must ha' pitched the hosses over first to lighten the ship, for a score of dead hosses had washed in afore I left, half an hour back. An' three or four soldiers, too—fine long corpses in white breeches and jackets of blue and gold. I held the lantern to one. Such a straight young man!"

'My father asked her about the trumpeting.

' "That's the queerest bit of all. She was burnin' a light when me an' my man joined the crowd down there. All her masts had gone; whether they carried away, or were cut away to ease her, I don't rightly know. Anyway, there she lay 'pon the rocks with her decks bare. Her keelson was broke under her and her bottom sagged and stove, and she had just settled down like a sitting hen—just the leastest list to starboard; but a man could stand there easy. They had rigged up ropes across her, from bulwark to bulwark, an' beside these the men were mustered, holding on like grim death whenever the sea

made a clean breach over them, an' standing up like heroes as soon as it passed. The captain an' the officers were clinging to the rail of the quarter-deck, all in their golden uniforms, waiting for the end as if 'twas King George they expected. There was no way to help, for she lay right beyond cast of line, though our folk tried it fifty times. And beside them clung a trumpeter, a whacking big man, an' between the heavy seas he would lift his trumpet with one hand, and blow a call; and every time he blew, the men gave a cheer. There" (she says) "—hark'ee now—there he goes agen! But you won't hear no cheering any more, for few are left to cheer, and their voices weak. Bitter cold the wind is, and I reckon it numbs their grip o' the ropes, for they were dropping off fast with every sea when my man sent me home to get his breakfast. *Another* wreck, you say? Well, there's no hope for the tender dears, if 'tis the Manacles. You'd better run down and help yonder; though 'tis little help that any man can give. Not one came in alive while I was there. The tide's flowing, an' she won't hold together another hour, they say."

'Well, sure enough, the end was coming fast when my father got down to the point. Six men had been cast up alive, or just breathing—a seaman and five troopers. The seaman was the only one that had breath to speak; and while they were carrying him into the town, the word went round that the ship's name was the *Despatch*, transport, homeward bound from Corunna, with a detachment of the 7th Hussars, that had been fighting out there with Sir John Moore. The seas had rolled her farther over by this time, and given her decks a pretty sharp cant; but a dozen men still held on, seven by the ropes near the ship's waist, a couple near the break of the poop, and three on the quarter-deck. Of these three my father made out one to be the skipper; close by him clung an officer in full regimentals—his name, they heard after, was Captain Duncanfield; and last came the tall trumpeter; and if you'll believe me, the fellow was making shift there, at the very last, to blow *God Save the King*. What's more, he got to "Send us victorious" before an extra big sea came bursting across and washed them off the deck—every man but one of the pair beneath the poop—and *he* dropped his hold before the next wave; being stunned, I reckon. The others went out of sight at once, but the trumpeter—being, as I said, a powerful man as well as a tough swimmer—rose like a duck, rode out a couple of breakers, and came in on the crest of the third. The folks looked to see him broke like an egg at their feet; but when the smother cleared, there he was, lying face downward on a ledge below them; and one of the men that happened to have a rope round him—I forget the fellow's name, if I ever heard it—jumped down and grabbed him by the ankle as he began to slip back. Before the next big sea, the pair were hauled high enough to be out of harm, and another heave brought them up to grass. Quick work; but master trumpeter wasn't quite dead; nothing worse than a cracked head and three staved ribs. In twenty minutes or so they

had him in bed, with the doctor to tend him.

'Now was the time—nothing being left alive upon the transport—for my father to tell of the sloop he'd seen driving upon the Manacles. And when he got a hearing, though the most were set upon salvage, and believed a wreck in the hand, so to say, to be worth half a dozen they couldn't see, a good few volunteered to start off with him and have a look. They crossed Lowland Point; no ship to be seen on the Manacles, nor anywhere upon the sea. One or two was for calling my father a liar. "Wait till we come to Dean Point," said he. Sure enough, on the far side of Dean Point, they found the sloop's mainmast washing about with half a dozen men lashed to it—men in red jackets—every mother's son drowned and staring; and a little farther on, just under the Dean, three or four bodies cast up on the shore, one of them a small drummer-boy, side-drum and all; and, near by, part of a ship's gig, with "H.M.S. *Primrose*" cut on the stern-board. From this point on, the shore was littered thick with wreckage and dead bodies—the most of them Marines in uniform; and in Godrevy Cove, in particular, a heap of furniture from the captain's cabin, and amongst it a water-tight box, not much damaged, and full of papers; by which, when it came to be examined next day, the wreck was easily made out to be the *Primrose*, of eighteen guns, outward bound from Portsmouth, with a fleet of transports for the Spanish War—thirty sail, I've heard, but I've never heard what became of them. Being handled by merchant skippers, no doubt they rode out the gale and reached the Tagus safe and sound. Not but what the captain of the *Primrose* (Mein was his name) did quite right to try and club-haul his vessel when he found himself under the land: only he never ought to have got there if he took proper soundings. But it's easy talking.

'The *Primrose*, sir, was a handsome vessel—for her size, one of the handsomest in the King's service—and newly fitted out at Plymouth Dock. So the boys had brave pickings from her in the way of brass-work, ship's instruments, and the like, let alone some barrels of stores not much spoiled. They loaded themselves with as much as they could carry, and started for home, meaning to make a second journey before the preventive men got wind of their doings and came to spoil the fun. But as my father was passing back under the Dean, he happened to take a look over his shoulder at the bodies there. "Hullo," says he, and dropped his gear: "I do believe there's a leg moving!" And, running fore, he stooped over the small drummer-boy that I told you about. The poor little chap was lying there, with his face a boil of bruises and his eyes closed: but he had shifted one leg an inch or two, and was still breathing. So my father pulled out a knife and cut him free from his drum

—that was lashed on to him with a double turn of Manila rope—and took him up and carried him along here, to this very room that we're sitting in. He lost a good deal by this; for when he went back to fetch his bundle the preventive men had got hold of it, and were thick as thieves along the foreshore; so that 'twas only by paying one or two to look the other way that he picked up anything worth carrying off: which you'll allow to be hard, seeing that he was the first man to give news of the wreck.

'Well, the inquiry was held, of course, and my father gave evidence; and for the rest they had to trust to the sloop's papers: for not a soul was saved besides the drummer-boy, and he was raving in a fever, brought on by the cold and the fright. And the seamen and the five troopers gave evidence about the loss of the *Despatch*. The tall trumpeter, too, whose ribs were healing, came forward and kissed the Book; but somehow his head had been hurt in coming ashore, and he talked foolish-like, and 'twas easy seen he would never be a proper man again. The others were taken up to Plymouth, and so went their ways; but the trumpeter stayed on in Coverack; and King George, finding he was fit for nothing, sent him down a trifle of a pension after a while—enough to keep him in board and lodging, with a bit of tobacco over.

'Now the first time that this man—William Tallifer, he called himself—met with the drummer-boy, was about a fortnight after the little chap had bettered enough to be allowed a short walk out of doors, which he took, if you please, in full regimentals. There never was a soldier so proud of his dress. His own suit had shrunk a brave bit with the salt water; but into ordinary frock an' corduroys he declared he would not get—not if he had to go naked the rest of his life; so my father, being a good-natured man and handy with the needle, turned to and repaired damages with a piece or two of scarlet cloth cut from the jacket of one of the drowned Marines. Well, the poor little chap chanced to be standing, in this rig-out, down by the gate of Gunner's Meadow, where they had buried two score and over of his comrades. The morning was a fine one, early in March month; and along came the cracked trumpeter, likewise taking a stroll.

' "Hullo!" says he; "good mornin'! And what might you be doin' here?"

' "I was a-wishin'," says the boy, "I had a pair o' drum-sticks. Our lads were buried yonder without so much as a drum tapped or a musket fired; and that's not Christian burial for British soldiers."

' "Phut!" says the trumpeter, and spat on the ground; "a parcel of Marines!"

'The boy eyed him a second or so, and answered up: "If I'd a tab of turf handy, I'd bung it at your mouth, you greasy cavalryman, and learn you to speak respectful of your betters. The Marines are the handiest body of men in the service."

‘The trumpeter looked down on him from the height of six foot two, and asked: “Did they die well?”

‘ “They died very well. There was a lot of running to and fro at first, and some of the men began to cry, and a few to strip off their clothes. But when the ship fell off for the last time, Captain Mein turned and said something to Major Griffiths, the commanding officer on board, and the Major called out to me to beat to quarters. It might have been for a wedding, he sang it out so cheerful. We’d had word already that ’twas to be parade order, and the men fell in as trim and decent as if they were going to church. One or two even tried to shave at the last moment. The Major wore his medals. One of the seamen, seeing I had hard work to keep the drum steady—the sling being a bit loose for me and the wind what you remember—lashed it tight with a piece of rope; and that saved my life afterwards, a drum being as good as a cork until ’tis stove. I kept beating away until every man was on deck; and then the Major formed them up and told them to die like British soldiers, and the chaplain read a prayer or two—the boys standin’ all the while like rocks, each man’s courage keeping up the others’. The chaplain was in the middle of a prayer when she struck. In ten minutes she was gone. That was how they died, cavalryman.”

‘ “And that was very well done, drummer of the Marines. What’s your name?”

‘ “John Christian.”

‘ “Mine is William George Tallifer, trumpeter, of the 7th Light Dragoons—the Queen’s Own. I played *God Save the King* while our men were drowning. Captain Duncanfield told me to sound a call or two, to put them in heart; but that matter of *God Save the King* was a notion of my own. I won’t say anything to hurt the feelings of a Marine, even if he’s not much over five-foot tall; but the Queen’s Own Hussars is a tearin’ fine regiment. As between horse and foot, ’tis a question o’ which gets the chance. All the way from Sahagun to Corunna ’twas we that took and gave the knocks—at Mayorga and Rueda, and Bennyventy.” (The reason, sir, I can speak the names so pat is that my father learnt ’em by heart afterwards from the trumpeter, who was always talking about Mayorga and Rueda and Bennyventy.) “We made the rear-guard, under General Paget, and drove the French every time; and all the infantry did was to sit about in wine-shops till we whipped ’em out, an’ steal an’ straggle an’ play the tom-fool in general. And when it came to a stand-up fight at Corunna, ’twas the horse, or the best part of it, that had to stay sea-sick aboard the transports, an’ watch the infantry in the thick o’ the caper. Very well they behaved, too; ’specially the 4th Regiment, an’ the 42nd Highlanders an’ the Dirty Half-Hundred. Oh, ay; they’re decent regiments, all three. But the Queen’s Own Hussars is a tearin’ fine regiment. So you played on your drum when the ship was goin’ down? Drummer John Christian, I’ll have to get you a

new pair o' drum-sticks for that."

'Well, sir, it appears that the very next day the trumpeter marched into Helston, and got a carpenter there to turn him a pair of box-wood drum-sticks for the boy. And this was the beginning of one of the most curious friendships you ever heard tell of. Nothing delighted the pair more than to borrow a boat off my father and pull out to the rocks where the *Primrose* and the *Despatch* had struck and sunk; and on still days 'twas pretty to hear them out there off the Manacles, the drummer playing his tattoo—for they always took their music with them—and the trumpeter practising calls, and making his trumpet speak like an angel. But if the weather turned roughish, they'd be walking together and talking; leastwise, the youngster listened while the other discoursed about Sir John's campaign in Spain and Portugal, telling how each little skirmish befell; and of Sir John himself, and General Baird and General Paget, and Colonel Vivian, his own commanding officer, and what kind of men they were; and of the last bloody stand-up at Corunna, and so forth, as if neither could have enough.

'But all this had to come to an end in the late summer; for the boy, John Christian, being now well and strong again, must go up to Plymouth to report himself. 'Twas his own wish (for I believe King George had forgotten all about him), but his friend wouldn't hold him back. As for the trumpeter, my father had made an arrangement to take him on as a lodger as soon as the boy left; and on the morning fixed for the start, he was up at the door here by five o'clock, with his trumpet slung by his side, and all the rest of his kit in a small valise. A Monday morning it was, and after breakfast he had fixed to walk with the boy some way on the road towards Helston, where the coach started. My father left them at breakfast together, and went out to meat the pig, and do a few odd morning jobs of that sort. When he came back, the boy was still at table, and the trumpeter standing here by the chimney-place with the drum and trumpet in his hands, hitched together just as they be at this moment.

' "Look at this," he says to my father, showing him the lock; "I picked it up off a starving brass-worker in Lisbon, and it is not one of your common locks that one word of six letters will open at any time. There's *janius* in this lock; for you've only to make the rings spell any six-letter word you please, and snap down the lock upon that, and never a soul can open it—not the maker, even—until somebody comes along that knows the word you snapped it on. Now, Johnny here's goin', and he leaves his drum behind him; for, though he can make pretty music on it, the parchment sags in wet weather, by reason of the sea-water getting at it; an' if he carries it to Plymouth, they'll only condemn it and give him another. And, as for me, I shan't have the heart to put lip to the trumpet any more when Johnny's gone. So we've chosen a word together, and locked 'em together upon that; and, by your leave, I'll hang 'em

here together on the hook over your fire-place. Maybe Johnny'll come back; maybe not. Maybe, if he comes, I'll be dead an' gone, an' he'll take 'em apart an' try their music for old sake's sake. But if he never comes, nobody can separate 'em; for nobody beside knows the word. And if you marry and have sons, you can tell 'em that here are tied together the souls of Johnny Christian, drummer of the Marines, and William George Tallifer, once trumpeter of the Queen's Own Hussars. Amen."

'With that he hung the two instruments 'pon the hook there; and the boy stood up and thanked my father and shook hands; and the pair went forth of the door, towards Helston.

'Somewhere on the road they took leave of one another; but nobody saw the parting, nor heard what was said between them. About three in the afternoon the trumpeter came walking back over the hill; and by the time my father came home from the fishing, the cottage was tidied up and the tea ready, and the whole place shining like a new pin. From that time for five years he lodged here with my father, looking after the house and tilling the garden; and all the while he was steadily failing, the hurt in his head spreading, in a manner, to his limbs. My father watched the feebleness growing on him, but said nothing. And from first to last neither spake a word about the drummer, John Christian; nor did any letter reach them, nor word of his doings.

'The rest of the tale you'm free to believe, sir, or not, as you please. It stands upon my father's words, and he always declared he was ready to kiss the Book upon it before judge and jury. He said, too, that he never had the wit to make up such a yarn; and he defied any one to explain about the lock, in particular, by any other tale. But you shall judge for yourself.

'My father said that about three o'clock in the morning, April fourteenth of the year 'fourteen, he and William Tallifer were sitting here, just as you and I, sir, are sitting now. My father had put on his clothes a few minutes before, and was mending his spiller by the light of the horn lantern, meaning to set off before daylight to haul the trammel. The trumpeter hadn't been to bed at all. Towards the last he mostly spent his nights (and his days, too) dozing in the elbow-chair where you sit at this minute. He was dozing then (my father said), with his chin dropped forward on his chest, when a knock sounded upon the door, and the door opened, and in walked an upright young man in scarlet regimentals.

'He had grown a brave bit, and his face was the colour of wood-ashes; but it was the drummer, John Christian. Only his uniform was different from the one he used to wear, and the figures "38" shone in brass upon his collar.

‘The drummer walked past my father as if he never saw him, and stood by the elbow-chair and said:

‘ “Trumpeter, trumpeter, are you one with me?”

‘And the trumpeter just lifted the lids of his eyes, and answered: “How should I not be one with you, drummer Johnny—Johnny boy? The men are patient. ’Till you come, I count; while you march, I mark time; until the discharge comes.”

‘ “The discharge has come to-night,” said the drummer, “and the word is Corunna no longer”; and stepping to the chimney-place, he unhooked the drum and trumpet, and began to twist the brass rings of the lock, spelling the word aloud, so—C-O-R-U-N-A. When he had fixed the last letter, the padlock opened in his hand.

‘ “Did you know, trumpeter, that when I came to Plymouth they put me into a line regiment?”

‘ “The 38th is a good regiment,” answered the old Hussar, still in his dull voice. “I went back with them from Sahagun to Corunna. At Corunna they stood in General Fraser’s division, on the right. They behaved well.”

‘ “But I’d fain see the Marines again,” says the drummer, handing him the trumpet; “and you—you shall call once more for the Queen’s Own. Matthew,” he says, suddenly, turning on my father—and when he turned, my father saw for the first time that his scarlet jacket had a round hole by the breast-bone, and that the blood was welling there—“Matthew, we shall want your boat.”

‘Then my father rose on his legs like a man in a dream, while they two slung on, the one his drum, and t’ other his trumpet. He took the lantern, and went quaking before them down to the shore, and they breathed heavily behind him; and they stepped into his boat, and my father pushed off.

‘ “Row you first for Dolor Point,” says the drummer. So my father rowed them out past the white houses of Coverack to Dolor Point, and there, at a word, lay on his oars. And the trumpeter, William Tallifer, put his trumpet to his mouth and sounded the *Revelly*. The music of it was like rivers running.

‘ “They will follow,” said the drummer. “Matthew, pull you now for the Manacles.”

‘So my father pulled for the Manacles, and came to an easy close outside Carn du. And the drummer took his sticks and beat a tattoo, there by the edge of the reef; and the music of it was like a rolling chariot.

‘ “That will do,” says he, breaking off; “they will follow. Pull now for the shore under Gunner’s Meadow.”

‘Then my father pulled for the shore, and ran his boat in under Gunner’s Meadow. And they stepped out, all three, and walked up to the meadow. By the gate the drummer halted and began his tattoo again, looking out towards the darkness over the sea.

‘And while the drum beat, and my father held his breath, there came up out of the sea and the darkness a troop of many men, horse and foot, and formed up among the graves; and others rose out of the graves and formed up—drowned Marines with bleached faces, and pale Hussars riding their horses, all lean and shadowy. There was no clatter of hoofs or accoutrements, my father said, but a soft sound all the while, like the beating of a bird’s wing, and a black shadow lying like a pool about the feet of all. The drummer stood upon a little knoll just inside the gate, and beside him the tall trumpeter, with hand on hip, watching them gather; and behind them both my father, clinging to the gate. When no more came, the drummer stopped playing, and said: “Call the roll.”

‘Then the trumpeter stepped towards the end man of the rank and called: “Troop-Sergeant-Major Thomas Irons!” and the man in a thin voice answered “Here!”

‘ “Troop-Sergeant-Major Thomas Irons, how is it with you?”

‘The man answered: “How should it be with me? When I was young, I betrayed a girl; and when I was grown, I betrayed a friend; and for these things I must pay. But I died as a man ought. God save the King!”

‘The trumpeter called to the next man: “Trooper Henry Buckingham!” and the next man answered: “Here!”

‘ “Trooper Henry Buckingham, how is it with you?”

‘ “How should it be with me? I was a drunkard, and I stole, and in Lugo, in a wine-shop, I knifed a man. But I died as a man should. God save the King!”

‘So the trumpeter went down the line; and when he had finished, the drummer took it up, hailing the dead Marines in their order. Each man answered to his name, and each man ended with “God save the King!” When all were hailed, the drummer stepped back to his mound, and called:

‘ “It is well. You are content, and we are content to join you. Wait yet a little while.”

‘With this he turned and ordered my father to pick up the lantern, and lead the way back. As my father picked it up, he heard the ranks of dead men cheer and call: “God save the King!” all together, and saw them waver and fade back into the dark, like a breath fading off a pane.

‘But when they came back here to the kitchen, and my father set the lantern down, it seemed they’d both forgot about him. For the drummer turned in the lantern-light—and my father could see the blood still welling out of the hole in his breast—and took the trumpet-sling from around the other’s neck, and locked drum and trumpet together again, choosing the letters on the lock very carefully. While he did this he said:

‘ “The word is no more Corunna, but Bayonne. As you left out an ’n’ in Corunna, so must I leave out an ’n’ in Bayonne.” And before snapping the

padlock, he spelt out the word slowly—"B-A-Y-O-N-E." After that, he used no more speech; but turned and hung the two instruments back on the hook; and then took the trumpeter by the arm; and the pair walked out into the darkness, glancing neither to right nor left.

'My father was on the point of following, when he heard a sort of sigh behind him; and there, sitting in the elbow-chair, was the very trumpeter he had just seen walk out by the door! If my father's heart jumped before, you may believe it jumped quicker now. But after a bit, he went up to the man asleep in the chair, and put a hand upon him. It was the trumpeter in flesh and blood that he touched; but though the flesh was warm, the trumpeter was dead.

'Well, sir, they buried him three days after; and at first my father was minded to say nothing about his dream (as he thought it). But the day after the funeral, he met Parson Kendall coming from Helston market: and the parson called out: "Have 'ee heard the news the coach brought down this mornin'?" "What news?" says my father. "Why, that peace is agreed upon." "None too soon," says my father. "Not soon enough for our poor lads at Bayonne," the parson answered. "Bayonne!" cries my father, with a jump. "Why, yes"; and the parson told him all about a great sally the French had made on the night of April 13th. "Do you happen to know if the 38th Regiment was engaged?" my father asked. "Come, now," said Parson Kendall, "I didn't know you was so well up in the campaign. But, as it happens, I *do* know that the 38th was engaged, for 'twas they that held a cottage and stopped the French advance."

'Still my father held his tongue; and when, a week later, he walked into Helston and bought a *Mercury* off the Sherborne rider, and got the landlord of the "Angel" to spell out the list of killed and wounded, sure enough, there among the killed was Drummer John Christian, of the 38th Foot.

'After this, there was nothing for a religious man but to make a clean breast. So my father went up to Parson Kendall and told the whole story. The parson listened, and put a question or two, and then asked:

' "Have you tried to open the lock since that night?"

' "I han't dared to touch it," says my father.

' "Then come along and try." When the parson came to the cottage here, he took the things off the hook and tried the lock. "Did he say '*Bayonne*'? The word has seven letters."

' "Not if you spell it with one 'n' as *he* did," says my father.

'The parson spelt it out—B-A-Y-O-N-E. "Whew!" says he, for the lock had fallen open in his hand.

'He stood considering it a moment, and then he says: "I tell you what. I shouldn't blab this all round the parish, if I was you. You won't get no credit for truthtelling, and a miracle's wasted on a set of fools. But if you like, I'll shut down the lock again upon a holy word that no one but me shall know, and

neither drummer nor trumpeter, dead nor alive, shall frighten the secret out of me.”

‘ “I wish to gracious you would, parson,” said my father.

‘The parson chose the holy word there and then, and shut the lock back upon it, and hung the drum and trumpet back in their place. He is gone long since, taking the word with him. And till the lock is broken by force, nobody will ever separate those twain.’

THE BEND OF THE ROAD

I

JUST outside the small country station of M—— in Cornwall, a viaduct carries the Great Western Railway line across a coombe, or narrow valley, through which a tributary trout-stream runs southward to meet the tides of the L—— River. From the carriage window as you pass you look down the coombe for half a mile perhaps, and also down a road which, leading out from M—— Station a few yards below the viaduct, descends the left-hand slope at a sharp incline to the stream; but whether to cross it or run close beside it down the valley bottom you cannot tell, since, before they meet, an eastward curve of the coombe shuts off the view.

Both slopes are pleasantly wooded, and tall beeches, interset here and there with pines—a pretty contrast in the spring—spread their boughs over the road; which is cut cornice-wise, with a low parapet hedge to protect it along the outer side, where the ground falls steeply to the water-meadows, that wind like a narrow green riband edged by the stream with twinkling silver.

For the rest, there appears nothing remarkable in the valley: and certainly Mr. Molesworth, who crossed and recrossed it regularly on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, on his way to and from his banking business in Plymouth, would have been puzzled to explain why, three times out of four, as his train rattled over the viaduct, he laid down his newspaper, took the cigar from his mouth, and gazed down from the window of his first-class smoking carriage upon the green water-meadows and the curving road. The Great Western line for thirty miles or so on the far side of Plymouth runs through scenery singularly beautiful, and its many viaducts carry it over at least a dozen coombes more strikingly picturesque than this particular one which alone engaged his curiosity. The secret, perhaps, lay with the road. Mr. Molesworth, who had never set foot on it, sometimes wondered whither it led and into what country it disappeared around the base of the slope to which at times his eyes travelled and almost always wistfully. He had passed his forty-fifth year, and forgotten that he was an imaginative man. Nevertheless, and quite unconsciously, he let his imagination play for a few moments every morning—in the evening, jaded with business, he forgot as often as not to look—along this country road. Somehow it had come to wear a friendly smile, inviting him: and he on his part regarded it with quite a friendly interest. Once

or twice, half-amused by the fancy, he had promised himself to take a holiday and explore it.

Years had gone by, and the promise remained unredeemed, nor appeared likely to be redeemed; yet at the back of his mind he was always aware of it. Daily, as the train slowed down and stopped at M—— Station, he spared a look for the folks on the platform. They had come by the road; and others, alighting, were about to take the road.

They were few enough, as a rule: apple-cheeked farmers and country-wives with their baskets, bound for Plymouth market; on summer mornings, as likely as not, an angler or two, thick-booted, carrying rods and creels, their hats wreathed with March-browns or palmers on silvery lines of gut; in the autumn, now and then, a sportsman with his gun; on Monday mornings half a dozen Navy lads returning from furlough, with stains of native earth on their shoes and the edges of their wide trousers. . . . The faces of all these people wore an innocent friendliness: to Mr. Molesworth, a childless man, they seemed a childlike race, and mysterious as children, carrying with them like an aura the preoccupations of the valley from which they emerged. He decided that the country below the road must be worth exploring; that spring or early summer must be the proper season, and angling his pretext. He had been an accomplished fly-fisher in his youth, and wondered how much of the art would return to his hand when, after many years, it balanced the rod again.

Together with his fly-fishing Mr. Molesworth had forgotten most of the propensities of his youth. He had been born an only son of rich parents, who shrank from exposing him to the rigours and temptations of a public school. Consequently, when the time came for him to go up to Oxford, he had found no friends there and had made few, being sensitive, shy, entirely unskilled in games, and but moderately interested in learning. His vacations, which he spent at home, were as dull as he had always found them under a succession of well-meaning, middle-aged tutors—until, one August day, as he played a twelve-pound salmon, he glanced up at the farther bank and into a pair of brown eyes which were watching him with unconcealed interest.

The eyes belonged to a yeoman-farmer's daughter: and young Molesworth lost his fish, but returned next day, and again day after day, to try for him. At the end of three weeks or so, his parents—he was a poor hand at dissimulation—discovered what was happening, and interfered with promptness and resolution. He had not learnt the art of disobedience, and while he considered how to begin (having, indeed, taken his passion with a thoroughness that did him credit), Miss Margaret, sorely weeping, was packed off on a visit to her mother's relations near Exeter, where three months later, she married a young farmer-cousin and emigrated to Canada.

In this way Mr. Molesworth's love-making and his fly-fishing had come to

an end together. Like Gibbon, he had sighed as a lover, and (Miss Margaret's faithlessness assisting) obeyed as a son. Nevertheless the sequel did not quite fulfil the hopes of his parents, who, having acted with decision in a situation which took them unawares, were willing enough to make amends by providing him with quite a large choice of suitable partners. To their dismay it appeared that he had done with all thoughts of matrimony: and I am not sure that, as the years went on, their dismay did not deepen into regret. To the end he made them an admirable son, but they went down to their graves and left him unmarried.

In all other respects he followed irreproachably the line of life they had marked out for him. He succeeded to the directorate of the Bank in which the family had made its money, and to those unpaid offices of local distinction which his father had adorned. As a banker he was eminently 'sound'—that is to say, cautious, but not obstinately conservative; as a Justice of the Peace, scrupulous, fair, inclined to mercy, exact in the performance of all his duties. As High Sheriff he filled his term of office and discharged it adequately, but without ostentation. Respecting wealth, but not greatly caring for it—as why should he?—every year without effort he put aside a thousand or two. Men liked him, in spite of his shyness: his good manners hiding a certain fastidiousness of which he was aware without being at all proud of it. No one had ever treated him with familiarity. One or two at the most called him friend, and these probably enjoyed a deeper friendship than they knew. Every one felt him to be, behind his reserve, a good fellow.

Regularly four times a week he drove down in his phaeton to the small country station at the foot of his park, and caught the 10.27 up-train: regularly as the train started he lit the cigar which, carefully smoked, was regularly three-parts consumed by the time he crossed the M—— viaduct; and regularly, as he lit it, he was conscious of a faint feeling of resentment at the presence of Sir John Crang.

Nine mornings out of ten, Sir John Crang (who lived two stations down the line) would be his fellow-traveller; and, three times out of five, his only companion. Sir John was an ex-Civil Servant, knighted for what were known vaguely as 'services in Burmah,' and, now retired upon a derelict country seat in Cornwall, was making a bold push for local importance, and dividing his leisure between the cultivation of roses (in which he excelled) and the directorship of a large soap-factory near the Plymouth docks. Mr. Molesworth did not like him, and might have accounted for his dislike by a variety of reasons. He himself, for example, grew roses in a small way as an amateur, and had been used to achieve successes at the local flower-shows until Sir John arrived and in one season beat him out of the field. This, as an essentially generous man, he might have forgiven; but not the loud dogmatic air of

patronage with which on venturing to congratulate his rival and discuss some question of culture, he had been bullied and set right and generally treated as an ignorant junior. Moreover, he seemed to observe—but he may have been mistaken—that, whatever rose he selected for his buttonhole, Sir John would take note of it and trump next day with a finer bloom.

But these were trifles. Putting them aside, Mr. Molesworth felt that he could never like the man who—to be short—was less of a gentleman than a highly coloured and somewhat aggressive imitation of one. Most of all, perhaps, he abhorred Sir John's bulging glassy eyeballs, of a hard white by contrast with his coppery skin—surest sign of the cold sensualist. But in fact he took no pains to analyse his aversion, which extended even to the smell of Sir John's excellent but Burmese cigars. The two men nodded when they met, and usually exchanged a remark or two on the weather. Beyond this they rarely conversed, even upon politics, although both were Conservatives and voters in the same electoral division.

The day of which this story tells was a Saturday in the month of May 188-, a warm and cloudless morning, which seemed to mark the real beginning of summer after an unusually cold spring. The year, indeed, had reached that exact point when for a week or so the young leaves are as fragrant as flowers, and the rush of the train swept a thousand delicious scents in at the open windows. Mr. Molesworth had donned a white waistcoat in honour of the weather, and wore a bud of a Capucine rose in his buttonhole. Sir John had adorned himself with an enormous glowing Sénateur Vaisse. (Why not a Paul Neyron while he was about it? wondered Mr. Molesworth, as he surveyed the globular bloom.)

Now in the breast a door flings wide——

It may have been the weather that disposed Sir John to talk to-day. After commending it, and adding a word or two in general in praise of the West-country climate, he paused and watched Mr. Molesworth lighting his cigar.

'You're a man of regular habits?' he observed unexpectedly, with a shade of interrogation in his voice.

Mr. Molesworth frowned and tossed his match out of the window.

'I believe in regular habits myself.' Sir John, bent on affability, laid down his newspaper on his knee. 'There's one danger about them, though: they're deadening. They save a man the bother of thinking and persuade him he's doing right, when all the reason is that he's done the same thing a hundred times before. I came across that in a book once, and it seemed to me dashed sound sense. Now here's something I'd like to ask you—have you any theory at all about dreams?'

'Dreams?' echoed Mr. Molesworth, taken aback by the inconsequent

question.

‘There’s a Society—isn’t there?—that makes a study of ’em and collects evidence. Man wakes up, having dreamt that a friend whom he knows to be abroad is standing by his bed; lights his candle or turns on the electric-light and looks at his watch; goes to sleep again, tells his family all about it at breakfast, and a week or two later learns that his friend died at such-and-such an hour, and the very minute his watch pointed to. That’s the sort of thing.’

‘You mean the Psychical Society?’

‘That’s the name. Well, I’m a case for ’em. Anyway, I can knock the inside out of one of their theories, that dreams are a sort of memory-game, made up of scenes and scraps and suchlike out of your waking consciousness—isn’t that the lingo? Now, I’ve never had but one dream in my life; but I’ve dreamt it two or three score of times, and I dreamt it last night.’

‘Indeed?’ Mr. Molesworth was getting mildly interested.

‘And I’m not what you’d call a fanciful sort of person,’ went on Sir John, with obvious veracity. ‘Regular habits—rise early and to bed early; never a day’s trouble with my digestion; off to sleep as soon as my head touches the pillow. You can’t call my dream a nightmare, and yet it’s unpleasant, somehow.’

‘But what is it?’

‘Well’—Sir John seemed to hesitate—‘you might call it a scene. Yes, that’s it—a scene. There’s a piece of water and a church beside it—just an ordinary-looking little parish church, with a tower but no pinnacles. Outside the porch there’s a tallish stone cross—you can just see it between the elms from the churchyard gate; and going through the gate you step over a sort of grid—half a dozen granite stones laid parallel, with spaces between.’

‘Then it must be a Cornish church. You never see that contrivance outside the Duchy: though it’s worth copying. It keeps out sheep and cattle, while even a child can step across it easily.’

‘But, my dear sir, I never saw Cornwall—and certainly never saw or heard of this contrivance—until I came and settled here, eight years ago: whereas I’ve been dreaming this, off and on, ever since I was fifteen.’

‘And you never actually saw the rest of the scene? the church itself, for instance?’

‘Neither stick nor stone of it: I’ll take my oath. Mind you, it isn’t *like* a church made up of different scraps of memory. It’s just that particular church, and I know it by heart, down to a scaffold-hole, partly hidden with grass, close under the lowest string-course of the tower, facing the gate.’

‘And inside?’

‘I don’t know. I’ve never been inside. But stop a moment—you haven’t heard the half of it yet! There’s a road comes downhill to the shore, between

the churchyard wall—there's a heap of greyish silvery-looking stuff, by the way, growing on the coping—something like lavender, with yellow blossoms ——Where was I? Oh yes, and on the other side of the road there's a tall hedge with elms above it. It breaks off where the road takes a bend around and in front of the churchyard gate, with a yard or two of turf on the side towards the water, and from the turf a clean drop of three feet, or a little less, on to the foreshore. The foreshore is all grey stones, round and flat, the sort you'd choose to play what's called ducks-and-drakes. It goes curving along, and the road with it, until the beach ends with a spit of rock, and over the rock a kind of cottage (only bigger, but thatched and whitewashed just like a cottage) with a garden, and in the garden a laburnum in flower, leaning slantwise'—Sir John raised his open hand and bent his forefinger to indicate the angle—'and behind the cottage a reddish cliff with a few clumps of furze overhanging it, and the turf on it stretching up to a larch plantation. . . .'

Sir John paused and rubbed his forehead meditatively.

'At least,' he resumed, 'I *think* it's a larch plantation; but the scene gets confused above a certain height. It's the foreshore, and the church and the cottage that I always see clearest. Yes, and I forgot to tell you—I'm a poor hand at description—that there's a splash of whitewash on the spit of rock, and an iron ring fixed there, for warping-in a vessel, maybe; and sometimes there's a boat, out on the water. . . .'

'You describe it vividly enough,' said Mr. Molesworth as Sir John paused and, apparently on the point of resuming his story, checked himself, tossed his cigar out of the window, and chose a fresh one from his pocket-case. 'Well, and what happens in your dream?'

Sir John struck a match, puffed his fresh cigar alight, deliberately examined the ignited end, and flung the match away. 'Nothing happens. I told you it was just a scene, didn't I?'

'You said that somehow the dream was an unpleasant one.'

'So I did. So it is. It makes me damnably uncomfortable every time I dream it; though for the life of me I can't tell you why.'

'The picture as you draw it seems to me quite a pleasant one.'

'So it is, again.'

'And you say nothing happens?'

'Well'—Sir John took the cigar from his mouth and looked at it—'nothing ever happens in it, definitely: nothing at all. But always in the dream there's a smell of lemon verbena—it comes from the garden—and a curious hissing noise—and a sense of a black man's being somehow mixed up in it all. . . .'

'A black man?'

'Black or brown . . . in the dream I don't think I've ever actually seen him. The hissing sound—it's like the hiss of a snake, only ten times louder—may

have come into the dream of late years. As to that I won't swear. But I'm dead certain there was always a black man mixed up in it, or what I may call a sense of one: and that, as you will say, is the most curious part of the whole business.'

Sir John flipped away the ash of his cigar and leant forward impressively.

'If I wasn't, as I say, dead sure of his having been in it from the first,' he went on, 'I could tell you the exact date when he took a hand in the game: because,' he resumed after another pause, 'I once actually saw what I'm telling you.'

'But you told me,' objected Mr. Molesworth, 'that you have never actually seen it.'

'I was wrong then. I saw it once, in a Burmese boy's hand at Maulmain. The old Eastern trick, you know: palmful of ink and the rest of it. There was nothing particular about the boy except an ugly scar on his cheek (caused, I believe, by his mother having put him down to sleep in the fire-place while the clay floor of it was nearly red-hot under the ashes). His master called himself his grandfather—a holy-looking man with a white beard down to his loins: and the pair of them used to come up every year from Mergui or some such part, at the Full Moon of Taboung, which happens at the end of March and is the big feast in Maulmain. The pair of them stood close by the great entrance of the Shway Dagone where the three roads meet, and just below the long flights of steps leading up to the pagoda. The second day of the feast I was making for the entrance with a couple of naval officers I had picked up at the Club, and my man, Moung Gway, following as close as he could keep in the crowd. Just as we were going up the steps, the old impostor challenged me, and, partly to show my friends what the game was like—for they were new to the country—I stopped and found a coin for him. He poured the usual dollop of ink into the boy's hand, and, by George, sir, next minute I was staring at the very thing I'd seen a score of times in my dreams but never out of them. I tell you, there's more in that Eastern hanky-panky than meets the eye; beyond that I'll offer no opinion. Outside the magic I believe that whole business was a put-up job, to catch my attention and take me unawares. For when I stepped back, pretty well startled, and blinking from the strain of keeping my attention fixed on the boy's palm, a man jumped forward from the crowd and precious nearly knifed me. If it hadn't been for Moung Gway, who tripped him up and knocked him sideways, I should have been a dead man in two twos—for my friends were taken aback by the suddenness of it. But in less than a minute we had him down and the handcuffs on him; and the end was, he got five years' hard, which means hefting chain-shot from one end to another of the prison square and then hefting it back again. There was a rather neat little Burmese girl, you see—a sort of niece of Moung Gway's—who had taken a fancy to me; and this

turned out to be a disappointed lover, just turned up from a voyage to Cagayan in a paddy-boat. I believed he had fixed it up with the venerable one to hold me with the magic until he got in his stroke. Venomous beggars, those Burmans, if you cross 'em in the wrong way! The fellow got his release a week before I left Maulmain for good, and the very next day Moung Gway was found, down by the quays, dead as a haddock, with a wound between the shoulderblades as neat as if he'd been measured for it. Oh, I could tell you a story or two about those fellows?'

'It's easily explained, at any rate,' Mr. Molesworth suggested, 'why you see a dark-skinned man in your dream.'

'But I tell you, my dear sir, he has been a part of the dream from the beginning . . . before I went to Wren's, and long before ever I thought of Burmah. He's as old as the church itself, and the foreshore and the cottage—the whole scene, in fact—though I can't say he's half as distinct. I can't tell you in the least, for instance, what his features are like. I've said that the upper part of the dream is vague to me; at the end of the foreshore, that is, where the cottage stands; the church tower I can see plainly enough to the very top. But over by the cottage—above the porch, as you may say—everything seems to swim in a mist: and it's up in that mist the fellow's head and shoulders appear and vanish. Sometimes I think he's looking out of the window at me, and draws back into the room as if he didn't want to be seen; and the mist itself gathers and floats away with the hissing sound I told you about. . . .'

Sir John's voice paused abruptly. The train was drawing near the M—— viaduct, and Mr. Molesworth from force of habit had turned his eyes to the window, to gaze down the green valley. He withdrew them suddenly, and looked around at his companion.

'Ah, to be sure,' he said vaguely; 'I had forgotten the hissing sound.'

It was curious, but as he spoke he himself became aware of a loud hissing sound filling his ears. The train lurched and jolted heavily.

'Hallo!' exclaimed Sir John, half rising in his seat, 'something's wrong.' He was staring past Mr. Molesworth and out of the window. 'Nasty place for an accident, too,' he added in a slow, strained voice.

The two men looked at each other for a moment. Sir John's face wore a tense expression—a kind of galvanized smile. Mr. Molesworth closed his eyes, instinctively concealing his sudden sickening terror of what an accident just there must mean: and for a second or so he actually had a sensation of dropping into space. He remembered having felt something like it in dreams three or four times in his life: and at the same instant he remembered a country superstition gravely imparted to him in childhood by his old nurse, that if you dreamt of falling and didn't wake up before reaching the bottom, you would surely die. The absurdity of it chased away his terror, and he opened his eyes

and looked about him with a short laugh. . . .

The train still jolted heavily, but had begun to slow down, and Mr. Molesworth drew a long breath as a glance told him that they were past the viaduct. Sir John had risen, and was leaning out of the farther window. Something had gone amiss, then. But what?

He put the question aloud. Sir John, his head and shoulders well outside the carriage-window, did not answer. Probably he did not hear.

As the train ran into M—— Station and came to a standstill, Mr. Molesworth caught a glimpse of the station-master, in his gold-braided cap, by the door of the booking-office. He wore a grave, almost a scared look. The three or four country-people on the sunny platform seemed to have their gaze drawn by the engine, and somebody ahead there was shouting. Sir John Crang, without a backward look, flung the door open and stepped out. Mr. Molesworth was preparing to follow—and by the cramped feeling in his fingers was aware at the same instant that he had been gripping the arm-rest almost desperately—when the guard of the train came running by and paused to thrust his head in at the open doorway to explain.

'Engine's broken her coupling-rod, sir—just before we came to the viaduct. Mercy for us she didn't leave the rails.'

'Mercy, indeed, as you say,' Mr. Molesworth assented. 'I suppose we shall be hung up here until they send a relief down?'

The guard—Mr. Molesworth knew him as 'George' by name, and by habit constantly polite—turned and waved his flag hurriedly, in acknowledgment of the shouting ahead, before answering——

'You may count on half an hour's delay, sir. Lucky it's no worse. You'll excuse me—they're calling for me down yonder.'

He ran on, and Mr. Molesworth stepped out upon the platform, of which this end was already deserted, all the passengers having alighted and hurried forward to inspect the damaged engine. A few paces beyond the door he met the station-master racing back to dispatch a telegram.

'It seems that we've had a narrow escape,' said Mr. Molesworth.

The station-master touched his hat and plunged into his office. Mr. Molesworth, instead of joining the crowd around the engine, halted before a small pile of luggage on a bench outside the waiting-room and absent-mindedly scanned the labels.

Among the parcels lay a fishing-rod in a canvas case and a wicker creel, the pair of them labelled and bearing the name of an acquaintance of his—a certain Sir Warwick Moyle, baronet and county magistrate, beside whom he habitually sat at Quarter Sessions.

'I had no idea,' Mr. Molesworth mused, 'that Moyle was an angler. It would be a fair joke, anyway, to borrow his rod and fill up the time.—How

long before the relief comes down?' he asked, intercepting the station-master as he came rushing out from his office and slammed the door behind him.

'Maybe an hour, sir, before we get you started again. I can't honestly promise you less than forty minutes.'

'Very well, then: I'm going to borrow Sir Warwick's rod, there, and fill up the time,' said Mr. Molesworth, pointing at it.

The station-master apparently did not hear; at any rate he passed on without remonstrance. Mr. Molesworth slung the creel over his shoulder, picked up the rod, and stepped out beyond the station gateway upon the road.

II

The road ran through a cutting, sunless, cooled by many small springs of water trickling down the rock-face, green with draperies of the hart's-tongue and common polypody ferns; and emerged again into warmth upon a curve of the hillside facing southward down the coombe, and almost close under the second span of the viaduct, where the tall trestles plunged down among the tree-tops like gigantic stilts, and the railway left earth and spun itself across the chasm like a line of gossamer, its criss-crossed timber so delicately pencilled against the blue that the whole structure seemed to swing there in the morning breeze. Above it, in heights yet more giddy, the larks were chiming; and Mr. Molesworth's heart went up to those clear heights with a sudden lift.

In all the many times he had crossed the viaduct he had never once guessed —he could not have imagined—how beautiful it looked from below. He stood and gazed, and drew a long breath. Was it the escape from dreadful peril, with its blessed revulsion of feeling, that so quickened all his senses dulled by years of habit? He could not tell. He gave himself up to the strange and innocent excitement.

Why had he never till now—and now only by accident—obeyed the impulse to descend this road and explore? He was rich: he had not even the excuse of children to be provided for: the Bank might surely have waited for one day. He did not want much money. His tastes were simple. Was not the happiness at this moment thrilling him a proof that his tastes were simple as a child's? Lo, too, his eyes were looking on the world as freshly as a child's! Why had he so long denied them a holiday? Why do men chain themselves in prisons of their own making?

What had the station-master said? It might be an hour—certainly not less than forty minutes—before the train could be restarted. Mr. Molesworth looked at his watch. Forty minutes to explore the road: forty minutes' holiday! He laughed, pocketed the watch again, and took the road briskly, humming a song.

Suppose he missed his train? Why, then, the Bank must do without him to-day, as it would have to do without him one of these days when he was dead. He thought of his fellow-directors' faces, and laughed again. He felt morally certain of missing that train. What kind of world would it be if money grew in birds' nests, or if leaves were currency and withered in autumn? Would it include truant-schools for bankers? . . .

He that is down needs fear no fall,
  He that is low, no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
  Have God to be his guide.

Fulness to such a burden is
  That go on pilgrimage——

Mr. Molesworth did not actually sing these words. The tune he hummed was a wordless one, and, for that matter, not even much of a tune. But he afterwards declared very positively that he sang the sense of them, being challenged by the birds calling in contention louder and louder as the road dipped towards the stream, and by the music of lapping water which now began to possess his ear. For some five or six furlongs the road descended under beech-boughs, between slopes carpeted with last year's leaves: but by and by the beeches gave place to an oak coppice with a matted undergrowth of the whortleberry; and where these in turn broke off, and a plantation of green young larches climbed the hill, the wild hyacinths ran down to the stream in sheet upon sheet of blue.

Mr. Molesworth rested his creel on the low hedge above one of these sheets of blue, and with the music of the stream in his ears began to unpack Sir Warwick Moyle's fishing-rod. For a moment he paused, bethinking himself, with another short laugh, that, without flies, neither rod nor line would catch him a fish. But decidedly fortune was kind to him to-day: for, opening the creel, he found Sir Warwick's fly-book within it, bulging with hooks and flies by the score—nay, by the hundred. He unbuckled the strap and was turning the leaves to make his choice, when his ear caught the sound of footsteps, and he lifted his eyes to see Sir John Crang coming down the road.

'Hallo!' hailed Sir John. 'I saw you slip out of the station and took a fancy that I'd follow. Pretty little out-of-the-way spot, this. Eh? Why, where on earth did you pick up those angling traps?'

'I stole them,' answered Mr. Molesworth deliberately, choosing a fly. He did not in the least desire Sir John's company, but somehow found himself too full of good-nature to resent it actively.

'Stole 'em?'

'Well, as a matter of fact, they belong to a friend of mine. They were lying ready to hand in the station, and I borrowed them without leave. He won't mind.'

‘You’re a cool one, I must say.’ It may be that the recent agitation of his feelings had shaken Sir John’s native vulgarity to the surface. Certainly he spoke now with a commonness of idiom and accent he was usually at pains to conceal. ‘You must have a fair nerve altogether, for all you’re such a quiet-looking chap. Hadn’t even the curiosity—had you?—to find out what had gone wrong; but just picked up a handy fishing-rod and strolled off to fill up the time till damages were repaired. Look here. Do you know, or don’t you, that ’twasn’t by more than a hair’s-breadth we missed going over that viaduct?’

‘I knew we must have had a narrow escape.’

‘And you can be tying the fly there on to that gut as steady as a doctor picking up an artery! Well, I envy you. Look at *that*!’ Sir John held out a brown, hairy, shaking hand. ‘And I don’t reckon myself a coward, either.’

Mr. Molesworth knew that the man’s record had established at any rate his reputation for courage. He had, in fact, been a famous hunter-out of Dacoity.

‘I didn’t know you went in for that sort of thing,’ pursued Sir John, watching Mr. Molesworth, who, with a penknife, was trimming the ends of gut. ‘Don’t mind my watching your first cast or two, I hope? I won’t talk. Anglers don’t like being interrupted, I know.’

‘I shall be glad of your company: and please talk as much as you choose. To tell the truth, I haven’t handled a rod for years, and I’m making this little experiment to see if I’ve quite lost the knack, rather than with any hope of catching fish.’

It appeared, however, that he had not lost the knack and after the first cast or two, in the pleasure of recovered skill, his senses abandoned themselves entirely to the sport. Sir John had lit a cigar and seated himself amid the bracken a short distance back from the brink, to watch: but whether he conversed or not Mr. Molesworth could not tell. He remembered afterwards that at the end of twenty minutes or so—probably when his cigar was finished—Sir John rose and announced his intention of strolling some way farther down the valley—‘to soothe his nerves a bit,’ as he said, adding: ‘So long! I see you’re going to miss that train, to a certainty.’

Yes, it was certain enough that Mr. Molesworth would miss his train. He fished down the stream slowly, the song and dazzle of the water filling his ears, his vision; his whole being soothed and lulled less by the actual scene than by a hundred memories it awakened or set stirring. He was young again—a youth of twenty with romance in his heart. The plants and grasses he trod were the asphodels, sundew, water-mint his feet had crushed—crushed into fragrance—five-and-twenty years ago. . . .

So deeply preoccupied was he that, coming to a bend where the coombe suddenly widened, and the stream without warning cast its green fringe of alders like a slough and slipped down a beach of flat pebbles to the head

waters of a tidal creek, Mr. Molesworth rubbed his eyes with a start. Had the stream been a Naiad she could not have given him the go-by more coquettishly.

He rubbed his eyes, and then with a short gasp of wonder—almost of terror—involuntarily looked around for Sir John. Here before him was a shore, with a church beside it, and at the far end a whitewashed cottage—surely the very shore, church, cottage, of Sir John's dream! Yes, there was the stone cross before the porch; and here the grid-fashioned church stile; and yonder under the string-course the scaffold-hole with the grass growing out of it!

If Mr. Molesworth's hands had been steady when he tied on his May-fly, they trembled enough now as he hurriedly put up his tackle and disjointed his rod: and still, and again while he hastened across to the cottage above the rocky spit—the cottage with the larch plantation above and in the garden a laburnum aslant and in bloom—his eyes sought the beach for Sir John.

The cottage was a large one, as Sir John had described. It was, in fact, a waterside inn, with its name, 'The Saracen's Head,' painted in black letters along its whitewashed front and under a swinging signboard. Looking up at the board Mr. Molesworth discerned, beneath its dark varnish, the shoulders, scimitar, and grinning face of a turbaned Saracen, and laughed aloud between incredulity and a sense of terror absurdly relieved. This, then, was Sir John's black man!

But almost at the same moment another face looked over the low hedge—the face of a young girl in a blue sun-bonnet: and Mr. Molesworth put out a hand to the gate to steady himself.

The girl—she had heard his laugh, perhaps—gazed down at him with a frank curiosity. Her eyes were honest, clear, untroubled: they were also extremely beautiful eyes: and they were more. As Mr. Molesworth to his last day was prepared to take oath, here were the very eyes, as here was the very face and here the very form, of the Margaret whom he had suffered for, and suffered to be lost to him, twenty-five years ago. It was Margaret, and she had not aged one day.

In Margaret's voice, too, seeing that he made no motion to enter, she spoke down to him across the hedge.

'Are you a friend, sir, of the gentleman that was here just now?'

'Sir John Crang?' Mr. Molesworth just managed to command his voice.

'I don't know his name, sir. But he left his cigar-case behind. I found it on the settle five minutes after he had gone, and ran out to search for him. . . .'

Mr. Molesworth opened the gate and held out a hand for the case. Yes: he recognized it. It bore Sir John's monogram in silver.

'I will give it to him,' he said. Without exactly knowing why, he followed her into the inn-kitchen. Yes, he would take a pint of her ale. 'The home-

brewed?' Yes, certainly, the home-brewed.

She brought it in a pewter tankard, exquisitely polished. The polish of it caught and cast back the sunlight in prismatic circles on the scoured deal cable. The girl—Margaret—stood for a moment in the fuller sunlight by the window, lingering there to pick a dead leaf from a geranium on the ledge.

'Which way did Sir John go?'

'I *thought* he took the turning along the shore; but I didn't notice particularly which way he went. He said he had come down the valley, and I took it for granted he would be going on.'

Mr. Molesworth drank his beer and stood up. 'There are only two ways, then, out of this valley?'

'Thank you, sir——' As he paid her she dropped a small curtsey—'Yes, only two ways—up the valley or along the shore. The road up the valley leads to the railway station.'

'By the way, there was an accident at the station this morning?'

'Indeed, sir?' Her beautiful eyes grew round. 'Nothing serious, I hope?'

'It might have been a very nasty one indeed,' said Mr. Molesworth, and paused. 'I think I'll take a look along the shore before returning. I don't want to miss my friend, if I can help it.'

'You can see right along it from the rock beyond the garden,' said the girl, and Mr. Molesworth went out.

As he reached the spit of rock, the sunlight playing down the waters of the creek dazzled him for a moment. Rubbing his eyes, he saw, about two hundred yards along the foreshore, a boat grounded, and two figures beside it on the beach: and either his sight was playing him a trick or these two were struggling together.

He ran towards them. Almost as he started, in one of the figures he recognized Sir John. The other had him by the shoulders, and seemed to be dragging him by main force towards the boat. Mr. Molesworth shouted as he rushed up to the fray. The assailant turned—turned with a loud hissing sound—and, releasing Sir John, swung up a hand with something in it that flashed in the sun as he struck at the new-comer: and as Mr. Molesworth fell, he saw a fierce brown face and a cage of white, gleaming teeth bared in a savage grin. . . .

He picked himself up, the blood running warm over his eyes, and, as he stood erect for a moment, down over his white waistcoat. But the dusky face of his antagonist had vanished, and, with it, the whole scene. In place of the foreshore with its flat grey stones, his eye travelled down a steep green slope. The hissing sound continued in his ears, louder than ever, but it came with violent jets of steam from a locomotive, grotesquely overturned some twenty yards below him. Fainting, he saw and sank across the body of Sir John Crang,

which lay with face upturned among the June grasses, staring at the sky.

III

STATEMENT BY W. PITT FERGUSON, M.D., OF LOCKYER STREET, PLYMOUTH

The foregoing narrative had been submitted to me by the writer, who was well acquainted with the late Mr. Molesworth. In my opinion it conveys a correct impression of that gentleman's temperament and character: and I can testify that in the details of his psychical adventures on the valley road leading to St. A——'s Church it adheres strictly to the account given me by Mr. Molesworth himself shortly after the accident on the M—— viaduct, and repeated by him several times with insistence during the illness which terminated mortally some four months later. The manner in which the narrative is presented may be open to criticism: but of this, as one who has for some years eschewed the reading of fiction, I am not a fair judge. It adds, at any rate, nothing in the way of 'sensation' to the story as Mr. Molesworth told it: and of its improbability I should be the last to complain, who am to add, of my own positive observation, some evidence which will make it appear yet more startling, if not wholly incredible.

The accident was actually witnessed by two men, cattle-jobbers, who were driving down the valley road in a light cart or 'trap,' and were within two hundred yards of the viaduct when they saw the train crash through the parapet over the second span (counting from the west), and strike and plunge down the slope. In their evidence at the inquest and again at the Board of Trade inquiry, these men agree that it took them from five to eight minutes only to alight, run down and across the valley (fording the stream on their way), and scramble up to the scene of the disaster: and they further agree that one of the first sad objects on which their eyes fell was the dead body of Sir John Crang with Mr. Molesworth, alive but sadly injured and bleeding, stretched across it. Apparently they had managed to crawl from the wreck of the carriage before Sir John succumbed, or Mr. Molesworth had managed to drag his companion out—whether dead or alive cannot be told—before himself fainting from loss of blood.

The toll of the disaster, as is generally known, amounted to twelve killed and seventeen more or less seriously injured. Help having been summoned from M—— Station, the injured—or as many of them as could be removed—were conveyed in an ambulance train to Plymouth. Among them was Mr. Molesworth, whose apparent injuries were a broken hip, a laceration of the thigh, and an ugly, jagged scalp-wound. Of all these he made, in time, a fair recovery: but what brought him under my care was the nervous shock from which his brain, even while his body healed, never made any promising

attempt to rally. For some time after the surgeon had pronounced him cured he lingered on, a visibly dying man, and died in the end of utter nervous collapse.

Yet even within a few days of the end his brain kept an astonishing clearness: and to me, as well as to the friends who visited him in hospital and afterwards in his Plymouth lodgings—for he never returned home again, being unable to face another railway journey—he would maintain, and with astonishing vigour and lucidity of description, that he had actually in very truth travelled down the valley in company with Sir John Crang, and seen with his own eyes everything related in the foregoing paper. Now, as a record of what did undeniably pass through the brain of a cultivated man in some catastrophic moments, I found these recollections of his exceedingly interesting. As no evidence is harder to collect, so almost none can be of higher importance, than that of man's sensations at the exact moment when he passes, naturally or violently, out of this present life into whatever may be beyond. Partly because Mr. Molesworth's story, which he persisted in, had this scientific value; partly in the hope of diverting his mind from the lethargy into which I perceived it to be sinking; I once begged him to write the whole story down. To this, however, he was unequal. His will betrayed him as soon as he took pen and paper.

The entire veracity of his recollection he none the less affirmed again and again, and with something like passion, although aware that his friends were but humouring him while they listened and made pretence to believe. The strong card—if I may so term it—in his evidence was undoubtedly Sir John Crang's cigar-case. It was found in Mr. Molesworth's breast-pocket when they undressed him at the hospital, and how it came there I confess I cannot explain. It may be that it had dropped on the grass from Sir John's pocket, and that Mr. Molesworth, under the hallucination which undoubtedly possessed him, picked it up, and pocketed it before the two cattle-drovers found him. It is an unlikely hypothesis, but I cannot suggest a likelier.

A fortnight before his death he sent for a lawyer and made his will, the sanity of which no one can challenge. At the end he directed that his body should be interred in the parish churchyard of St. A——, 'as close as may be to the cross by the church porch.' As a last challenge to scepticism this surely was defiant enough.

It was my duty to attend the funeral. The coffin, conveyed by train to M —— Station, was there transferred to a hearse, and the procession followed the valley road. I forget at what point it began to be impressed upon me, who had never travelled the road before, that Mr. Molesworth's 'recollections' of it had been so exact that they compelled a choice between the impossibility of accepting his story and the impossibility of doubting the assurance of so entirely honourable a man that he had never travelled the road in his life. At

first I tried to believe that his recollections of it—detailed as they were—might one by one have been suggested by the view from the viaduct. But, honestly, I was soon obliged to give this up; and when we arrived at the creek's head and the small churchyard beside it, I confessed myself confounded. Point by point, and at every point, the actual scene reproduced Mr. Molesworth's description.

I prefer to make no comment on my last discovery. After the funeral, being curious to satisfy myself in every particular, I walked across the track to the inn—'The Saracen's Head'—which again answered Mr. Molesworth's description to the last detail. The house was kept by a widow and her daughter: and the girl—an extremely good-looking young person—made me welcome. I concluded she must be the original of Mr. Molesworth's illusion—perhaps the strangest of all his illusions—and took occasion to ask her (I confess not without a touch of trepidation) if she remembered the day of the accident. She answered that she remembered it well. I asked if she remembered any visitor, or visitors, coming to the inn on that day. She answered, None: but that now I happened to speak of it, somebody must have come that day while she was absent on an errand to the Vicarage (which lies some way along the shore to the westward); for on returning she found a fishing-rod and creel on the settle of the inn-kitchen.

The creel had a luggage-label tied to it, and on the label was written 'Sir W. Moyle.' She had written to Sir Warwick about it more than a month ago, but had not heard from him in answer. [It turned out that Sir Warwick had left England, three days after the accident, on a yachting excursion in Norway.]

'And a cigar-case?' I asked. 'You don't remember seeing a cigar-case?'

She shook her head, evidently puzzled. 'I know nothing about a cigar-case,' she said. 'But you shall see the rod and fishing-basket.'

She ran at once and fetched them. Now that rod and that creel (and the fly-book within it) have since been restored to Sir Warwick Moyle. He had left them in care of the station-master at M——, whence they had suspected that they had been stolen, in the confusion that day prevailing at the little station, by some navvy on the relief-train.

The girl, I am convinced, was honest, and had no notion how they found their way to the kitchen of 'The Saracen's Head': nor—to be equally honest—have I.

THE LAIRD'S LUCK

[In a General Order issued from the Horse-Guards on New Year's Day, 1836, His Majesty King William IV was pleased to direct, through the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Hill, that 'with the view of doing the fullest justice to Regiments, as well as to Individuals who had distinguished themselves in action against the enemy,' an account of the services of every Regiment in the British Army should be published, under the supervision of the Adjutant-General.

With fair promptitude this scheme was put in hand, under the editorship of Mr. Richard Cannon, Principal Clerk of the Adjutant-General's Office. The duty of examining, sifting, and preparing the records of that distinguished Regiment which I shall here call the Moray Highlanders (concealing its real name for reasons which the narrative will make apparent) fell to a certain Major Reginald Sparkes; who in the course of his researches came upon a number of pages in manuscript sealed under one cover and docketed 'Memoranda concerning Ensign D. M. J. Mackenzie. J. R., Jan. 3rd, 1816'—the initials being those of Lieut.-Colonel Sir James Ross, who had commanded the 2nd Battalion of the Morays through the campaign of Waterloo. The cover also bore, in the same handwriting, the word 'Private,' twice underlined.

Of the occurrences related in the enclosed papers—of the private ones, that is—it so happened that of the four eye-witnesses none survived at the date of Major Sparkes' discovery. They had, moreover, so carefully taken their secret with them that the Regiment preserved not a rumour of it. Major Sparkes' own commission was considerably more recent than the Waterloo year, and he at least had heard no whisper of the story. It lay outside the purpose of his inquiry, and he judiciously omitted it from his report. But the time is past when its publication might conceivably have been injurious; and with some alterations in the names—to carry out the disguise of the Regiment—it is here given. The reader will understand that I use the IPSISSIMA VERBA of Colonel Ross.—Q.]

I

I HAD the honour of commanding my Regiment, the Moray Highlanders, on the 16th of June 1815, when the late Ensign David Marie Joseph Mackenzie met his end in the bloody struggle of Quatre Bras (his first engagement). He fell beside the colours, and I gladly bear witness that he had not only borne himself with extreme gallantry, but maintained, under circumstances of severest trial, a coolness which might well have rewarded me for my help in procuring the lad's commission. And yet at the moment I could scarcely regret his death, for he went into action under a suspicion so dishonouring that, had it been proved, no amount of gallantry could have restored him to the respect of his fellows. So at least I believed, with three of his brother officers who shared the secret. These were Major William Ross (my half-brother), Captain Malcolm Murray, and Mr. Ronald Braintree Urquhart, then our senior ensign. Of these, Mr. Urquhart fell two days later, at Waterloo, while steadying his men to face that heroic shock in which Pack's skeleton regiments were enveloped yet not overwhelmed by four brigades of the French infantry. From

the others I received at the time a promise that the accusation against young Mackenzie should be wiped off the slate by his death, and the affair kept secret between us. Since then, however, there has come to me an explanation which—though hard indeed to credit—may, if true, exculpate the lad. I laid it before the others, and they agreed that if, in spite of precautions, the affair should ever come to light, the explanation ought also in justice to be forthcoming; and hence I am writing this memorandum.

It was in the late September of 1814 that I first made acquaintance with David Mackenzie. A wound received in the battle of Salamanca—a shattered ankle—had sent me home invalided, and on my partial recovery I was appointed to command the 2nd Battalion of my Regiment, then being formed at Inverness. To this duty I was equal; but my ankle still gave trouble (the splinters from time to time working through the flesh), and in the late summer of 1814 I obtained leave of absence with my step-brother, and spent some pleasant weeks in cruising and fishing about the Moray Firth. Finding that my leg bettered by this idleness, we hired a smaller boat and embarked on a longer excursion, which took us almost to the south-western end of Loch Ness.

Here, on September 18th, and pretty late in the afternoon, we were overtaken by a sudden squall, which carried away our mast (we found afterwards that it had rotted in the step), and put us for some minutes in no little danger; for my brother and I, being inexpert seamen, did not cut the tangle away, as we should have done, but made a bungling attempt to get the mast on board, with the rigging and drenched sail; and thereby managed to knock a hole in the side of the boat, which at once began to take in water. This compelled us to desist and fall to baling with might and main, leaving the raffle and jagged end of the mast to bump against us at the will of the waves. In short, we were in a highly unpleasant predicament, when a coble or row-boat, carrying one small lug-sail, hove out of the dusk to our assistance. It was manned by a crew of three, of whom the master (though we had scarce light enough to distinguish features) hailed us in a voice which was patently a gentleman's. He rounded up, lowered sail, and ran his boat alongside; and while his two hands were cutting us free of our tangle, inquired very civilly if we were strangers. We answered that we were, and desired him to tell us of the nearest place alongshore where we might land and find a lodging for the night, as well as a carpenter to repair our damage.

'In any ordinary case,' said he, 'I should ask you to come aboard and home with me. But my house lies five miles up the lake; your boat is sinking, and the first thing is to beach her. It happens that you are but half a mile from Ardlaugh and a decent carpenter who can answer all requirements. I think, if I stand by you, the thing can be done; and afterwards we will talk of supper.'

By diligent baling we were able, under his direction, to bring our boat to a

shingly beach, over which a light shone warm in a cottage window. Our hail was quickly answered by a second light. A lantern issued from the building, and we heard the sound of footsteps.

'Is that you, Donald?' cried our rescuer (as I may be permitted to call him).

Before an answer could be returned, we saw that two men were approaching; of whom the one bearing the lantern was a grizzled old carlin with bent knees and a stoop of the shoulders. His companion carried himself with a lighter step. It was he who advanced to salute us, the old man holding the light obediently; and the rays revealed to us a slight, upstanding youth, poorly dressed, but handsome, and with a touch of pride in his bearing.

'Good evening, gentlemen.' He lifted his bonnet politely, and turned to our rescuer. 'Good evening, Mr. Gillespie,' he said—I thought more coldly. 'Can I be of any service to your friends?'

Mr. Gillespie's manner had changed suddenly at sight of the young man, whose salutation he acknowledged more coldly and even more curtly than it had been given. 'I can scarcely claim them as my friends,' he answered. 'They are two gentlemen, strangers in these parts, who have met with an accident to their boat: one so serious that I brought them to the nearest landing, which happened to be Donald's.' He shortly explained our mishap, while the young man took the lantern in hand and inspected the damage with Donald.

'There is nothing,' he announced, 'which cannot be set right in a couple of hours; but we must wait till morning. Meanwhile if, as I gather, you have no claim on these gentlemen, I shall beg them to be my guests for the night.'

We glanced at Mr. Gillespie, whose manners seemed to have deserted him. He shrugged his shoulders. 'Your house is the nearer,' said he, 'and the sooner they reach a warm fire the better for them after their drenching.' And with that he lifted his cap to us, turned abruptly, and pushed off his own boat, scarcely regarding our thanks.

A somewhat awkward pause followed as we stood on the beach, listening to the creak of the thole-pins in the departing boat. After a minute our new acquaintance turned to us with a slightly constrained laugh.

'Mr. Gillespie omitted some of the formalities,' said he. 'My name is Mackenzie—David Mackenzie; and I live at Ardlaugh Castle, scarcely half a mile up the glen behind us. I warn you that its hospitality is rude, but to what it affords you are heartily welcome.'

He spoke with a high, precise courtliness which contrasted oddly with his boyish face (I guessed his age at nineteen or twenty), and still more oddly with his clothes, which were threadbare and patched in many places, yet with a deftness which told of a woman's care. We introduced ourselves by name, and thanked him, with some expressions of regret at inconveniencing (as I put it, at hazard) the family at the Castle.

‘Oh!’ he interrupted, ‘I am sole master there. I have no parents living, no family, and,’ he added, with a slight sullenness which I afterwards recognized as habitual, ‘I may almost say, no friends: though to be sure, you are lucky enough to have one fellow-guest to-night—the minister of the parish, a Mr. Saul, and a very worthy man.’

He broke off to give Donald some instructions about the boat, watched us while we found our plaids and soaked valises, and then took the lantern from the old man’s hand. ‘I ought to have explained,’ said he, ‘that we have neither cart here nor carriage: indeed, there is no carriage-road. But Donald has a pony.’

He led the way a few steps up the beach, and then halted, perceiving my lameness for the first time. ‘Donald, fetch out the sheltie. Can you ride bareback?’ he asked: ‘I fear there’s no saddle but an old piece of sacking.’ In spite of my protestations the pony was led forth; a starved little beast, on whose oversharp ridge I must have cut a sufficiently ludicrous figure when hoisted into place with the valises slung behind me.

The procession set out, and I soon began to feel thankful for my seat, though I took no ease in it. For the road climbed steeply from the cottage, and at once began to twist up the bottom of a ravine so narrow that we lost all help of the young moon. The path, indeed, resembled the bed of a torrent, shrunk now to a trickle of water, the voice of which ran in my ears while our host led the way, springing from boulder to boulder, avoiding pools, and pausing now and then to hold his lantern over some slippery place. The pony followed with admirable caution, and my brother trudged in the rear and took his cue from us. After five minutes of this the ground grew easier and at the same time steeper, and I guessed that we were slanting up the hillside and away from the torrent at an acute angle. The many twists and angles, and the utter darkness (for we were now moving between trees) had completely baffled my reckoning when—at the end of twenty minutes, perhaps—Mr. Mackenzie halted and allowed me to come up with him.

I was about to ask the reason of this halt when a ray of his lantern fell on a wall of masonry; and with a start almost laughable I knew we had arrived. To come to an entirely strange house at night is an experience which holds some taste of mystery even for the oldest campaigner; but I have never in my life received such a shock as this building gave me—naked, unlit, presented to me out of a darkness in which I had imagined a steep mountain scaur dotted with dwarfed trees—a sudden abomination of desolation standing, like the prophet’s, where it ought not. No light showed on the side where we stood—the side over the ravine; only one pointed turret stood out against the faint moonlight glow in the upper sky: but feeling our way around the gaunt side of the building, we came to a back courtyard and two windows lit. Our host

whistled, and helped me to dismount.

In an angle of the court a creaking door opened. A woman's voice cried: 'That will be you, Ardlaugh, and none too early! The minister——'

She broke off, catching sight of us. Our host stepped hastily to the door and began a whispered conversation. We could hear that she was protesting, and began to feel awkward enough. But whatever her objections were, her master cut them short.

'Come in, sirs,' he invited us: 'I warned you that the fare would be hard, but I repeat that you are welcome.'

To our surprise and, I must own, our amusement, the woman caught up his words with new protestations, uttered this time at the top of her voice.

'The fare hard? Well, it might not please folks accustomed to city feasts; but Ardlaugh was not yet without a joint of venison in the larder and a bottle of wine, maybe two, maybe three, for any guest its master chose to make welcome. It was "an ill bird that 'filed his own nest" '—with more to this effect, which our host tried in vain to interrupt.

'Then I will lead you to your rooms,' he said, turning to us as soon as she paused to draw breath.

'Indeed, Ardlaugh, you will do nothing of the kind.' She ran into the kitchen, and returned holding high a lighted torch—a grey-haired woman, with traces of past comeliness, overlaid now by an air of worry, almost of fear. But her manner showed only a defiant pride as she led us up the uncarpeted stairs, past old portraits sagging and rotting in their frames, through bleak corridors, where the windows were patched and the plastered walls discoloured by fungus. Once only she halted. 'It will be a long way to your ap-partments. A grand house!' She had faced round on us, and her eyes seemed to ask a question of ours. 'I have known it filled,' she added—'filled with guests, and the drink and fiddles never stopping for a week. You will see it better to-morrow. A grand house!'

I will confess that, as I limped after this barbaric woman and her torch, I felt some reasonable apprehensions of the bedchamber towards which they were escorting me. But here came another surprise. The room was of moderate size, poorly furnished indeed, but comfortable and something more. It bore traces of many petty attentions, even—in its white dimity curtains and valances—of an attempt at daintiness. The sight of it brought quite a pleasant shock after the dirt and disarray of the corridor. Nor was the room assigned to my brother one whit less habitable. But if surprised by all this, I was fairly astounded to find in each room a pair of candles lit—and quite recently lit—beside the looking-glass, and an ewer of hot water standing, with a clean towel upon it, in each washhand basin. No sooner had the woman departed than I visited my brother and begged him (while he unstrapped his valise) to explain

this apparent miracle. He could only guess with me that the woman had been warned of our arrival by the noise of footsteps in the courtyard, and had dispatched a servant by some backstairs to make ready for us.

Our valises were, fortunately, waterproof. We quickly exchanged our damp clothes for dry ones, and groped our way together along the corridors, helped by the moon which shone through their uncurtained windows, to the main staircase. Here we came on a scent of roasting meat—appetizing to us after our day in the open air—and at the foot found our host waiting for us. He had donned his Highland dress of ceremony—velvet jacket, filibeg and kilt, with the tartan of his clan—and looked (I must own) extremely well in it, though the garments had long since lost their original gloss. An apology for our rough touring suits led to some few questions and replies about the regimental tartan of the Morays, in the history of which he was passably well informed.

Thus chatting, we entered the great hall of Ardlaugh Castle—a tall but narrow and ill-proportioned apartment, having an open timber roof, a stone-paved floor, and walls sparsely decorated with antlers and round targes—where a very small man stood warming his back at an immense fire-place. This was the Reverend Samuel Saul, whose acquaintance we had scarce time to make before a cracked gong summoned us to dinner in the adjoining room.

The young Laird of Ardlaugh took his seat in a roughly carved chair of state at the head of the table; but before doing so treated me to another surprise by muttering a Latin grace and crossing himself. Up to now I had taken it for granted he was a member of the Scottish Kirk. I glanced at the minister in some mystification; but he, good man, appeared to have fallen into a brown study, with his eyes fastened upon a dish of apples which adorned the centre of our promiscuously furnished board.

Of the furniture of our meal I can only say that poverty and decent appearance kept up a brave fight throughout. The table-cloth was ragged, but spotlessly clean; the silver-ware scanty and worn with high polishing. The plates and glasses displayed a noble range of patterns, but were for the most part chipped or cracked. Each knife had been worn to a point, and a few of them joggled in their handles. In a lull of the talk I caught myself idly counting the darns in my table-napkin. They were—if I remember—fourteen, and all exquisitely stitched. The dinner, on the other hand, would have tempted men far less hungry than we—grilled steaks of salmon, a roast haunch of venison, grouse, a milk-pudding, and, for dessert, the dish of apples already mentioned; the meats washed down with one wine only, but that wine was claret, and beautifully sound. I should mention that we were served by a grey-haired retainer, almost stone deaf, and as hopelessly cracked as the gong with which he had beaten us to dinner. In the long waits between the courses we heard him quarrelling outside with the woman who had admitted us; and gradually—I

know not how—the conviction grew on me that they were man and wife, and the only servants of our host's establishment. To cover the noise of one of their altercations I began to congratulate the Laird on the quality of his venison, and put some idle question about his care for his deer.

'I have no deer-forest,' he answered. 'Elspeth is my only housekeeper.'

I had some reply on my lips, when my attention was distracted by a sudden movement by the Rev. Samuel Saul. This honest man had, as we shook hands in the great hall, broken into a flood of small talk. On our way to the dining-room he took me, so to speak, by the buttonhole, and within the minute so drenched me with gossip about Ardlaugh, its climate, its scenery, its crops, and the dimensions of the parish, that I feared a whole evening of boredom lay before us. But from the moment we seated ourselves at table he dropped to an absolute silence. There are men, living much alone, who by habit talk little during their meals; and the minister might be reserving himself. But I had almost forgotten his presence when I heard a sharp exclamation, and, looking across, saw him take from his lips his wine-glass of claret and set it down with a shaking hand. The Laird, too, had heard, and bent a darkly questioning glance on him. At once the little man—whose face had turned to a sickly white—began to stammer and excuse himself.

'It was nothing—a spasm. He would be better of it in a moment. No, he would take no wine: a glass of water would set him right—he was more used to drinking water,' he explained, with a small, nervous laugh.

Perceiving that our solicitude embarrassed him, we resumed our talk, which now turned upon the last Peninsular campaign and certain engagements in which the Morays had borne part; upon the stability of the French Monarchy, and the career (as we believed, at an end) of Napoleon. On all these topics the Laird showed himself well informed, and while preferring the part of listener (as became his youth) from time to time put in a question which convinced me of his intelligence, especially in military affairs.

The minister, though silent as before, had regained his colour; and we were somewhat astonished when, the cloth being drawn and the company left to its wine and one dish of dessert, he rose and announced that he must be going. He was decidedly better, but (so he excused himself) would feel easier at home in his own manse; and so, declining our host's offer of a bed, he shook hands and bade us good night. The Laird accompanied him to the door, and in his absence I fell to peeling an apple, while my brother drummed with his fingers on the table and eyed the faded hangings. I suppose that ten minutes elapsed before we heard the young man's footsteps returning through the flagged hall and a woman's voice uplifted.

'But had the minister any complaint, whatever—to ride off without a word? She could answer for the collops——'

‘Whist, woman! Have done with your clashin’, ye doited old fool!’ He slammed the door upon her, stepped to the table, and with a sullen frown poured himself a glass of wine. His brow cleared as he drank it. ‘I beg your pardon, gentlemen; but this indisposition of Mr. Saul has annoyed me. He lives at the far end of the parish—a good seven miles away—and I had invited him expressly to talk of parish affairs.’

‘I believe,’ said I, ‘you and he are not of the same religion?’

‘Eh?’ He seemed to be wondering how I had guessed. ‘No, I was bred a Catholic. In our branch we have always held to the Old Profession. But that doesn’t prevent my wishing to stand well with my neighbours and do my duty towards them. What disheartens me is, they won’t see it.’ He pushed the wine aside, and for a while, leaning his elbows on the table and resting his chin on his knuckles, stared gloomily before him. Then, with sudden boyish indignation, he burst out: ‘It’s an infernal shame; that’s it—an infernal shame! I haven’t been home here a twelve-month, and the people avoid me like the plague. What have I done? My father wasn’t popular—in fact, they hated him. But so did I. And he hated me, God knows: misused my mother, and wouldn’t endure me in his presence. All my miserable youth I’ve been mewed up in a school in England—a private seminary. Ugh, what a den it was, too! My mother died calling for me—I was not allowed to come: I hadn’t seen her for three years. And now, when the old tyrant is dead, and I come home meaning—so help me!—to straighten things out and make friends—come home, to the poverty you pretend not to notice, though it stares you in the face from every wall—come home, only asking to make the best of it, live on good terms with my fellows, and be happy for the first time in my life—damn them, they won’t fling me a kind look! What have I *done*?—that’s what I want to know. The queer thing is, they behaved more decently at first. There’s that Gillespie, who brought you ashore: he came over the first week, offered me shooting, was altogether as pleasant as could be. I quite took to the fellow. Now, when we meet, he looks the other way! If he has anything against me, he might at least explain: it’s all I ask. What have I done?’

Throughout this outburst I sat slicing my apple and taking now and then a glance at the speaker. It was all so hotly and honestly boyish! He only wanted justice. I know something of youngsters, and recognized the cry. Justice! It’s the one thing every boy claims confidently as his right, and probably the last thing on earth he will ever get. And this boy looked so handsome, too, sitting in his father’s chair, petulant, restive under a weight too heavy (as any one could see) for his age. I couldn’t help liking him.

My brother told me afterwards that I pounced like any recruiting-sergeant. This I do not believe. But what, after a long pause, I said was this: ‘If you are innocent or unconscious of offending, you can only wait for your neighbours

to explain themselves. Meanwhile, why not leave them? Why not travel, for instance?'

'Travel!' he echoed, as much as to say, 'You ought to know, without my telling, that I cannot afford it.'

'Travel,' I repeated; 'see the world, rub against men of your age. You might by the way do some fighting.'

He opened his eyes wide. I saw the sudden idea take hold of him, and again I liked what I saw.

'If I thought——' He broke off. 'You don't mean——' he began, and broke off again.

'I mean the Morays,' I said. 'There may be difficulties; but at this moment I cannot see any real ones.'

By this time he was gripping the arms of his chair. 'If I thought——' he harked back, and for the third time broke off. 'What a fool I am! It's the last thing they ever put in a boy's head at that infernal school. If you will believe it, they wanted to make a priest of me!'

He sprang up, pushing back his chair. We carried our wine into the great hall, and sat there talking the question over before the fire. Before we parted for the night I had engaged to use all my interest to get him a commission in the Morays; and I left him pacing the hall, his mind in a whirl, but his heart (as was plain to see) exulting in his new prospects.

And certainly, when I came to inspect the castle by the next morning's light, I could understand his longing to leave it. A gloomier, more pretentious, or worse-devised structure I never set eyes on. The Mackenzie who erected it may well have been (as the saying is) his own architect, and had either come to the end of his purse or left his heirs to decide against planting gardens, laying out approaches, or even maintaining the pile in decent repair. In place of a drive a grassy cart-track, scored deep with old ruts, led through a gateless entrance into a courtyard where the slates had dropped from the roof and lay strewn like autumn leaves. On this road I encountered the young Laird returning from an early tramp with his gun; and he stood still and pointed to the castle with a grimace.

'A white elephant,' said I.

'Call it rather the corpse of one,' he answered. 'Cannot you imagine some *genie* of the Oriental Tales dragging the beast across Europe and dumping it down here in a sudden fit of disgust? As a matter of fact my grandfather built it, and cursed us with poverty thereby. It soured my father's life. I believe the only soul honestly proud of it is Elspeth.'

'And I suppose,' said I, 'you will leave her in charge of it when you join the Morays?'

'Ah!' he broke in, with a voice which betrayed his relief: 'you are in

earnest about that? Yes, Elspeth will look after the castle, as she does already. I am just a child in her hands. When a man has one only servant it's well to have her devoted.' Seeing my look of surprise, he added, 'I don't count old Duncan, her husband; for he's half-witted, and only serves to break the plates. Does it surprise you to learn that, barring him, Elspeth is my only retainer.'

'H'm,' said I, considerably puzzled—I must explain why.

I am by training an extraordinary light sleeper; yet nothing had disturbed me during the night until at dawn my brother knocked at the door and entered, ready dressed.

'Hallo!' he exclaimed, 'are you responsible for this?' and he pointed to a chair at the foot of the bed where lay, folded in a neat pile, not only the clothes I had tossed down carelessly overnight, but the suit in which I had arrived. He picked up this latter, felt it, and handed it to me. It was dry, and had been carefully brushed.

'Our friend keeps a good valet,' said I; 'but the queer thing is that, in a strange room, I didn't wake. I see he has brought hot water too.'

'Look here,' my brother asked: 'did you lock your door?'

'Why, of course not—the more by token that it hasn't a key.'

'Well,' said he, 'mine has, and I'll swear I used it; but the same thing has happened to me!'

This, I tried to persuade him, was impossible; and for the while he seemed convinced. 'It *must* be,' he owned; 'but if I didn't lock that door I'll never swear to a thing again in all my life.'

The young Laird's remark set me thinking of this, and I answered after a pause: 'In one of the pair, then, you possess a remarkably clever valet.'

It so happened that, while I said it, my eyes rested, without the least intention, on the sleeve of his shooting-coat; and the words were scarcely out before he flushed hotly and made a motion as if to hide a neatly mended rent in its cuff. In another moment he would have retorted, and was indeed drawing himself up in anger, when I prevented him by adding:

'I mean that I am indebted to him or to her this morning for a neatly brushed suit; and I suppose to your freeness in plying me with wine last night that it arrived in my room without waking me. But for that I could almost set it down to the supernatural.'

I said this in all simplicity, and was quite unprepared for its effect upon him, or for his extraordinary reply. He turned as white in the face as, a moment before, he had been red. 'Good God!' he said eagerly, 'you haven't missed anything, have you?'

'Certainly not,' I assured him. 'My dear sir——'

‘I know, I know. But you see,’ he stammered, ‘I am new to these servants. I know them to be faithful, and that’s all. Forgive me; I feared from your tone one of them—Duncan perhaps . . .’

He did not finish his sentence, but broke into a hurried walk and led me towards the house. A minute later, as we approached it, he began to discourse half-humorously on its more glaring features, and had apparently forgotten his perturbation.

I too attached small importance to it, and recall it now merely through unwillingness to omit any circumstance which may throw light on a story sufficiently dark to me. After breakfast our host walked down with us to the loch-side, where we found old Donald putting the last touches on his job. With thanks for our entertainment we shook hands and pushed off: and my last word at parting was a promise to remember his ambition and write any news of my success.

II

I anticipated no difficulty, and encountered none. The *Gazette* of January, 1815, announced that David Marie Joseph Mackenzie, gentleman, had been appointed to an ensigncy in the —th Regiment of Infantry (Moray Highlanders); and I timed my letter of congratulation to reach him with the news. Within a week he had joined us at Inverness, and was made welcome.

I may say at once that during his brief period of service I could find no possible fault with his bearing as a soldier. From the first he took seriously to the calling of arms, and not only showed himself punctual on parade and in all the small duties of barracks, but displayed, in his reserved way, a zealous resolve to master whatever by book or conversation could be learned of the higher business of war. My junior officers—though when the test came, as it soon did, they acquitted themselves most creditably—showed, as a whole, just then no great promise. For the most part they were young lairds, like Mr. Mackenzie, or cadets of good Highland families; but, unlike him, they had been allowed to run wild, and chafed under harness. One or two of them had the true Highland addiction to card-playing; and though I set a pretty stern face against this curse—as I dare to call it—its effects were to be traced in late hours, more than one case of shirking ‘rounds,’ and a general slovenliness at morning parade.

In such company Mr. Mackenzie showed to advantage, and I soon began to value him as a likely officer. Nor, in my dissatisfaction with them, did it give me any uneasiness—as it gave me no surprise—to find that his brother-officers took less kindly to him. He kept a certain reticence of manner, which either came of a natural shyness or had been ingrained in him at the Roman Catholic

seminary. He was poor, too; but poverty did not prevent his joining in all the regimental amusements, figuring modestly but sufficiently on the subscription lists, and even taking a hand at cards for moderate stakes. Yet he made no headway, and his popularity diminished instead of growing. All this I noted, but without discovering any definite reason. Of his professional promise, on the other hand, there could be no question; and the men liked and respected him.

Our senior ensign at this date was a Mr. Urquhart, the eldest son of a West Highland laird, and heir to a considerable estate. He had been in barracks when Mr. Mackenzie joined; but a week later his father's sudden illness called for his presence at home, and I granted him a leave of absence, which was afterwards extended. I regretted this, not only for the sad occasion, but because it deprived the battalion for a time of one of its steadiest officers, and Mr. Mackenzie in particular of the chance to form a very useful friendship. For the two young men had (I thought) several qualities which might well attract them each to the other, and a common gravity of mind in contrast with their companions' prevalent and somewhat tiresome frivolity. Of the two I judged Mr. Urquhart (the elder by a year) to have the more stable character. He was a good-looking, dark-complexioned young Highlander, with a serious expression which, without being gloomy, did not escape a touch of melancholy. I should judge this melancholy of Mr. Urquhart's constitutional, and the boyish sullenness which lingered on Mr. Mackenzie's equally handsome face to have been imposed rather by circumstances.

Mr. Urquhart rejoined us on the 24th of February. Two days later, as all the world knows, Napoleon made his escape from Elba; and the next week or two made it certain not only that the Allies must fight, but that the British contingent must be drawn largely, if not in the main, from the second battalions then drilling up and down the country. The 29th of March brought us our marching-orders; and I will own that, while feeling no uneasiness about the great issue, I mistrusted the share my raw youngsters were to take in it.

On the 12th of April we were landed at Ostend, and at once marched up to Brussels, where we remained until the middle of June, having been assigned to the 5th (Picton's) Division of the Reserve. For some reason the Highland regiments had been massed into the Reserve, and were billeted about the capital, our own quarters lying between the 92nd (Gordons) and General Kruse's Nassauers, whose lodgings stretched out along the Louvain road; and although I could have wished some harder and more responsible service to get the Morays into training, I felt what advantage they derived from rubbing shoulders with the fine fellows of the 42nd, 79th, and 92nd, all First Battalions toughened by Peninsular work. The gaieties of life in Brussels during these two months have been described often enough; but among the military they

were chiefly confined to those officers whose means allowed them to keep the pace set by rich civilians, and the Morays played the part of amused spectators. Yet the work and the few gaieties which fell to our share, while adding to our experiences, broke up to some degree the old domestic habits of the battalion. Excepting on duty I saw less of Mr. Mackenzie and thought less about him; he might be left now to be shaped by active service. But I was glad to find him often in company with Mr. Urquhart.

I come now to the memorable night of June 15th, concerning which and the end it brought upon the festivities of Brussels so much has been written. All the world has heard of the Duchess of Richmond's ball, and seems to conspire in decking it out with pretty romantic fables. To contradict the most of these were waste of time; but I may point out (1) that the ball was over and, I believe, all the company dispersed, before the actual alarm awoke the capital; and (2) that all responsible officers gathered there shared the knowledge that such an alarm was impending, might arrive at any moment, and would almost certainly arrive within a few hours. News of the French advance across the frontier and attack on General Zieten's outposts had reached Wellington at three o'clock that afternoon. It should have been brought five hours earlier; but he gave his orders at once, and quietly, and already our troops were massing for defence upon Nivelles. We of the Reserve had secret orders to hold ourselves prepared. Obedient to a hint from their Commander-in-Chief, the generals of division and brigade who attended the Duchess's ball withdrew themselves early on various pleas. Her Grace had honoured me with an invitation, probably because I represented a Highland regiment; and Highlanders (especially the Gordons, her brother's regiment) were much to the fore that night with reels, flings, and strathspeys. The many withdrawals warned me that something was in the wind, and after remaining just so long as seemed respectful I took leave of my hostess and walked homewards across the city as the clocks were striking eleven.

We of the Morays had our headquarters in a fairly large building—the Hôtel de Liège—in time of peace a resort of *commis-voyageurs* of the better class. It boasted a roomy hall, out of which opened two coffee-rooms, converted by us into guard- and mess-room. A large drawing-room on the first floor overlooking the street served me for sleeping as well as working quarters, and to reach it I must pass the *entresol*, where a small apartment had been set aside for occasional uses. We made it, for instance, our ante-room, and assembled there before mess; a few would retire there for smoking or card-playing; during the day it served as a waiting-room for messengers or any one whose business could not be for the moment attended to.

I had paused at the entrance to put some small question to the sentry, when I heard the crash of a chair in this room, and two voices broke out in fierce

altercation. An instant after, the mess-room door opened, and Captain Murray, without observing me, ran past me and up the stairs. As he reached the *entresol*, a voice—my brother's—called down from an upper landing, and demanded: 'What's wrong there?'

'I don't know, Major,' Captain Murray answered, and at the same moment flung the door open. I was quick on his heels, and he wheeled round in some surprise at my voice, and to see me interposed between him and my brother, who had come running downstairs, and now stood behind my shoulder in the entrance.

'Shut the door,' I commanded quickly. 'Shut the door, and send away any one you may hear outside. Now, gentleman, explain yourselves, please.'

Mr. Urquhart and Mr. Mackenzie faced each other across a small table, from which the cloth had been dragged and lay on the floor with a scattered pack of cards. The elder lad held a couple of cards in his hand; he was white in the face.

'He cheated!' He swung round upon me in a kind of indignant fury, and tapped the cards with his forefinger.

I looked from him to the accused. Mackenzie's face was dark, almost purple, rather with rage (as it struck me) than with shame.

'It's a lie.' He let out the words slowly, as if holding rein on his passion. 'Twice he's said so, and twice I've called him a liar.' He drew back for an instant, and then lost control of himself. 'If that's not enough——' He leapt forward, and almost before Captain Murray could interpose had hurled himself upon Urquhart. The table between them went down with a crash, and Urquhart went staggering back from a blow which just missed his face and took him on the collar-bone before Murray threw both arms around the assailant.

'Mr. Mackenzie,' said I, 'you will consider yourself under arrest. Mr. Urquhart, you will hold yourself ready to give me a full explanation. Whichever of you may be in the right, this is a disgraceful business, and dishonouring to your regiment and the cloth you wear: so disgraceful, that I hesitate to call up the guard and expose it to more eyes than ours. If Mr. Mackenzie'—I turned to him again—'can behave himself like a gentleman, and accept the fact of his arrest without further trouble, the scandal can at least be postponed until I discover how much it is necessary to face. For the moment, sir, you are in charge of Captain Murray. Do you understand?'

He bent his head sullenly. 'He shall fight me, whatever happens,' he muttered.

I found it wise to pay no heed to this. 'It will be best,' I said to Murray, 'to remain here with Mr. Mackenzie until I am ready for him. Mr. Urquhart may retire to his quarters, if he will—I advise it, indeed—but I shall require his attendance in a few minutes. You understand,' I added significantly, 'that for

the present this affair remains strictly between ourselves.' I knew well enough that, for all the King's regulations, a meeting would inevitably follow sooner or later, and will own I looked upon it as the proper outcome, between gentlemen, of such a quarrel. But it was not for me, their Colonel, to betray this knowledge or my feelings, and by imposing secrecy I put off for the time all the business of a formal challenge with seconds. So I left them, and requesting my brother to follow me, mounted to my own room. The door was no sooner shut than I turned on him.

'Surely,' I said, 'this is a bad mistake of Urquhart's? It's an incredible charge. From all I've seen of him, the lad would never be guilty . . .' I paused, expecting his assent. To my surprise he did not give it, but stood fingering his chin and looking serious.

'I don't know,' he answered unwillingly. 'There are stories against him.'

'What stories?'

'Nothing definite.' My brother hesitated. 'It doesn't seem fair to him to repeat mere whispers. But the others don't like him.'

'Hence the whispers, perhaps. They have not reached me.'

'They would not. He is known to be a favourite of yours. But they don't care to play with him.' My brother stopped, met my look, and answered it with a shrug of the shoulders, adding: 'He wins pretty constantly.'

'Any definite charge before to-night's?'

'No: at least, I think not. But Urquhart may have been put up to watch.'

'Fetch him up, please,' said I promptly; and seating myself at the writing-table I lit candles (for the lamp was dim), made ready the writing materials and prepared to take notes of the evidence.

Mr. Urquhart presently entered, and I wheeled round in my chair to confront him. He was still exceedingly pale—paler, I thought, than I had left him. He seemed decidedly ill at ease, though not on his own account. His answer to my first question made me fairly leap in my chair.

'I wish,' he said, 'to qualify my accusation of Mr. Mackenzie. That he cheated I have the evidence of my own eyes; but I am not sure how far he knew he was cheating.'

'Good heavens, sir!' I cried. 'Do you know you have accused that young man of a villainy which must damn him for life? And now you tell me——' I broke off in sheer indignation.

'I know,' he answered quietly. 'The noise fetched you in upon us on the instant, and the mischief was done.'

'Indeed, sir,' I could not avoid sneering, 'to most of us it would seem that the mischief was done when you accused a brother-officer of fraud to his face.'

He seemed to reflect. 'Yes, sir,' he assented slowly; 'it is done. I saw him cheat: that I must persist in; but I cannot say how far he was conscious of it.

And since I cannot, I must take the consequences.'

'Will you kindly inform us how it is possible for a player to cheat and not know that he is cheating?'

He bent his eyes on the carpet as if seeking an answer. It was long in coming. 'No,' he said at last, in a slow, dragging tone, 'I cannot.'

'Then you will at least tell us exactly what Mr. Mackenzie did.'

Again there was a long pause. He looked at me straight, but with hopelessness in his eyes. 'I fear you would not believe me. It would not be worth while. If you can grant it, sir, I would ask time to decide.'

'Mr. Urquhart,' said I sternly, 'are you aware you have brought against Mr. Mackenzie a charge under which no man of honour can live easily for a moment? You ask me without a word of evidence in substantiation to keep *him* in torture while I give *you* time. It is monstrous, and I beg to remind you that, unless your charge is proved, you can—and will—be broken for making it.'

'I know it, sir,' he answered firmly enough; 'and because I knew it, I asked—perhaps selfishly—for time. If you refuse, I will at least ask permission to see a priest before telling a story which I can scarcely expect you to believe.' Mr. Urquhart too was a Roman Catholic.

But my temper for the moment was gone. 'I see little chance,' said I, 'of keeping this scandal secret, and regret it the less if the consequences are to fall on a rash accuser. But just now I will have no meddling priest share the secret. For the present, one word more. Had you heard before this evening of any hints against Mr. Mackenzie's play?'

He answered reluctantly: 'Yes.'

'And you set yourself to lay a trap for him?'

'No, sir; I did not. Unconsciously I may have been set on the watch: no, that is wrong—I *did* watch. But I swear it was in every hope and expectation of clearing him. He was my friend. Even when I *saw*, I had at first no intention to expose him until——'

'That is enough, sir,' I broke in, and turned to my brother. 'I have no option but to put Mr. Urquhart too under arrest. Kindly convey him back to his room, and send Captain Murray to me. He may leave Mr. Mackenzie in the *entresol*.'

My brother led Urquhart out, and in a minute Captain Murray tapped at my door. He was an honest Scot, not too sharp-witted, but straight as a die. I am to show him this description, and he will cheerfully agree with it.

'This is a hideous business, Murray,' said I as he entered. 'There's something wrong with Urquhart's story. Indeed, between ourselves it has the fatal weakness that he won't tell it.'

Murray took half a minute to digest this: then he answered: 'I don't know anything about Urquhart's story, sir. But there's something wrong about

Urquhart.' Here he hesitated.

'Speak out, man,' said I: 'in confidence. That's understood.'

'Well, sir,' said he, 'Urquhart won't fight.'

'Ah! so that question came up, did it?' I asked, looking at him sharply.

He was abashed, but answered, with a twinkle in his eye: 'I believe, sir, you gave me no orders to stop their talking, and in a case like this—between youngsters—some question of a meeting would naturally come up. You see, I know both the lads. Urquhart I really like; but he didn't show up well, I must own—to be fair to the other, who is in the worse fix.'

'I am not so sure of that,' I commented; 'but go on.'

He seemed surprised. 'Indeed, Colonel? Well,' he resumed, 'I being the sort of fellow they could talk before, a meeting *was* discussed. The question was how to arrange it without seconds—that is, without breaking your orders and dragging in outsiders. For Mackenzie wanted blood at once, and for a while Urquhart seemed just as eager. All of a sudden, when . . .' here he broke off suddenly, not wishing to commit himself.

'Tell me only what you think necessary,' said I.

He thanked me. 'That is what I wanted,' he said. 'Well, all of a sudden, when we had found out a way and Urquhart was discussing it, he pulled himself up in the middle of a sentence, and with his eyes fixed on the other—a most curious look it was—he waited while you could count ten, and, "No," says he, "I'll not fight you at once"—for we had been arranging something of the sort—"not to-night, anyway, nor to-morrow," he says. "I'll fight you; but I won't have your blood on my head *in that way*." Those were his words. I have no notion what he meant; but he kept repeating them, and would not explain, though Mackenzie tried him hard and was for shooting across the table. He was repeating them when the Major interrupted us and called him up.'

'He has behaved ill from the first,' said I. 'To me the whole affair begins to look like an abominable plot against Mackenzie. Certainly I cannot entertain a suspicion of his guilt upon a bare assertion which Urquhart declines to back with a tittle of evidence.'

'The devil he does!' mused Captain Murray. 'That looks bad for him. And yet, sir, I'd sooner trust Urquhart than Mackenzie, and if the case lies against Urquhart——'

'It will assuredly break him,' I put in, 'unless he can prove the charge, or that he was honestly mistaken.'

'Then, sir,' said the Captain, 'I'll have to show you this. It's ugly, but it's only justice.'

He pulled a sovereign from his pocket and pushed it on the writing-table under my nose.

'What does this mean?'

‘It is a marked one,’ said he.

‘So I perceive.’ I had picked up the coin and was examining it.

‘I found it just now,’ he continued, ‘in the room below. The upsetting of the table had scattered Mackenzie’s stakes about the floor.’

‘You seem to have a pretty notion of evidence!’ I observed sharply. ‘I don’t know what accusation this coin may carry; but why need it be Mackenzie’s? He might have won it from Urquhart.’

‘I thought of that,’ was the answer. ‘But no money had changed hands. I inquired. The quarrel arose over the second deal, and as a matter of fact Urquhart had laid no money on the table, but made a pencil-note of the few shillings he lost by the first hand. You may remember, sir, how the table stood when you entered.’

I reflected. ‘Yes, my recollection bears you out. Do I gather that you have confronted Mackenzie with this?’

‘No. I found it and slipped it quietly into my pocket. I thought we had trouble enough on hand for the moment.’

‘Who marked this coin?’

‘Young Fraser, sir, in my presence. He has been losing small sums, he declares, by pilfering. We suspected one of the orderlies.’

‘In this connection you had no suspicion of Mr. Mackenzie?’

‘None, sir.’ He considered for a moment, and added: ‘There was a curious thing happened three weeks ago over my watch. It found its way one night to Mr. Mackenzie’s quarters. He brought it to me in the morning; said it was lying, when he awoke, on the table beside his bed. He seemed utterly puzzled. He had been to one or two already to discover the owner. We joked him about it, the more by token that his own watch had broken down the day before and was away at the mender’s. The whole thing was queer, and has not been explained. Of course in that instance he was innocent: everything proves it. It just occurred to me as worth mentioning, because in both instances the lad may have been the victim of a trick.’

‘I am glad you did so,’ I said; ‘though just now it does not throw any light that I can see.’ I rose and paced the room. ‘Mr. Mackenzie had better be confronted with this, too, and hear your evidence. It’s best he should know the worst against him; and if he be guilty it may move him to confession.’

‘Certainly, sir,’ Captain Murray assented. ‘Shall I fetch him?’

‘No, remain where you are,’ I said; ‘I will go for him myself.’

I understood that Mr. Urquhart had retired to his own quarters or to my brother’s, and that Mr. Mackenzie had been left in the *entresol* alone. But as I descended the stairs quietly I heard within that room a voice which at first persuaded me he had company, and next that, left to himself, he had broken down and given way to the most childish wailing. The voice was so unlike his,

or any grown man's, that it arrested me on the lowermost stair against my will. It resembled rather the sobbing of an infant mingled with short strangled cries of contrition and despair.

'What shall I do? What shall I do? I didn't mean it—I meant to do good! What shall I do?'

So much I heard (as I say) against my will, before my astonishment gave room to a sense of shame at playing, even for a moment, the eavesdropper upon the lad I was to judge. I stepped quickly to the door, and with a warning rattle (to give him time to recover himself) turned the handle and entered.

He was alone, lying back in an easy chair—not writhing there in anguish of mind, as I had fully expected, but sunk rather in a state of dull and hopeless apathy. To reconcile his attitude with the sounds I had just heard was merely impossible; and it bewildered me worse than any in the long chain of bewildering incidents. For five seconds or so he appeared not to see me; but when he grew aware his look changed suddenly to one of utter terror, and his eyes, shifting from me, shot a glance about the room as if he expected some new accusation to dart at him from the corners. His indignation and passionate defiance were gone: his eyes seemed to ask me: 'How much do you know?' before he dropped them and stood before me, sullenly submissive.

'I want you upstairs,' said I: 'not to hear your defence on this charge, for Mr. Urquhart has not yet specified it. But there is another matter.'

'Another?' he echoed dully, and, I observed, without surprise.

I led the way back to the room where Captain Murray waited. 'Can you tell me anything about this?' I asked, pointing to the sovereign on the writing-table.

He shook his head, clearly puzzled, but anticipating mischief.

'The coin is marked, you see. I have reason to know that it was marked by its owner in order to detect a thief. Captain Murray found it just now among your stakes.'

Somehow—for I liked the lad—I had not the heart to watch his face as I delivered this. I kept my eyes upon the coin, and waited, expecting an explosion—a furious denial, or at least a cry that he was the victim of a conspiracy. None came. I heard him breathing hard. After a long and very dreadful pause some words broke from him, so lowly uttered that my ears only just caught them.

'This too? O my God!'

I seated myself, the lad before me, and Captain Murray erect and rigid at the end of the table. 'Listen, my lad,' said I. 'This wears an ugly look, but that a stolen coin has been found in your possession does not prove that you've stolen it.'

'I did not. Sir, I swear to you on my honour, and before Heaven, that I did

not.'

'Very well,' said I: 'Captain Murray asserts that he found this among the moneys you had been staking at cards. Do you question that assertion?'

He answered almost without pondering. 'No, sir. Captain Murray is a gentleman, and incapable of falsehood. If he says so, it was so.'

'Very well again. Now, can you explain how this coin came into your possession?'

At this he seemed to hesitate; but answered at length: 'No, I cannot explain.'

'Have you any idea? Or can you form any guess?'

Again there was a long pause before the answer came in low and strained tones: 'I can guess.'

'What is your guess?'

He lifted a hand and dropped it hopelessly. 'You would not believe,' he said.

I will own a suspicion flashed across my mind on hearing these words—the very excuse given a while ago by Mr. Urquhart—that the whole affair was a hoax and the two young men were in conspiracy to befool me. I dismissed it at once: the sight of Mr. Mackenzie's face was convincing. But my temper was gone.

'Believe you?' I exclaimed. 'You seem to think the one thing I can swallow as credible, even probable, is that an officer in the Morays has been pilfering and cheating at cards. Oddly enough, it's the last thing I'm going to believe without proof, and the last charge I shall pass without clearing it up to my satisfaction. Captain Murray, will you go and bring me Mr. Urquhart and the Major?'

As Captain Murray closed the door I rose, and with my hands behind me took a turn across the room to the fire-place, then back to the writing-table.

'Mr. Mackenzie,' I said, 'before we go any further I wish you to believe that I am your friend as well as your Colonel. I did something to start you upon your career, and I take a warm interest in it. To believe you guilty of these charges will give me the keenest grief. However unlikely your defence may sound—and you seem to fear it—I will give it the best consideration I can. If you are innocent, you shall not find me prejudiced because many are against you and you are alone. Now, this coin——' I turned to the table.

The coin was gone.

I stared at the place where it had lain; then at the young man. He had not moved. My back had been turned for less than two seconds, and I could have sworn he had not budged from the square of carpet on which he had first taken his stand, and on which his feet were still planted. On the other hand, I was equally positive the incriminating coin had lain on the table at the moment I

turned my back.

'It is gone!' cried I.

'Gone?' he echoed, staring at the spot to which my finger pointed. In the silence our glances were still crossing when my brother tapped at the door and brought in Mr. Urquhart, Captain Murray following.

Dismissing for a moment this latest mystery, I addressed Mr. Urquhart. 'I have sent for you, sir, to request in the first place that here in Mr. Mackenzie's presence and in colder blood you will either withdraw or repeat and at least attempt to substantiate the charge you brought against him.'

'I adhere to it, sir, that there was cheating. To withdraw would be to utter a lie. Does he deny it?'

I glanced at Mr. Mackenzie. 'I deny that I cheated,' said he sullenly.

'Further,' pursued Mr. Urquhart, 'I repeat what I told you, sir. He *may*, while profiting by it, have been unaware of the cheat. At the moment I thought it impossible; but I am willing to believe——'

'*You* are willing!' I broke in. 'And pray, sir, what about me, his Colonel, and the rest of his brother-officers? Have you the coolness to suggest——'

But the full question was never put, and in this world it will never be answered. A bugle call, distant but clear, cut my sentence in half. It came from the direction of the Place d'Armes. A second bugle echoed it from the height of the Montagne du Parc, and within a minute its note was taken up and answered across the darkness from quarter after quarter of the city.

We looked at one another in silence. 'Business,' said my brother at length, curtly and quietly.

Already the rooms above us were astir. I heard windows thrown open, voices calling questions, feet running.

'Yes,' said I, 'it is business at length, and for the while this inquiry must end. Captain Murray, look to your company. You, Major, see that the lads tumble out quick to the alarm-post. One moment!'—and Captain Murray halted with his hand on the door—'It is understood that for the present no word of to-night's affair passes our lips.' I turned to Mr. Mackenzie and answered the question I read in the lad's eyes. 'Yes, sir; for the present I take off your arrest. Get your sword. It shall be your good fortune to answer the enemy before answering me.'

To my amazement Mr. Urquhart interposed. He was, if possible, paler and more deeply agitated than before. 'Sir, I entreat you not to allow Mr. Mackenzie to go. I have reasons—I was mistaken just now——'

'Mistaken, sir?'

'Not in what I saw. I refused to fight him—under a mistake. I thought——'

But I cut his stammering short. 'As for you,' I said, 'the most charitable construction I can put on your behaviour is to believe you mad. For the present

you, too, are free to go and do your duty. Now leave me. Business presses, and I am sick and angry at the sight of you.'

It was just two in the morning when I reached the alarm-post. Brussels by this time was full of the rolling of drums and screaming of pipes; and the regiment formed up in darkness rendered tenfold more confusing by a mob of citizens, some wildly excited, others paralysed by terror, and all intractable. We had, moreover, no small trouble to disengage from our ranks the wives and families who had most unwisely followed many officers abroad, and now clung to their dear ones bidding them farewell. To end this most distressing scene I had in some instances to use a roughness which it still afflicts me to remember. Yet in actual time it was soon over, and dawn scarcely breaking when the Morays with the other regiments of Pack's brigade filed out of the park and fell into stride on the road which leads southward to Charleroi.

In this record it would be immaterial to describe either our march or the since-famous engagement which terminated it. Very early we began to hear the sound of heavy guns far ahead and to make guesses at their distance; but it was close upon two in the afternoon before we reached the high ground above Quatre Bras, and saw the battle spread below us like a picture. The Prince of Orange had been fighting his ground stubbornly since seven in the morning. Ney's superior artillery and far superior cavalry had forced him back, it is true; but he still covered the cross-roads which were the key of his defence, and his position, remained sound, though it was fast becoming critical. Just as we arrived, the French, who had already mastered the farm of Piermont on the left of the Charleroi road, began to push their skirmishers into a thicket below it and commanding the road running east to Namur. Indeed, for a short space they had this road at their mercy, and the chance within grasp of doubling up our left by means of it.

This happened, I say, just as we arrived; and Wellington, who had reached Quatre Bras a short while ahead of us (having fetched a circuit from Brussels through Ligny, where he paused to inspect Field-Marshal Blücher's dispositions for battle), at once saw the danger, and detached one of our regiments, the 95th Rifles, to drive back the tirailleurs from the thicket; which, albeit scarcely breathed after their march, they did with a will, and so regained the Allies' hold upon the Namur road. The rest of us meanwhile defiled down this same road, formed line in front of it, and under a brisk cannonade from the French heights waited for the next move.

It was not long in coming. Ney, finding that our artillery made poor play against his, prepared to launch a column against us. Warned by a cloud of skirmishers, our light companies leapt forward, chose their shelter, and began a

very pretty exchange of musketry. But this was preliminary work only, and soon the head of a large French column appeared on the slope to our right, driving the Brunswickers slowly before it. It descended a little way, and suddenly broke into three or four columns of attack. The mischief no sooner threatened than Picton came galloping along our line and roaring that our division would advance and engage with all speed. For a raw regiment like the Morays this was no light test; but, supported by a veteran regiment on either hand, they bore it admirably. Dropping the Gordons to protect the road in case of mishap, the two brigades swung forward in the prettiest style, their skirmishers running in and forming on their flank as they advanced. Then for a while the work was hot; but, as will always happen when column is boldly met by line, the French quickly had enough of our enveloping fire, and wavered. A short charge with the bayonet finished it, and drove them in confusion up the slope: nor had I an easy task to resume a hold on my youngsters and restrain them from pursuing too far. The brush had been sharp, but I had the satisfaction of knowing that the Morays had behaved well. They also knew it, and fell to jesting in high good-humour as General Pack withdrew the brigade from the ground of its exploit and posted us in line with the 42nd and 44th Regiments on the left of the main road to Charleroi.

To the right of the Charleroi road, and some way in advance of our position, the Brunswickers were holding ground as best they could under a hot and accurate artillery fire. Except for this, the battle had come to a lull, when a second mass of the enemy began to move down the slopes: a battalion in line heading two columns of infantry direct upon the Brunswickers, while squadron after squadron of lancers crowded down along the road into which by weight of numbers they must be driven. The Duke of Brunswick, perceiving his peril, headed a charge of his lancers upon the advancing infantry, but without the least effect. His horsemen broke. He rode back and called on his infantry to retire in good order. They also broke, and in the attempt to rally them he fell mortally wounded.

The line taken by these flying Brunswickers would have brought them diagonally across the Charleroi road into our arms, had not the French lancers seized this moment to charge straight down it in a body. They encountered, and the indiscriminate mass was hurled on to us, choking and overflowing the causeway. In a minute we were swamped—the two Highland regiments and the 44th bending against a sheer weight of French horsemen. So suddenly came the shock that the 42nd had no time to form square, until two companies were cut off and well-nigh destroyed; *then* that noble regiment formed around the horsemen who could boast of having broken it, and left not one to bear back the tale. The 44th behaved more cleverly, but not more intrepidly: it did not attempt to form square, but faced its rear rank round and gave the

Frenchmen a volley; before they could check their impetus the front rank poured in a second; and the light company, which had held its fire, delivered a third, breaking the crowd in two, and driving the hinder-part back in disorder and up the Charleroi road. But already the fore-part had fallen upon the Morays, fortunately the last of the three regiments to receive the shock. Though most fortunate, they had least experience, and were consequently slow in answering my shout. A wedge of lancers broke through us as we formed around the two standards, and I saw Mr. Urquhart with the King's colours hurled back in the rush. The pole fell with him, after swaying within a yard of a French lancer, who thrust out an arm to grasp it. And with that I saw Mackenzie divide the rush and stand—it may have been for five seconds—erect, with his foot upon the standard. Then three lances pierced him, and he fell. But the lateral pressure of their own troopers broke off the head of the wedge which the French had pushed into us. Their leading squadrons were pressed down the road and afterwards accounted for by the Gordons. Of the seven-and-twenty assailants around whom the Morays now closed, not one survived.

Towards nightfall, as Ney weakened and the Allies were reinforced, our troops pushed forward and recaptured every important position taken by the French that morning. The Morays, with the rest of Picton's division, bivouacked for the night in and around the farmstead of Gemiancourt.

So obstinately had the field been contested that darkness fell before the wounded could be collected with any thoroughness; and the comfort of the men around many a camp-fire was disturbed by groans (often quite near at hand) of some poor comrade or enemy lying helpless and undiscovered, or exerting his shattered limbs to crawl towards the blaze. And these interruptions at length became so distressing to the Morays, that two or three officers sought me and demanded leave to form a fatigue party of volunteers and explore the hedges and thickets with lanterns. Among them was Mr. Urquhart; and having readily given leave and accompanied them some little way on their search, I was bidding them good night and good speed when I found him standing at my elbow.

'May I have a word with you, Colonel?' he asked.

His voice was low and serious. Of course I knew what subject filled his thoughts. 'Is it worth while, sir?' I answered. 'I have lost to-day a brave lad for whom I had a great affection. For him the account is closed; but not for those who liked him and are still concerned in his good name. If you have anything further against him, or if you have any confession to make, I warn you that this is a bad moment to choose.'

'I have only to ask,' said he, 'that you will grant me the first convenient hour for explaining; and to remind you that when I besought you not to send

him into action to-day, I had no time to give you reasons.'

'This is extraordinary talk, sir. I am not used to command the Morays under advice from my subalterns. And in this instance I had reasons for not even listening to you.' He was silent. 'Moreover,' I continued, 'you may as well know, though I am under no obligation to tell you, that I do most certainly not regret having given that permission to one who justified it by a signal service to his king and country.'

'But would you have sent him *knowing* that he must die? Colonel,' he went on rapidly, before I could interrupt, 'I beseech you to listen. I *knew* he had only a few hours to live. I saw his wraith last night. It stood behind his shoulder in the room when in Captain Murray's presence he challenged me to fight him. You are a Highlander, sir: you may be sceptical about the second sight; but at least you must have heard many claim it. I swear positively that I saw Mr. Mackenzie's wraith last night, and for that reason, and no other, tried to defer the meeting. To fight him, knowing he must die, seemed to me as bad as murder. Afterwards, when the alarm sounded and you took off his arrest, I knew that his fate must overtake him—that my refusal had done no good. I tried to interfere again, and you would not hear. Naturally you would not hear; and very likely, if you had, his fate would have found him in some other way. That is what I try to believe. I hope it is not selfish, sir; but the doubt tortures me.'

'Mr. Urquhart,' I asked, 'is this the only occasion on which you have possessed the second sight, or had reason to think so?'

'No, sir.'

'Was it the first or only time last night you believed you were granted it?'

'It was the *second* time last night,' he said steadily.

We had been walking back to my bivouac fire, and in the light of it I turned and said: 'I will hear your story at the first opportunity. I will not promise to believe, but I will hear and weigh it. Go now and join the others in their search.'

He saluted, and strode away into the darkness. The opportunity I promised him never came. At eleven o'clock next morning we began our withdrawal, and within twenty-four hours the battle of Waterloo had begun. In one of the most heroic feats of that day—the famous resistance of Pack's brigade—Mr. Urquhart was among the first to fall.

III

Thus it happened that an affair which so nearly touched the honour of the Morays, and which had been agitating me at the very moment when the bugle sounded in the Place d'Armes, became a secret shared by three only. The

regiment joined in the occupation of Paris, and did not return to Scotland until the middle of December.

I had ceased to mourn for Mr. Mackenzie, but neither to regret him nor to speculate on the mystery which closed his career, and which, now that death had sealed Mr. Urquhart's lips, I could no longer hope to penetrate, when, on the day of my return to Inverness, I was reminded of him by finding, among the letters and papers awaiting me, a visiting-card neatly indited with the name of the Reverend Samuel Saul. On inquiry I learnt that the minister had paid at least three visits to Inverness during the past fortnight, and had, on each occasion, shown much anxiety to learn when the battalion might be expected. He had also left word that he wished to see me on a matter of much importance.

Sure enough, at ten o'clock next morning the little man presented himself. He was clearly bursting to disclose his business, and our salutations were scarce over when he ran to the door and called to someone in the passage outside.

'Elspeth! Step inside, woman. The housekeeper, sir, to the late Mr. Mackenzie of Ardlaugh,' he explained, as he held the door to admit her.

She was dressed in ragged mourning, and wore a grotesque and fearful bonnet. As she saluted me respectfully I saw that her eyes indeed were dry and even hard, but her features set in an expression of quiet and hopeless misery. She did not speak, but left explanation to the minister.

'You will guess, sir,' began Mr. Saul, 'that we have called to learn more of the poor lad.' And he paused.

'He died most gallantly,' said I: 'died in the act of saving the colours. No soldier could have wished for a better end.'

'To be sure, to be sure. So it was reported to us. He died, as one might say, without a stain on his character?' said Mr. Saul, with a sort of question in his tone.

'He died,' I answered, 'in a way which could only do credit to his name.'

A somewhat constrained silence followed. The woman broke it. 'You are not telling us all,' she said, in a slow, harsh voice.

It took me aback. 'I am telling all that needs to be known,' I assured her.

'No doubt, sir, no doubt,' Mr. Saul interjected. 'Hold your tongue, woman. I am going to tell Colonel Ross a tale which may or may not bear upon anything he knows. If not, he will interrupt me before I go far; but if he says nothing I shall take it I have his leave to continue. Now, sir, on the 16th day of June last, and at six in the morning—that would be the day of Quatre Bras ——'

He paused for me to nod assent, and continued. 'At six in the morning or a little earlier, this woman, Elspeth Mackenzie, came to me at the Manse in great

perturbation. She had walked all the way from Ardlaugh. It had come to her (she said) that the young Laird abroad was in great trouble since the previous evening. I asked: “What trouble? Was it danger of life, for instance?”—asking it not seriously, but rather to compose her; for at first I set down her fears to an old woman’s whimsies. Not that I would call Elspeth *old* precisely——’

Here he broke off and glanced at her; but, perceiving she paid little attention, went on again at a gallop. ‘She answered that it was worse—that the young Laird stood very near disgrace, and (the worst of all was) at a distance she could not help him. Now, sir, for reasons I shall hereafter tell you, Mr. Mackenzie’s being in disgrace would have little surprised me; but that she should know of it, he being in Belgium, was incredible. So I pressed her, and she being distraught and (I verily believe) in something like anguish, came out with a most extraordinary story: to wit, that the Laird of Ardlaugh had in his service, unbeknown to him (but, as she protested, well known to her), a familiar spirit—or, as we should say commonly, a “brownie”—which in general served him most faithfully but at times erratically, having no conscience nor any Christian principle to direct him. I cautioned her, but she persisted, in a kind of wild terror, and added that at times the spirit would, in all good faith, do things which no Christian allowed to be permissible, and further, that she had profited by such actions. I asked her: “Was thieving one of them?” She answered that it was, and indeed the chief.

‘Now, this was an admission which gave me some eagerness to hear more. For to my knowledge there were charges lying against young Mr. Mackenzie—though not pronounced—which pointed to a thief in his employment and presumably in his confidence. You will remember, sir, that when I had the honour of meeting you at Mr. Mackenzie’s table, I took my leave with much abruptness. You remarked upon it, no doubt. But you will no longer think it strange when I tell you that there—under my nose—were a dozen apples of a sort which grows nowhere within twenty miles of Ardlaugh but in my own Manse garden. The tree was a new one, obtained from Herefordshire, and planted three seasons before as an experiment. I had watched it, therefore, particularly; and on that very morning had counted the fruit, and been dismayed to find twelve apples missing. Further, I am a pretty good judge of wine (though I taste it rarely), and could there and then have taken my oath that the claret our host set before us was the very wine I had tasted at the table of his neighbour Mr. Gillespie. As for the venison—I had already heard whispers that deer and all game were not safe within a mile or two of Ardlaugh. These were injurious tales, sir, which I had no mind to believe; for, bating his religion, I saw everything in Mr. Mackenzie which disposed me to like him. But I knew (as neighbours must) of the shortness of his purse; and the multiplied evidence (particularly my own Goodrich pippins staring me in

the face) overwhelmed me for a moment.

'So then, I listened to this woman's tale with more patience—or, let me say, more curiosity—than you, sir, might have given it. She persisted, I say, that her master was in trouble; and that the trouble had something to do with a game of cards, but that Mr. Mackenzie had been innocent of deceit, and the real culprit was this spirit I tell of——'

Here the women herself broke in upon Mr. Saul. 'He had nae conscience—he had nae conscience. He was just a poor luck-child, born by mischance and put away without baptism. He had nae conscience. How should he?'

I looked from her to Mr. Saul in perplexity.

'Whist!' said he; 'we'll talk of that anon.'

'We will not,' said she. 'We will talk of it now. He was my own child, sir, by the young Laird's own father. That was before he was married upon the wife he took later——'

Here Mr. Saul nudged me, and whispered: 'The old Laird had her married to that daunderin' old half-wit Duncan, to cover things up. This part of the tale is true enough, to my knowledge.'

'My bairn was overlaid, sir,' the woman went on; 'not by purpose, I will swear before you and God. They buried his poor body without baptism; but not his poor soul. Only when the young Laird came, and my own bairn clave to him as Mackenzie to Mackenzie, and wrought and hunted and mended for him—it was not to be thought that the poor innocent, without knowledge of God's ways——'

She ran on incoherently, while my thoughts harked back to the voice I had heard wailing behind the door of the *entresol* at Brussels; to the young Laird's face, his furious indignation, followed by hopeless apathy, as of one who in the interval had learnt what he could never explain; to the marked coin so mysteriously spirited from sight; to Mr. Urquhart's words before he left me on the night of Quatre Bras.

'But he was sorry,' the woman ran on; 'he was sorry—sorry. He came wailing to me that night; yes, and sobbing. He meant no wrong; it was just that he loved his own father's son, and knew no better. There was no priest living within thirty miles; so I dressed, and ran to the minister here. *He* gave me no rest until I started.'

I addressed Mr. Saul. 'Is there reason to suppose that, besides this woman and (let us say) her accomplice, any one shared the secret of these pilferings?'

'Ardlaugh never knew,' put in the woman quickly. 'He may have guessed we were helping him; but the lad knew nothing, and may the saints in heaven love him as they ought? He trusted me with his purse, and slight it was to maintain him. But until too late he never knew—no, never, sir!'

I thought again of that voice behind the door of the *entresol*.

‘Elspeth Mackenzie,’ I said, ‘I and two other living men alone know of what your master was accused. It cannot affect him; but these two shall hear your exculpation of him. And I will write the whole story down, so that the world, if it ever hears the charge, may also hear your testimony, which of the two (though both are strange) I believe to be not the less credible.’

A PAIR OF HANDS

AN OLD MAID'S GHOST-STORY

'YES,' said Miss Le Petyt, gazing into the deep fire-place and letting her hands and her knitting lie for the moment idle in her lap. 'Oh, yes, I have seen a ghost. In fact I have lived in a house with one for quite a long time.'

'How you *could*——!' began one of my host's daughters; and '*You*, Aunt Emily?' cried the other at the same moment.

Miss Le Petyt, gentle soul, withdrew her eyes from the fire-place and protested with a gay little smile. 'Well, my dears, I am not quite the coward you take me for. And, as it happens, mine was the most harmless ghost in the world. In fact'—and here she looked at the fire again—'I was quite sorry to lose her.'

'It was a woman, then? Now *I* think,' said Miss Blanche, 'that female ghosts are the horridest of all. They wear little shoes with high red heels, and go about *tap, tap*, wringing their hands.'

'This one wrung her hands, certainly. But I don't know about the high red heels, for I never saw her feet. Perhaps she was like the Queen of Spain, and hadn't any. And as for the hands, it all depends how you wring them. There's an elderly shopwalker at Knightsbridge, for instance——'

'Don't be prosy, dear, when you know that we're just dying to hear the story.'

Miss Le Petyt turned to me with a small deprecating laugh. 'It's such a little one.'

'The story, or the ghost?'

'Both.'

And this was Miss Le Petyt's story:

'It happened when I lived down in Cornwall, at Tresillack on the south coast. Tresillack was the name of the house, which stood quite alone at the head of a coombe, within sound of the sea but without sight of it; for though the coombe led down to a wide open beach, it wound and twisted half a dozen times on its way, and its overlapping sides closed the view from the house, which was advertised as "secluded." I was very poor in those days. Your father and all of us were poor then, as I trust, my dears, you will never be; but I was

young enough to be romantic and wise enough to like independence, and this word “secluded” took my fancy.

‘The misfortune was that it had taken the fancy, or just suited the requirements, of several previous tenants. You know, I dare say, the kind of person who rents a secluded house in the country? Well, yes, there are several kinds; but they seem to agree in being odious. No one knows where they come from, though they soon remove all doubt where they’re “going to,” as the children say. “Shady” is the word, is it not? Well, the previous tenants of Tresillack (from first to last a bewildering series) had been shady with a vengeance.

‘I knew nothing of this when I first made application to the landlord, a solid yeoman inhabiting a farm at the foot of the coombe, on a cliff overlooking the beach. To him I presented myself fearlessly as a spinster of decent family and small but assured income, intending a rural life of combined seemliness and economy. He met my advances politely enough, but with an air of suspicion which offended me. I began by disliking him for it: afterwards I set it down as an unpleasant feature in the local character. I was doubly mistaken. Farmer Hosking was slow-witted, but as honest a man as ever stood up against hard times; and a more open and hospitable race than the people on that coast I never wish to meet. It was the caution of a child who had burnt his fingers, not once but many times. Had I known what I afterwards learned of Farmer Hosking’s tribulations as landlord of a “secluded country residence,” I should have approached him with the bashfulness proper to my suit and faltered as I undertook to prove the bright exception in a long line of painful experiences. He had bought the Tresillack estate twenty years before—on mortgage, I fancy—because the land adjoined his own and would pay him for tillage. But the house was a nuisance, an incubus: and had been so from the beginning.

‘ “Well, miss,” he said, “you’re welcome to look over it; a pretty enough place, inside and out. There’s no trouble about keys, because I’ve put in a housekeeper, a widow-woman, and she’ll show you round. With your leave I’ll step up the coombe so far with you, and put you in your way.” As I thanked him he paused and rubbed his chin. “There’s one thing I must tell you, though. Whoever takes the house must take Mrs. Carkeek along with it.”

‘ “Mrs. Carkeek?” I echoed dolefully. “Is that the housekeeper?”

‘ “Yes: she was wife to my late hind. I’m sorry, miss,” he added, my face telling him no doubt what sort of woman I expected Mrs. Carkeek to be; “but I had to make it a rule after—after some things that happened. And I dare say you won’t find her so bad. Mary Carkeek’s a sensible comfortable woman, and knows the place. She was in service there to Squire Kendall when he sold up and went: her first place it was.”

‘ “I may as well see the house, anyhow,” said I dejectedly. So we started to walk up the coombe. The path, which ran beside a little chattering stream, was narrow for the most part, and Farmer Hosking, with an apology, strode on ahead to beat aside the brambles. But whenever its width allowed us to walk side by side I caught him from time to time stealing a shy inquisitive glance under his rough eyebrows. Courteously though he bore himself, it was clear that he could not sum me up to his satisfaction or bring me square with his notion of a tenant for his “secluded country residence.”

‘I don’t know what foolish fancy prompted it, but about half-way up the coombe I stopped short and asked:

‘ “There are no ghosts, I suppose?”

‘It struck me, a moment after I had uttered it, as a supremely silly question; but he took it quite seriously. “No; I never heard tell of any *ghosts*.” He laid a queer sort of stress on the word. “There’s always been trouble with servants, and maids’ tongues will be runnin’. But Mary Carkeek lives up there alone, and she seems comfortable enough.”

‘We walked on. By and by he pointed with his stick. “It don’t look like a place for ghosts, now, do it?”

‘Certainly it did not. Above an untrimmed orchard rose a terrace of turf scattered with thorn-bushes, and above this a terrace of stone, upon which stood the prettiest cottage I had ever seen. It was long and low and thatched; a deep veranda ran from end to end. Clematis, Banksia roses, and honeysuckle climbed the posts of this veranda, and big blooms of the Maréchal Niel were clustered along its roof, beneath the lattices of the bedroom windows. The house was small enough to be called a cottage, and rare enough in features and in situation to confer distinction on any tenant. It suggested what in those days we should have called “elegant” living. And I could have clapped my hands for joy.

‘My spirits mounted still higher when Mrs. Carkeek opened the door to us. I had looked for a Mrs. Gummidge, and I found a healthy middle-aged woman with a thoughtful but contented face, and a smile which, without a trace of obsequiousness, quite bore out the farmer’s description of her. She was a comfortable woman; and while we walked through the rooms together (for Mr. Hosking waited outside) I “took to” Mrs. Carkeek. Her speech was direct and practical; the rooms, in spite of their faded furniture, were bright and exquisitely clean; and somehow the very atmosphere of the house gave me a sense of well-being, of feeling at home and cared for; yes, *of being loved*. Don’t laugh, my dears; for when I’ve done you may not think this fancy altogether foolish.

‘I stepped out into the veranda, and Farmer Hosking pocketed the pruning-knife which he had been using on a bush of jasmine.

‘ “This is better than anything I had dreamed of,” said I.

‘ “Well, miss, that’s not a wise way of beginning a bargain, if you’ll excuse me.”

‘He took no advantage, however, of my admission; and we struck the bargain as we returned down the coombe to his farm, where the hired chaise waited to convey me back to the market-town. I had meant to engage a maid of my own, but now it occurred to me that I might do very well with Mrs. Carkeek. This, too, was settled in the course of the next day or two, and within the week I had moved into my new home.

‘I can hardly describe to you the happiness of my first month at Tresillack; because (as I now believe) if I take the reasons which I had for being happy, one by one, there remains over something which I cannot account for. I was moderately young, entirely healthy; I felt myself independent and adventurous; the season was high summer, the weather glorious, the garden in all the pomp of June, yet sufficiently unkempt to keep me busy, give me a sharp appetite for meals, and send me to bed in that drowsy stupor which comes of the odours of earth. I spent the most of my time out-of-doors, winding up the day’s work as a rule with a walk down the cool valley, along the beach, and back.

‘I soon found that all housework could be safely left to Mrs. Carkeek. She did not talk much; indeed her only fault (a rare one in housekeepers) was that she talked too little, and even when I addressed her seemed at times unable to give me her attention. It was as though her mind strayed off to some small job she had forgotten, and her eyes wore a listening look, as though she waited for the neglected task to speak and remind her. But as a matter of fact she forgot nothing. Indeed, my dears, I was never so well attended to in my life.

‘Well, that is what I’m coming to. That, so to say, is just *it*. The woman not only had the rooms swept and dusted, and my meals prepared to the moment. In a hundred odd little ways this orderliness, these preparations, seemed to read my desires. Did I wish the roses renewed in a bowl upon the dining-table, sure enough at the next meal they would be replaced by fresh ones. Mrs. Carkeek (I told myself) must have surprised and interpreted a glance of mine. And yet I could not remember having glanced at the bowl in her presence. And how on earth had she guessed the very roses, the very shapes and colours I had lightly wished for? This is only an instance, you understand. Every day, and from morning to night, I happened on others, each slight enough, but all together bearing witness to a ministering intelligence as subtle as it was untiring.

‘I am a light sleeper, as you know, with an uncomfortable knack of waking with the sun and roaming early. No matter how early I rose at Tresillack, Mrs. Carkeek seemed to have prevented me. Finally I had to conclude that she arose and dusted and tidied as soon as she judged me safely a-bed. For once, finding the drawing-room (where I had been sitting late) “redded up” at four in the

morning, and no trace of a plate of raspberries which I had carried thither after dinner and left overnight, I determined to test her, and walked through to the kitchen, calling her by name. I found the kitchen as clean as a pin, and the fire laid, but no trace of Mrs. Carkeek. I walked upstairs and knocked at her door. At the second knock a sleepy voice cried out, and presently the good woman stood before me in her nightgown, looking (I thought) very badly scared.

‘ “No,” I said, “it’s not a burglar. But I’ve found out what I wanted, that you do your morning’s work overnight. But you mustn’t wait for me when I choose to sit up. And now go back to your bed like a good soul, whilst I take a run down to the beach.”

‘She stood blinking in the dawn. Her face was still white.

‘ “Oh, miss,” she gasped, “I made sure you must have seen something!”

‘ “And so I have,” I answered, “but it was neither burglars nor ghosts.”

‘ “Thank God!” I heard her say as she turned her back to me in her grey bedroom—which faced the north. And I took this for a carelessly pious expression and ran downstairs, thinking no more of it.

‘A few days later I began to understand.

‘The plan of Tresillack house (I must explain) was simplicity itself. To the left of the hall as you entered was the dining-room; to the right the drawing-room, with a boudoir beyond. The foot of the stairs faced the front door, and beside it, passing a glazed inner door, you found two others right and left, the left opening on the kitchen, the right on a passage which ran by a store-cupboard under the bend of the stairs to a neat pantry with the usual shelves and linen-press, and under the window (which faced north) a porcelain basin and brass tap. On the first morning of my tenancy I had visited this pantry and turned the tap; but no water ran. I supposed this to be accidental. Mrs. Carkeek had to wash up glassware and crockery, and no doubt Mrs. Carkeek would complain of any failure in the water-supply.

‘But the day after my surprise visit (as I called it) I had picked a basketful of roses, and carried them into the pantry as a handy place to arrange them in. I chose a china bowl and went to fill it at the tap. Again the water would not run.

‘I called Mrs. Carkeek. “What is wrong with this tap?” I asked. “The rest of the house is well enough supplied.”

‘ “I don’t know, miss. I never use it.”

‘ “But there must be a reason; and you must find it a great nuisance washing up the plate and glasses in the kitchen. Come around to the back with me, and we’ll have a look at the cisterns.”

‘ “The cisterns’ll be all right, miss. I assure you I don’t find it a trouble.”

‘But I was not to be put off. The back of the house stood but ten feet from a wall which was really but a stone face built against the cliff cut away by the architect. Above the cliff rose the kitchen-garden, and from its lower path we

looked over the wall's parapet upon the cisterns. There were two—a very large one, supplying the kitchen and the bathroom above the kitchen; and a small one, obviously fed by the other, and as obviously leading, by a pipe which I could trace, to the pantry. Now the big cistern stood almost full, and yet the small one, though on a lower level, was empty.

' "It's as plain as daylight," said I. "The pipe between the two is choked." And I clambered on to the parapet.

' "I wouldn't, miss. The pantry tap is only cold water, and no use to me. From the kitchen boiler I get it hot, you see."

' "But I want the pantry water for my flowers." I bent over and groped. "I thought as much!" said I, as I wrenched out a thick plug of cork and immediately the water began to flow. I turned triumphantly on Mrs. Carkeek, who had grown suddenly red in the face. Her eyes were fixed on the cork in my hand. To keep it more firmly wedged in its place somebody had wrapped it round with a rag of calico print; and, discoloured though the rag was, I seemed to recall the pattern (a lilac sprig). Then, as our eyes met, it occurred to me that only two mornings before Mrs. Carkeek had worn a print apron of that same sprigged pattern.

'I had the presence of mind to hide this very small discovery, sliding over it with some quite trivial remark; and presently Mrs. Carkeek regained her composure. But I own I felt disappointed in her. It seemed such a paltry thing to be disingenuous over. She had deliberately acted a fib before me; and why? Merely because she preferred the kitchen to the pantry tap. It was childish. "But servants are all the same," I told myself. "I must take Mrs. Carkeek as she is; and, after all, she is a treasure."

'On the second night after this, and between eleven and twelve o'clock, I was lying in bed and reading myself sleepy over a novel of Lord Lytton's, when a small sound disturbed me. I listened. The sound was clearly that of water trickling; and I set it down to rain. A shower (I told myself) had filled the water-pipes which drained the roof. Somehow I could not fix the sound. There was a water-pipe against the wall just outside my window. I rose and drew up the blind.

'To my astonishment no rain was falling; no rain had fallen. I felt the slate window-sill; some dew had gathered there—no more. There was no wind, no cloud: only a still moon high over the eastern slope of the coombe, the distant plash of waves, and the fragrance of many roses. I went back to bed and listened again. Yes, the trickling sound continued, quite distinct in the silence of the house, not to be confused for a moment with the dull murmur of the beach. After a while it began to grate on my nerves. I caught up my candle, flung my dressing-gown about me, and stole softly downstairs.

'Then it was simple. I traced the sound to the pantry. "Mrs. Carkeek has

left the tap running," said I: and, sure enough, I found it so—a thin trickle steadily running to waste in the porcelain basin. I turned off the tap, went contentedly back to my bed, and slept.

'——for some hours. I opened my eyes in darkness, and at once knew what had awakened me. The tap was running again. Now it had shut easily in my hand, but not so easily that I could believe it had slipped open again of its own accord. "This is Mrs. Carkeek's doing," said I; and am afraid I added "Bother Mrs. Carkeek!"

'Well, there was no help for it: so I struck a light, looked at my watch, saw that the hour was just three o'clock, and descended the stairs again. At the pantry door I paused. I was not afraid—not one little bit. In fact the notion that anything might be wrong had never crossed my mind. But I remember thinking, with my hand on the door, that if Mrs. Carkeek were in the pantry I might happen to give her a severe fright.

'I pushed the door open briskly. Mrs. Carkeek was not there. But something *was* there, by the porcelain basin—something which might have sent me scurrying upstairs two steps at a time, but which as a matter of fact held me to the spot. My heart seemed to stand still—so still! And in the stillness I remember setting down the brass candlestick on a tall nest of drawers beside me.

'Over the porcelain basin and beneath the water trickling from the tap I saw two hands.

'That was all—two small hands, a child's hands. I cannot tell you how they ended.

'No: they were not cut off. I saw them quite distinctly: just a pair of small hands and the wrists, and after that—nothing. They were moving briskly—washing themselves clean. I saw the water trickle and splash over them—not *through* them—but just as it would on real hands. They were the hands of a little girl, too. Oh, yes, I was sure of that at once. Boys and girls wash their hands differently. I can't just tell you what the difference is, but it's unmistakable.

'I saw all this before my candle slipped and fell with a crash. I had set it down without looking—for my eyes were fixed on the basin—and had balanced it on the edge of the nest of drawers. After the crash, in the darkness there, with the water running, I suffered some bad moments. Oddly enough, the thought uppermost with me was that I *must* shut off that tap before escaping. I *had* to. And after a while I picked up all my courage, so to say, between my teeth, and with a little sob thrust out my hand and did it. Then I fled.

'The dawn was close upon me: and as soon as the sky reddened I took my bath, dressed, and went downstairs. And there at the pantry door I found Mrs.

Carkeek, also dressed, with my candlestick in her hand.

‘ “Ah!” said I, “you picked it up.”

‘Our eyes met. Clearly Mrs. Carkeek wished me to begin, and I determined at once to have it out with her.

‘ “And you knew all about it. That’s what accounts for your plugging up the cistern.”

‘ “You saw . . . ?” she began.

‘ “Yes, yes. And you must tell me all about it—never mind how bad. Is ——is it—murder?”

‘ “Law bless you, miss, whatever put such horrors in your head?”

‘ “She was washing her hands.”

‘ “Ah, so she does, poor dear! But—murder! And dear little Miss Margaret, that wouldn’t go to hurt a fly!”

‘ “Miss Margaret?”

‘ “Eh, she died at seven year. Squire Kendall’s only daughter; and that’s twenty year ago. I was her nurse, miss, and I know—diphtheria it was; she took it down in the village.”

‘ “But how do you know it is Margaret?”

‘ “Those hands—why, how could I mistake, that used to be her nurse?”

‘ “But why does she wash them?”

‘ “Well, miss, being always a dainty child—and the housework, you see ____”

‘I took a long breath. “Do you mean to tell me that all this tidying and dusting——” I broke off. “Is it she who has been taking this care of me?”

‘Mrs. Carkeek met my look steadily.

‘ “Who else, miss?”

‘ “Poor little soul!”

‘ “Well now”—Mrs. Carkeek rubbed my candlestick with the edge of her apron—“I’m so glad you take it like this. For there isn’t really nothing to be afraid of—is there?” She eyed me wistfully. “It’s my belief she loves you, miss. But only to think what a time she must have had with the others!”

‘ “The others?” I echoed.

‘ “The other tenants, miss: the ones afore you.”

‘ “Were they bad?”

‘ “They was awful. Didn’t Farmer Hosking tell you? They carried on fearful—one after another, and each one worse than the last.”

‘ “What was the matter with them? Drink?”

‘ “Drink, miss, with some of ’em. There was the Major—he used to go mad with it, and run about the coombe in his nightshirt. Oh, scandalous! And his wife drank too—that is, if she ever *was* his wife. Just think of that tender child washing up after their nasty doings!”

‘I shivered.

‘ “But that wasn’t the worst, miss—not by a long way. There was a pair here—from the colonies, or so they gave out—with two children, a boy and gel, the eldest scarce six. Poor mites!”

‘ “Why, what happened?”

‘ “They beat those children, miss—your blood would boil!—*and* starved, *and* tortured ’em, it’s my belief. You could hear their screams, I’ve been told, away back in the high road, and that’s the best part of half a mile. Sometimes they was locked up without food for days together. But it’s my belief that little Miss Margaret managed to feed them somehow. Oh, I can see her, creeping to the door and comforting!”

‘ “But perhaps she never showed herself when these awful people were here, but took to flight until they left.”

‘ “You didn’t never know her, miss. The brave she was! She’d have stood up to lions. She’ve been here all the while: and only to think what her innocent eyes and ears must have took in! There was another couple——” Mrs. Carkeek sunk her voice.

‘ “Oh, hush!” said I, “if I’m to have any peace of mind in this house!”

‘ “But you won’t go, miss? She loves you, I know she do. And think what you might be leaving her to—what sort of tenant might come next. For she can’t go. She’ve been here ever since her father sold the place. He died soon after. You mustn’t go!”

‘Now I had resolved to go, but all of a sudden I felt how mean this resolution was.

‘ “After all,” said I, “there’s nothing to be afraid of.”

‘ “That’s it, miss; nothing at all. I don’t even believe it’s so very uncommon. Why, I’ve heard my mother tell of farmhouses where the rooms were swept every night as regular as clockwork, and the floors sanded, and the pots and pans scoured, and all while the maids slept. They put it down to the piskies; but we know better, miss, and now we’ve got the secret between us we can lie easy in our beds, and if we hear anything, say ‘God bless the child!’ and go to sleep.”

‘ “Mrs. Carkeek,” said I, “there’s only one condition I have to make.”

‘ “What’s that?”

‘ “Why, that you let me kiss you.”

‘ “Oh, you dear!” said Mrs. Carkeek as we embraced: and this was as close to familiarity as she allowed herself to go in the whole course of my acquaintance with her.

‘I spent three years at Tresillack, and all that while Mrs. Carkeek lived with me and shared the secret. Few women, I dare to say, were ever so completely wrapped around with love as we were during those three years. It ran through

my waking life like a song: it smoothed my pillow, touched and made my table comely, in summer lifted the heads of the flowers as I passed, and in winter watched the fire with me and kept it bright.

‘ “Why did I ever leave Tresillack? Because one day, at the end of five years, Farmer Hosking brought me word that he had sold the house—or was about to sell it; I forget which. There was no avoiding it, at any rate; the purchaser being a Colonel Kendall, a brother of the old Squire.”

‘ “A married man?” I asked.

‘ “Yes, miss; with a family of eight. As pretty children as ever you see, and the mother a good lady. It’s the old home to Colonel Kendall.”

‘ “I see. And that is why you feel bound to sell.”

‘ “It’s a good price, too, that he offers. You mustn’t think but I’m sorry enough——”

‘ “To turn me out? I thank you, Mr. Hosking; but you are doing the right thing.”

‘Since Mrs. Carkeek was to stay, the arrangement lacked nothing of absolute perfection—except, perhaps, that it found no room for me.

‘ “*She*—Margaret—will be happy,” I said; “with her cousins, you know.”

‘ “Oh yes, miss, she will be happy, sure enough,” Mrs. Carkeek agreed.

‘So when the time came I packed up my boxes, and tried to be cheerful. But on the last morning, when they stood corded in the hall, I sent Mrs. Carkeek upstairs upon some poor excuse, and stepped along into the pantry.

‘ “Margaret!” I whispered.

‘There was no answer at all. I had scarcely dared to hope for one. Yet I tried again, and, shutting my eyes this time, stretched out both hands and whispered:

‘ “Margaret!”

‘And I will swear to my dying day that two little hands stole and rested—for a moment only—in mine.’

THE SEVENTH MAN

IN a one-roomed hut, high within the Arctic Circle, and only a little south of the eightieth parallel, six men were sitting—much as they had sat, evening after evening, for months. They had a clock, and by it they divided the hours into day and night. As a matter of fact, it was always night. But the clock said half-past eight, and they called the time evening.

The hut was built of logs, with an inner skin of rough match-boarding, daubed with pitch. It measured seventeen feet by fourteen; but opposite the door four bunks—two above and two below—took a yard off the length, and this made the interior exactly square. Each of these bunks had two doors, with brass latches on the inner side; so that the owner, if he chose, could shut himself up and go to sleep in a sort of cupboard. But, as a rule, he closed one of them only—that by his feet. The other swung back, with its brass latch showing. The men kept these latches in a high state of polish.

Across the angle of the wall, to the left of the door, and behind it when it opened, three hammocks were slung, one above another. No one slept in the uppermost.

But the feature of the hut was its fire-place; and this was merely a square hearthstone, raised slightly above the floor, in the middle of the room. Upon it, and upon a growing mountain of soft grey ash, the fire burned always. It had no chimney, and so the men lost none of its warmth. The smoke ascended steadily and spread itself under the blackened beams and roof-boards in dense blue layers. But about eighteen inches beneath the spring of the roof there ran a line of small trap-doors with siding panels, to admit the cold air, and below these the room was almost clear of smoke. A new-comer's eyes might have smarted, but these men stitched their clothes and read in comfort. To keep the up-draught steady they had plugged every chink and crevice in the match-boarding below the trap-doors with moss, and payed the seams with pitch. The fire they fed from a stack of drift and wreck-wood piled to the right of the door, and fuel for the fetching strewed the frozen beach outside—whole trees notched into lengths by lumberers' axes and washed thither from they knew not what continent. But the wreck-wood came from their own ship, the *J. R. MacNeill*, which had brought them from Dundee.

They were Alexander Williamson, of Dundee, better known as The Gaffer; David Faed, also of Dundee; George Lashman, of Cardiff; Long Ede, of Hayle, in Cornwall; Charles Silchester, otherwise The Snipe, of Ratcliff Highway or

thereabouts; and Daniel Cooney, shipped at Tromsö six weeks before the wreck, an Irish-American by birth and of no known address.

The Gaffer reclined in his bunk, reading by the light of a smoky and evil-smelling lamp. He had been mate of the *J. R. MacNeill*, and was now captain as well as patriarch of the party. He possessed three books—the Bible, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and an odd volume of *The Turkish Spy*. Just now he was reading *The Turkish Spy*. The lamplight glinted on the rim of his spectacles and on the silvery hairs in his beard, the slack of which he had tucked under the edge of his blanket. His lips moved as he read, and now and then he broke off to glance mildly at Faed and the Snipe, who were busy beside the fire with a greasy pack of cards; or to listen to the peevish grumbling of Lashman in the bunk below him. Lashman had taken to his bed six weeks before with scurvy, and complained incessantly; and though they hardly knew it, these complaints were wearing his comrades' nerves to fiddle-strings—doing the mischief that cold and bitter hard work and the cruel loneliness had hitherto failed to do. Long Ede lay stretched by the fire in a bundle of skins, reading in his only book, the Bible, open now at the Song of Solomon. Cooney had finished patching a pair of trousers, and rolled himself in his hammock, whence he stared at the roof and the moonlight streaming up there through the little trap-doors and chivvying the layers of smoke. Whenever Lashman broke out into fresh quaverings of self-pity, Cooner's hands opened and shut again, till the nails dug hard into the palm. He groaned at length, exasperated beyond endurance.

'Oh, stow it, George! Hang it all, man! . . .'

He checked himself, sharp and short: repentant, and rebuked by the silence of the others. They were good seamen all, and tender dealing with a sick shipmate was part of their code.

Lashman's voice, more querulous than ever, cut into the silence like a knife:

'That's it. You've thought it for weeks, and now you say it. I've knowed it all along. I'm just an encumbrance, and the sooner you're shut of me the better, says you. You needn't to fret. I'll be soon out of it; out of it—out there, alongside of Bill——'

'Easy there, matey.' The Snipe glanced over his shoulder and laid his cards face downward. 'Here, let me give the bed a shake up. It'll ease yer.'

'It'll make me quiet, you mean. Plucky deal you care about easin' me, any of yer!'

'Get out with yer nonsense! Dan didn' mean it.' The Snipe slipped an arm under the invalid's head and rearranged the pillow of skins and gunny-bags.

'He didn't, didn't he? Let him say it, then. . . .'

The Gaffer read on, his lips moving silently. Heaven knows how he had

acquired this strayed and stained and filthy little demi-octavo with the arms of Saumarez on its book-plate: 'The Sixth Volume of Letters writ by a Turkish Spy, who liv'd Five-and-Forty Years Undiscovered at Paris: Giving an Impartial Account to the *Divan* at *Constantinople* of the most remarkable Transactions of Europe. And discovering several *Intrigues* and *Secrets* of the *Christian* Courts (especially of that of *France*),' etc., etc. 'Written originally in *Arabick.* Translated into *Italian,* and from thence into *English* by the Translator of the First Volume. The Eleventh Edition. London: Printed for G. Strahan, S. Ballard'—and a score of booksellers—'MDCCXLI.' Heaven knows why he read it; since he understood about one-half, and admired less than one-tenth. The Oriental reflections struck him as mainly blasphemous. But the Gaffer's religious belief marked down nine-tenths of mankind for perdition: which perhaps made him tolerant. At any rate, he read on gravely between the puffs of his short clay:

'*On the 19th of this Moon, the King and the whole Court were present at a Ballet, representing the grandeur of the* French *monarchy. About the Middle of the Entertainment, there was an Antique Dance perform'd by twelve Masqueraders, in the suppos'd form of* Daemons. *But before they had advanc'd far in their Dance, they found an Interloper amongst 'em, who by encreasing the Number to thirteen, put them quite out of their Measure: For they practise every Step and Motion beforehand, till they are perfect. Being abash'd therefore at the unavoidable Blunders the thirteenth Antique made them commit, they stood still like Fools, gazing at one another: None daring to unmask, or speak a Word; for that would have put all the Spectators into a Disorder and Confusion.* Cardinal Mazarini *(who was the chief Contriver of these Entertainments, to divert the King from more serious Thoughts) stood close by the young Monarch, with the Scheme of the Ballet in his Hand. Knowing therefore that this Dance was to consist but of twelve Antiques, and taking notice that there were actually thirteen, he at first imputed it to some Mistake. But, afterwards, when he perceived the Confusion of the Dancers, he made a more narrow Enquiry into the Cause of this Disorder. To be brief, they convinced the Cardinal that it could be no Error of theirs, by a kind of Demonstration, in that they had but twelve Antique Dresses of that sort, which were made on purpose for this particular Ballet. That which made it seem the greater Mystery was, that when they came behind the Scenes to uncase, and examine the Matter, they found but twelve Antiques, whereas on the Stage there were thirteen . . .*'

'Let him say it. Let him say he didn't mean it, the rotten Irishman!'

Cooney flung a leg wearily over the side of his hammock, jerked himself out, and shuffled across to the sick man's berth.

'Av coorse I didn' mane it. It just took me, ye see, lyin' up yondher and

huggin' me thoughts in this—wilderness. I swear to ye, George: and ye'll just wet your throat to show there's no bad blood, and that ye belave me.' He took up a pannikin from the floor beside the bunk, pulled a hot iron from the fire, and stirred the frozen drink. The invalid turned his shoulder pettishly. 'I didn't mane it,' Cooney repeated. He set down the pannikin, and shuffled wearily back to his hammock.

The Gaffer blew a long cloud and stared at the fire; at the smoke mounting and the grey ash dropping; at David Faed dealing the cards and licking his thumb between each. Long Ede shifted from one cramped elbow to another and pushed his Bible nearer the blaze, murmuring: 'Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil our vines.'

'Full hand,' the Snipe announced.

'Ay.' David Faed rolled the quid in his cheek. The cards were so thumbed and tattered that by the backs of them each player guessed pretty shrewdly what the other held. Yet they went on playing night after night; the Snipe shrilly blessing or cursing his luck, the Scotsman phlegmatic as a bolster.

'Play away, man. What ails ye?' he asked.

The Snipe had dropped both hands to his thighs and sat up, stiff and listening.

'Whist! Outside the door. . . .'

All listened. 'I hear nothing,' said David, after ten seconds.

'Hush, man—listen! There, again. . . .'

They heard now. Cooney slipped down from his hammock, stole to the door and listened, crouching, with his ear close to the jamb. The sound resembled breathing—or so he thought for a moment. Then it seemed rather as if some creature were softly feeling about the door—fumbling its coating of ice and frozen snow.

Cooney listened. They all listened. Usually, as soon as they stirred from the scorching circle of the fire, their breath came from them in clouds. It trickled from them now in thin wisps of vapour. They could almost hear the soft grey ash dropping on the hearth.

A log spluttered. Then the invalid's voice clattered in:

'It's the bears—the bears! They've come after Bill, and next it'll be my turn. I warned you—I told you he wasn't deep enough. O Lord, have mercy . . . mercy . . . !' He pattered off into a prayer, his voice and teeth chattering.

'Hush!' commanded the Gaffer gently; and Lashman choked on a sob.

'It ain't bears,' Cooney reported, still with his ear to the door. 'Leastways . . . we've had bears before. The foxes, maybe . . . let me listen.'

Long Ede murmured: 'Take us the foxes, the little foxes . . .'

'I believe you're right,' the Gaffer announced cheerfully. 'A bear would snuff louder—though there's no telling. The snow was falling an hour back,

and I dessay 'tis pretty thick outside. If 'tis a bear, we don't want him fooling on the roof, and I misdoubt the drift by the north corner is pretty tall by this time. Is he there still?'

'I felt something then . . . through the chink, here . . . like a warm breath. It's gone now. Come here, Snipe, and listen.'

' "Breath," eh? Did it *smell* like bear?'

'I don't know . . . I didn't smell nothing, to notice. Here, put your head down, close.'

The Snipe bent his head. And at that moment the door shook gently. All stared; and saw the latch move up, up . . . and falteringly descend on the staple. They heard the click of it.

The door was secured within by two stout bars. Against these there had been no pressure. The men waited in a silence that ached. But the latch was not lifted again.

The Snipe, kneeling, looked up at Cooney. Cooney shivered and looked at David Faed. Long Ede, with his back to the fire, softly shook his feet free of the rugs. His eyes searched for the Gaffer's face. But the old man had drawn back into the gloom of his bunk, and the lamplight shone only on a grey fringe of beard. He saw Long Ede's look, though, and answered it quietly as ever.

'Take a brace of guns aloft, and fetch us a look round. Wait, if there's a chance of a shot. The trap works. I tried it this afternoon with the small chisel.'

Long Ede lit his pipe, tied down the ear-pieces of his cap, lifted a light ladder off its staples, and set it against a roof-beam: then, with the guns under his arm, quietly mounted. His head and shoulders wavered and grew vague to sight in the smoke-wreaths. 'Heard anything more?' he asked. 'Nothing since,' answered the Snipe. With his shoulder Long Ede pushed up the trap. They saw his head framed in a panel of moonlight, with one frosty star above it. He was wriggling through. 'Pitch him up a sleeping-bag, somebody,' the Gaffer ordered, and Cooney ran with one. 'Thank 'ee, mate,' said Long Ede, and closed the trap.

They heard his feet stealthily crunching the frozen stuff across the roof. He was working towards the eaves overlapping the door. Their breath tightened. They waited for the explosion of his gun. None came. The crunching began again: it was heard down by the very edge of the eaves. It mounted to the blunt ridge overhead; then it ceased.

'He will not have seen aught,' David Faed muttered.

'Listen, you. Listen by the door again.' They talked in whispers. Nothing; there was nothing to be heard. They crept back to the fire, and stood there warming themselves, keeping their eyes on the latch. It did not move. After a while Cooney slipped off to his hammock; Faed to his bunk, alongside Lashman's. The Gaffer had picked up his book again. The Snipe laid a couple

of logs on the blaze, and remained beside it, cowering, with his arms stretched out as if to embrace it. His shapeless shadow wavered up and down on the bunks behind him; and, across the fire, he still stared at the latch.

Suddenly the sick man's voice quavered out:

'It's not him they want—it's Bill! They're after Bill, out there! That was Bill trying to get in. . . . Why didn't yer open? It was Bill, I tell yer!'

At the first word the Snipe had wheeled right-about-face, and stood now, pointing, and shaking like a man with ague.

'Matey . . . for the love of God . . .'

'I won't hush. There's something wrong here to-night. I can't sleep. It's Bill, I tell yer! See his poor hammock up there shaking. . . .'

Cooney tumbled out with an oath and a thud. 'Hush it, you white-livered swine! Hush it, or by——' His hand went behind him to his knife-sheath.

'Dan Cooney,'—the Gaffer closed his book and leaned out—'go back to your bed.'

'I won't, sir. Not unless——'

'Go back.'

'Flesh and blood——'

'Go back.' And for the third time that night Cooney went back.

The Gaffer leaned a little farther over the ledge, and addressed the sick man.

'George, I went to Bill's grave not six hours agone. The snow on it wasn't even disturbed. Neither beast nor man, but only God, can break up the hard earth he lies under. I tell you that, and you may lay to it. Now go to sleep.'

. . . . . .

Long Ede crouched on the frozen ridge of the hut, with his feet in the sleeping-bag, his knees drawn up, and the two guns laid across them. The creature, whatever its name, that had tried the door, was nowhere to be seen; but he decided to wait a few minutes on the chance of a shot; that is, until the cold should drive him below. For the moment the clear tingling air was doing him good. The truth was Long Ede had begun to be afraid of himself, and the way his mind had been running for the last forty-eight hours upon green fields and visions of spring. As he put it to himself, something inside his head was melting. Biblical texts chattered within him like running brooks, and as they fleeted he could almost smell the blown meadow-scent. 'Take us the foxes, the little foxes . . . for our vines have tender grapes. . . . A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. . . . Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south . . . blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. . . .' He was light-headed, and he knew it. He must hold out. They were all going mad; were, in fact, three-parts crazed already, all except the

Gaffer. And the Gaffer relied on him as his right-hand man. One glimpse of the returning sun—one glimpse only—might save them yet.

He gazed out over the frozen hills, and northward across the ice-pack. A few streaks of pale violet—the ghost of the Aurora—fronted the moon. He could see for miles. Bear or fox, no living creature was in sight. But who could tell what might be hiding behind any one of the thousand hummocks? He listened. He heard the slow grinding of the ice-pack off the beach: only that. 'Take us the foxes, the little foxes. . . .'

This would never do. He must climb down and walk briskly, or return to the hut. Maybe there was a bear, after all, behind one of the hummocks, and a shot, or the chance of one, would scatter his head clear of these tom-fooling notions. He would have a search round.

What was that, moving . . . on a hummock, not five hundred yards away? He leaned forward to gaze.

Nothing now: but he had seen something. He lowered himself to the eaves by the north corner, and from the eaves to the drift piled there. The drift was frozen solid, but for a treacherous crust of fresh snow. His foot slipped upon this, and down he slid of a heap.

Luckily he had been careful to sling the guns tightly at his back. He picked himself up, and unstrapping one, took a step into the bright moonlight to examine the nipples; took two steps: and stood stock-still.

There, before him, on the frozen coat of snow, was a footprint. No: two, three, four—many footprints: prints of a naked human foot: right foot, left foot, both naked, and blood in each print—a little smear.

It had come, then. He was mad for certain. He saw them: he put his fingers in them; touched the frozen blood. The snow before the door was trodden thick with them—some going, some returning.

'The latch . . . lifted. . . .' Suddenly he recalled the figure he had seen moving upon the hummock, and with a groan he set his face northward and gave chase. Oh, he was mad for certain! He ran like a madman—floundering, slipping, plunging in his clumsy moccasins. 'Take us the foxes, the little foxes. . . . My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. . . . I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem . . . I charge you . . . I charge you. . . .'

He ran thus for three hundred yards maybe, and then stopped as suddenly as he had started.

His mates—they must not see these footprints, or they would go mad too: mad as he. No, he must cover them up, all within sight of the hut. And to-morrow he would come alone, and cover those farther afield. Slowly he retraced his steps. The footprints—those which pointed towards the hut and those which pointed away from it—lay close together; and he knelt before

each, breaking fresh snow over the hollows and carefully hiding the blood. And now a great happiness filled his heart; interrupted once or twice as he worked by a feeling that someone was following and watching him. Once he turned northwards and gazed, making a telescope of his hands. He saw nothing, and fell again to his long task.

. . . . .

Within the hut the sick man cried softly to himself. Faed, the Snipe, and Cooney slept uneasily, and muttered in their dreams. The Gaffer lay awake, thinking. After Bill, George Lashman; and after George . . . ? Who next? And who would be the last—the unburied one? The men were weakening fast; their wits and courage coming down at the end with a rush. Faed and Long Ede were the only two to be depended on for a day. The Gaffer liked Long Ede, who was a religious man. Indeed he had a growing suspicion that Long Ede, in spite of some amiable laxities of belief, was numbered among the Elect: or might be, if interceded for. The Gaffer began to intercede for him silently; but experience had taught him that such 'wrestlings,' to be effective, must be noisy, and he dropped off to sleep with a sense of failure. . . .

The Snipe stretched himself, yawned, and awoke. It was seven in the morning: time to prepare a cup of tea. He tossed an armful of logs on the fire, and the noise awoke the Gaffer, who at once inquired for Long Ede. He had not returned. 'Go you up to the roof. The lad must be frozen.' The Snipe climbed the ladder, pushed open the trap, and came back, reporting that Long Ede was nowhere to be seen. The old man slipped a jumper over his suits of clothing—already three deep—reached for a gun, and moved to the door. 'Take a cup of something warm to fortify,' the Snipe advised. 'The kettle won't be five minutes boiling.' But the Gaffer pushed up the heavy bolts and dragged the door open.

'What in the . . . ! Here, bear a hand, lads!'

Long Ede lay prone before the threshold, his outstretched hands almost touching it, his moccasins already covered out of sight by the powdery snow which ran and trickled incessantly—trickled between his long, dishevelled locks, and over the back of his gloves, and ran in a thin stream past the Gaffer's feet.

They carried him in and laid him on a heap of skins by the fire. They forced rum between his clenched teeth and beat his hands and feet, and kneaded and rubbed him. A sigh fluttered on his lips: something between a sigh and a smile, half seen, half heard. His eyes opened, and his comrades saw that it was really a smile.

‘Wot cheer, mate?’ It was the Snipe who asked.

‘I—I seen . . .’ The voice broke off, but he was smiling still.

What had he seen? Not the sun, surely! By the Gaffer’s reckoning the sun would not be due for a week or two yet: how many weeks he could not say precisely, and sometimes he was glad enough that he did not know.

They forced him to drink a couple of spoonfuls of rum, and wrapped him up warmly. Each man contributed some of his own bedding. Then the Gaffer called to morning prayers, and the three sound men dropped on their knees with him. Now, whether by reason of their joy at Long Ede’s recovery, or because the old man was in splendid voice, they felt their hearts uplifted that morning with a cheerfulness they had not known for months. Long Ede lay and listened dreamily while the passion of the Gaffer’s thanksgiving shook the hut. His gaze wandered over their bowed forms—‘The Gaffer, David Faed, Dan Cooney, the Snipe, and—and George Lashman in his bunk, of course—and me.’ But, then, *who was the seventh*? He began to count. ‘There’s myself—Lashman, in his bunk—David Faed, the Gaffer, the Snipe, Dan Cooney. . . . One, two, three, four—well, but that made *seven*. Then who was the seventh? Was it George who had crawled out of bed and was kneeling there? Decidedly there were five kneeling. No: there was George, plain enough, in his berth, and not able to move. Then who was the stranger? Wrong again: there was no stranger. He knew all these men—they were his mates. Was it—Bill? No, Bill was dead and buried: none of these was Bill, or like Bill. Try again—One, two, three, four, five—and us two sick men, seven. The Gaffer, David Faed, Dan Cooney—have I counted Dan twice? No, that’s Dan, yonder to the right, and only one of him. Five men kneeling, and two on their backs: that makes seven every time. Dear God—suppose——’

The Gaffer ceased, and in the act of rising from his knees, caught sight of Long Ede’s face. While the others fetched their breakfast-cans, he stepped over, and bent and whispered:

‘Tell me. Ye’ve seen what?’

‘Seen?’ Long Ede echoed.

‘Ay, seen what? Speak low—was it the sun?’

‘The sun——’ But this time the echo died on his lips, and his face grew full of awe uncomprehending. It frightened the Gaffer.

‘Ye’ll be the better of a snatch of sleep,’ said he; and was turning to go, when Long Ede stirred a hand under the edge of his rugs.

‘Seven . . . count . . .’ he whispered.

‘Lord, have mercy upon us!’ the Gaffer muttered to his beard as he moved away. ‘Long Ede; gone crazed!’

And yet, though an hour or two ago this had been the worst that could befall, the Gaffer felt unusually cheerful. As for the others, they were like

different men, all that day and through the three days that followed. Even Lashman ceased to complain, and, unless their eyes played them a trick, had taken a turn for the better. ‘I declare, if I don’t feel like pitching to sing!’ the Snipe announced on the second evening, as much to his own wonder as to theirs. ‘Then why in thunder don’t you strike up?’ answered Dan Cooney, and fetched his concertina. The Snipe struck up, then and there—‘Villikins and his Dinah’! What is more, the Gaffer looked up from his *Paradise Lost*, and joined in the chorus.

By the end of the second day, Long Ede was up and active again. He went about with a dazed look in his eyes. He was counting, counting to himself, always counting. The Gaffer watched him furtively.

Since his recovery, though his lips moved frequently, Long Ede had scarcely uttered a word. But towards noon on the fourth day he said an extraordinary thing.

‘There’s that sleeping-bag I took with me the other night. I wonder if ’tis on the roof still. It will be froze pretty stiff by this. You might nip up and see, Snipe, and’—he paused—‘if you find it, stow it up yonder on Bill’s hammock.’

The Gaffer opened his mouth, but shut it again without speaking. The Snipe went up the ladder.

A minute passed; and then they heard a cry from the roof—a cry that fetched them all trembling, choking, weeping, cheering, to the foot of the ladder.

‘Boys! boys!—the Sun!’

. . . . .

Months later—it was June, and even George Lashman had recovered his strength—the Snipe came running with news of the whaling fleet. And on the beach, as they watched the vessels come to anchor, Long Ede told the Gaffer his story. ‘It was a hall—a hallu—what d’ye call it, I reckon. I was crazed, eh?’ The Gaffer’s eyes wandered from a brambling hopping about the lichen-covered boulders, and away to the sea-fowl wheeling above the ships: and then came into his mind a tale he had read once in *The Turkish Spy*. ‘I wouldn’t say just that,’ he answered slowly.

‘Anyway,’ said Long Ede, ‘I believe the Lord sent a miracle to us to save us all.’

‘I wouldn’t say just that, either,’ the Gaffer objected. ‘I doubt it was meant just for you and me, and the rest were presairved, as you might say, incidentally.’

THE TWO HOUSEHOLDERS

Extract from the Memories of Gabriel Foot, Highwayman

I WILL say this—speaking as accurately as a man may, so long afterwards—that when first I spied the house it put no desire in me but just to give thanks.

For conceive my case. It was well past midnight, and ever since dusk I had been tramping the naked moors, in the teeth of as vicious a nor'-wester as ever drenched a man to the skin, and then blew the cold home to his marrow. My clothes were sodden; my coat-tails flapped with a noise like pistol-shots; my boots squeaked as I went. Overhead, the October moon was in her last quarter, and might have been a slice of finger-nail for all the light she afforded. Two-thirds of the time the wrack blotted her out altogether; and I, with my stick clipped tight under my armpit, eyes puckered up, and head bent aslant, had to keep my wits alive to distinguish the road from the black heath to right and left. For three hours I had met neither man nor man's dwelling, and (for all I knew) was desperately lost. Indeed, at the cross-roads, two miles back, there had been nothing for me but to choose the way that kept the wind on my face, and it gnawed me like a dog.

Mainly to allay the stinging of my eyes, I pulled up at last, turned right-about-face, leant back against the blast with a hand on my hat, and surveyed the blackness behind. It was at this instant that, far away to the left, a point of light caught my notice, faint but steady; and at once I felt sure it burnt in the window of a house. 'The house,' thought I, 'is a good mile off, beside the other road, and the light must have been an inch over my hat-brim for the last half-hour.' This reflection—that on so wide a moor I had come near missing the information I wanted (and perhaps a supper) by one inch—sent a strong thrill down my back.

I cut straight across the heather towards the light, risking quags and pitfalls. Nay, so heartening was the chance to hear a fellow-creature's voice, that I broke into a run, skipping over the stunted gorse that cropped up here and there, and dreading every moment to see the light quenched. 'Suppose it burns in an upper window, and the family is going to bed, as would be likely at this hour——' The apprehension kept my eyes fixed on the bright spot, to the frequent scandal of my legs, that within five minutes were stuck full of gorse prickles.

But the light did not go out, and soon a flicker of moonlight gave me a glimpse of the house's outline. It proved to be a deal more imposing than I looked for—the outline, in fact, of a tall, square barrack, with a cluster of chimneys at either end, like ears, and a high wall, topped by the roofs of some out-buildings, concealing the lower windows. There was no gate in this wall, and presently I guessed the reason. I was approaching the place from behind, and the light came from a back window on the first floor.

The faintness of the light also was explained by this time. It shone behind a drab-coloured blind, and in shape resembled the stem of a wine-glass, broadening out at the foot; an effect produced by the half-drawn curtains within. I came to a halt, waiting for the next ray of moonlight. At the same moment a rush of wind swept over the chimney-stacks, and on the wind there seemed to ride a human sigh.

On this last point I may err. The gust had passed some seconds before I caught myself detecting this peculiar note, and trying to disengage it from the natural chords of the storm. From the next gust it was absent; and then, to my dismay, the light faded from the window.

I was half-minded to call out when it appeared again, this time in two windows—those next on the right to that where it had shone before. Almost at once it increased in brilliance, as if the person who carried it from the smaller room to the larger were lighting more candles; and now the illumination was strong enough to make fine gold threads of the rain that fell within its radiance, and fling two shafts of warm yellow over the coping of the back wall. During the minute or more that I stood watching, no shadow fell on either blind.

Between me and the wall ran a ditch, into which the ground at my feet broke sharply away. Setting my back to the storm again, I followed the lip of this ditch around the wall's angle. Here it shallowed, and here, too, was shelter; but not wishing to mistake a bed of nettles or any such pitfall for solid earth, I kept pretty wide as I went on. The house was dark on this side, and the wall, as before, had no opening. Close beside the next angle there grew a mass of thick gorse bushes, and pushing through these I found myself suddenly on a sound high road, with the wind tearing at me as furiously as ever.

But here was the front; and I now perceived that the surrounding wall advanced some way before the house, so as to form a narrow courtlage. So much of it, too, as faced the road had been whitewashed, which made it an easy matter to find the gate. But as I laid hand on its latch I had a surprise.

A line of paving-stones led from the gate to a heavy porch; and along the wet surface of these there fell a streak of light from the front door, which stood ajar.

That a door should remain six inches open on such a night was astonishing enough, until I entered the court and found it as still as a room, owing to the

high wall. But looking up and assuring myself that all the rest of the façade was black as ink, I wondered at the carelessness of the inmates.

It was here that my professional instinct received the first jog. Abating the sound of my feet on the paving-stones, I went up to the door and pushed it softly. It opened without noise.

I stepped into a fair-sized hall of modern build, paved with red tiles and lit by a small hanging-lamp. To right and left were doors leading to the ground-floor rooms. Along the wall by my shoulder ran a line of pegs, on which hung half a dozen hats and greatcoats, every one of clerical shape; and full in front of me a broad staircase ran up, with a staring Brussels carpet, the colours and pattern of which I can recall as well as I can to-day's breakfast. Under this staircase was set a stand full of walking-sticks, and a table littered with gloves, brushes, a hand-bell, a riding-crop, one or two dog-whistles, and a bedroom candlestick with tinder-box beside it. This, with one notable exception, was all the furniture.

The exception—which turned me cold—was the form of a yellow mastiff dog, curled on a mat beneath the table. The arch of his back was towards me, and one forepaw lay over his nose in a natural posture of sleep. I leaned back on the wainscoting with my eyes tightly fixed on him, and my thoughts reverting with something of regret, to the cruel storm I had come through.

But a man's habits are not easily denied. At the end of three minutes the dog had not moved, and I was down on the door-mat unlacing my soaked boots. Slipping them off, and taking them in my left hand, I stood up, and tried a step towards the stairs, with eyes alert for any movement of the mastiff; but he never stirred. I was glad enough, however, on reaching the stairs, to find them newly built, and the carpet thick. Up I went, with a glance at every step for the table which now hid the brute's form from me, and never a creak did I wake out of that staircase till I was almost at the first landing, when my toe caught a loose stair-rod, and rattled it in a way that stopped my heart for a moment, and then set it going in double-quick time.

I stood still with a hand on the rail. My eyes were now on a level with the floor of the landing, out of which branched two passages—one turning sharply to my right, the other straight in front, so that I was gazing down the length of it. Almost at the end, a parallelogram of light fell across it from an open door.

A man who has once felt it knows there is only one kind of silence that can fitly be called 'dead.' This is only to be found in a great house at midnight. I declare that for a few seconds after I rattled the stair-rod you might have cut the silence with a knife. If the house held a clock, it ticked inaudibly.

Upon this silence, at the end of a minute, broke a light sound—the *tink-tink* of a decanter on the rim of a wine-glass. It came from the room where the light was.

Now perhaps it was that the very thought of liquor put warmth into my cold bones. It is certain that all of a sudden I straightened my back, took the remaining stairs at two strides, and walked down the passage as bold as brass, without caring a jot for the noise I made.

In the doorway I halted. The room was long, lined for the most part with books bound in what they call ‘divinity calf,’ and littered with papers like a barrister’s table on assize day. A leathern elbow-chair faced the fire-place, where a few coals burned sulkily, and beside it, on the corner of a writing-table, were set an unlit candle and a pile of manuscripts. At the opposite end of the room a curtained door led (as I guessed) to the chamber that I had first seen illuminated. All this I took in with the tail of my eye, while staring straight in front, where, in the middle of a great square of carpet, between me and the windows, stood a table with a red cloth upon it. On this cloth were a couple of wax candles lit, in silver stands, a tray, and a decanter three-parts full of liquor. And between me and the table stood a man.

He stood sideways, leaning a little back, as if to keep his shadow off the threshold, and looked at me over his left shoulder—a bald, grave man, slightly under the common height, with a long clerical coat of preposterous fit hanging loosely from his shoulders, a white cravat, black breeches, and black stockings. His feet were loosely thrust into carpet slippers. I judged his age at fifty, or thereabouts; but his face rested in the shadow, and I could only note a pair of eyes, very small and alert, twinkling above a large expanse of cheek.

He was lifting a wine-glass from the table at the moment when I appeared, and it trembled now in his right hand. I heard a spilt drop or two fall on the carpet. This was all the evidence he showed of discomposure.

Setting the glass back, he felt in his breast-pocket for a handkerchief, failed to find one, and rubbed his hands together to get the liquor off his fingers.

‘You startled me,’ he said, in a matter-of-fact tone, turning his eyes upon me, as he lifted his glass again, and emptied it. ‘How did you find your way in?’

‘By the front door,’ said I, wondering at his unconcern.

He nodded his head slowly.

‘Ah! yes; I forgot to lock it. You came to steal, I suppose?’

‘I came because I’d lost my way. I’ve been travelling this God-forsaken moor since dusk——’

‘With your boots in your hand?’ he put in quietly.

‘I took them off out of respect to the yellow dog you keep.’

‘He lies in a very natural attitude—eh?’

‘You don’t tell me he was *stuffed*?’

The old man’s eyes beamed a contemptuous pity.

‘You are indifferent sharp, my dear sir, for a house-breaker. Come in. Set

down those convicting boots, and don't drip pools of water in the doorway. If I must entertain a burglar, I prefer him tidy.'

He walked to the fire, picked up a poker, and knocked the coals into a blaze. This done, he turned round on me with the poker still in his hand. The serenest gravity sat on his large, pale features.

'Why have I done this?' he asked.

'I suppose to get possession of the poker.'

'Quite right. May I inquire your next move?'

'Why?' said I, feeling in my tail-pocket, 'I carry a pistol.'

'Which I suppose to be damp?'

'By no means. I carry it, as you see, in an oilcloth case.'

He stooped, and laid the poker carefully in the fender.

'That is a stronger card than I possess. I might urge that by pulling the trigger you would certainly alarm the house and the neighbourhood, and put a halter round your neck. But it strikes me as safer to assume you capable of using a pistol with effect at three paces. With what might happen subsequently I will not pretend to be concerned. The fate of your neck'—he waved a hand —'Well, I have known you for just five minutes, and feel but a moderate interest in your neck. As for the inmates of this house, it will refresh you to hear that there are none. I have lived here two years with a butler and female cook, both of whom I dismissed yesterday at a minute's notice, for conduct which I will not shock your ears by explicitly naming. Suffice it to say, I carried them off yesterday to my parish church, two miles away, married them and dismissed them in the vestry without characters. I wish you had known that butler—but excuse me; with the information I have supplied, you ought to find no difficulty in fixing the price you will take to clear out of my house instanter.'

'Sir,' I answered, 'I have held a pistol at one or two heads in my time, but never at one stuffed with nobler indiscretion. Your chivalry does not, indeed, disarm me, but prompts me to desire more of your acquaintance. I have found a gentleman, and must sup with him before I make terms.'

This address seemed to please him. He shuffled across the room to a sideboard, and produced a plate of biscuits, another of dried figs, a glass, and two decanters.

'Sherry and Madeira,' he said. 'There is also a cold pie in the larder, if you care for it.'

'A biscuit will serve,' I replied. 'To tell the truth, I'm more for the bucket than the manger, as the grooms say: and the brandy you were tasting just now is more to my mind than wine.'

'There is no water handy.'

'I have soaked in enough to-night to last me with this bottle.'

I pulled over a chair, laid my pistol on the table, and held out the glass for him to fill. Having done so, he helped himself to a glass and a chair, and sat down facing me.

'I was speaking, just now, of my late butler,' he began, with a sip at his brandy. 'Does it strike you that, when confronted with moral delinquency, I am apt to let my indignation get the better of me?'

'Not at all,' I answered heartily, refilling my glass.

It appeared that another reply would have pleased him better.

'H'm. I was hoping that, perhaps, I had visited his offence too strongly. As a clergyman, you see, I was bound to be severe; but upon my word, sir, since Parkinson left I have felt like a man who has lost a limb.'

He drummed with his fingers on the cloth for a few moments, and went on:

'One has a natural disposition to forgive butlers—Pharaoh, for instance, felt it. There hovers around butlers an atmosphere in which common ethics lose their pertinence. But mine was a rare bird—a black swan among butlers! He was more than a butler: he was a quick and brightly gifted man. Of the accuracy of his taste, and the unusual scope of his endeavour, you will be able to form some opinion when I assure you he modelled himself upon *me*.'

I bowed, over my brandy.

'I am a scholar: yet I employed him to read aloud to me, and derived pleasure from his intonation. I talk with refinement: yet he learned to answer me in language as precise as my own. My cast-off garments fitted him not more irreproachably than did my amenities of manner. Divest him of his tray, and you would find his mode of entering a room hardly distinguishable from my own—the same urbanity, the same alertness of carriage, the same superfine deference towards the weaker sex. All—all my idiosyncrasies I saw reflected in him; and can you doubt that I was gratified? He was my *alter ego*—which, by the way, makes it harder for me to pardon his behaviour with the cook.'

'Look here,' I broke in; 'you want a new butler?'

'Oh, you really grasp that fact, do you?' he retorted.

'Why, then,' said I, 'let me cease to be your burglar and let me continue here as your butler.'

He leant back, spreading out the fingers of each hand on the table's edge.

'Believe me,' I went on, 'you might do worse. I have been in my time a demy of Magdalen College, Oxford, and retain some Greek and Latin. I'll undertake to read the Fathers with an accent that shall not offend you. My taste in wine is none the worse for having been formed in other men's cellars. Moreover, you shall engage the ugliest cook in Christendom, so long as I'm your butler. I've taken a liking to you—that's flat—and I apply for the post.'

'I give forty pounds a year,' said he.

'And I'm cheap at that price.'

He filled up his glass, looking up at me while he did so with the air of one digesting a problem. From first to last his face was grave as a judge's.

'We are too impulsive, I think,' was his answer, after a minute's silence; 'and your speech smacks of the amateur. You say: "Let me cease to be your burglar and let me be your butler." The aspiration is respectable; but a man might as well say: "Let me cease to write sermons, let me paint pictures." And truly, sir, you impress me as no expert even in your present trade.'

'On the other hand,' I argued, 'consider the moderation of my demands; that alone should convince you of my desire to turn over a new leaf. I ask for a month's trial; if at the end of that time I don't suit, you shall say so, and I'll march from your door with nothing in my pocket but my month's wages. Be hanged, sir! but when I reflect on the amount you'll have to pay to get me to face to-night's storm again, you seem to be getting off dirt cheap!' cried I, slapping my palm on the table.

'Ah, if you had only known Parkinson!' he exclaimed.

Now the third glass of clean spirit has always a deplorable effect on me. It turns me from bright to black, from levity to extreme sulkiness. I have done more wickedness over this third tumbler than in all the other states of comparative inebriety within my experience. So now I glowered at my companion and cursed.

'Look here, I don't want to hear any more of Parkinson, and I've a pretty clear notion of the game you're playing. You want to make me drink, and you're ready to sit prattling there plying me till I drop under the table.'

'Do me the favour to remember that you came, and are staying, on your own motion. As for the brandy, I would remind you that I suggested a milder drink. Try some Madeira.'

He handed me the decanter, as he spoke, and I poured out a glass.

'Madeira!' said I, taking a gulp. 'Ugh! it's the commonest Marsala!'

I had no sooner said the words than he rose up, and stretched a hand gravely across to me.

'I hope you will shake it,' he said; 'though, as a man who after three glasses of neat spirit can distinguish between Madeira and Marsala, you have every right to refuse me. Two minutes ago you offered to become my butler, and I demurred. I now beg you to repeat that offer. Say the word, and I employ you gladly; you shall even have the second decanter (which contains genuine Madeira) to take to bed with you.'

We shook hands on our bargain, and catching up a candlestick, he led the way from the room.

Picking up my boots, I followed him along the passage and down the silent staircase. In the hall he paused to stand on tiptoe, and turn up the lamp, which was burning low. As he did so, I found time to fling a glance at my old enemy,

the mastiff. He lay as I had first seen him—a stuffed dog, if ever there was one. ‘Decidedly,’ thought I, ‘my wits are to seek to-night’; and with the same, a sudden suspicion made me turn to my conductor, who had advanced to the left-hand door, and was waiting for me, with a hand on the knob.

‘One moment!’ I said: ‘This is all very pretty, but how am I to know you’re not sending me to bed while you fetch in all the country-side to lay me by the heels?’

‘I’m afraid,’ was his answer, ‘you must be content with my word, as a gentleman, that never, to-night or hereafter, will I breathe a syllable about the circumstances of your visit. However, if you choose, we will return upstairs.’

‘No; I’ll trust you,’ said I; and he opened the door.

It led into a broad passage paved with slate, upon which three or four rooms opened. He paused by the second and ushered me into a sleeping-chamber, which, though narrow, was comfortable enough—a vast improvement, at any rate, on the mumpers’ lodgings I had been used to for many months past.

‘You can undress here,’ he said. ‘The sheets are aired, and if you’ll wait a moment, I’ll fetch a nightshirt—one of my own.’

‘Sir, you heap coals of fire on me.’

‘Believe me that for ninety-nine of your qualities I do not care a tinker’s curse; but for your palate you are to be taken care of.’

He shuffled away, but came back in a couple of minutes with the nightshirt.

‘Good night,’ he called to me, flinging it in at the door; and without giving me time to return the wish, went his way upstairs.

Now it might be supposed I was only too glad to toss off my clothes and climb into the bed I had so unexpectedly acquired a right to. But, as a matter of fact, I did nothing of the kind. Instead, I drew on my boots and sat on the bed’s edge, blinking at my candle till it died down in its socket, and afterwards at the purple square of window as it slowly changed to grey with the coming of dawn. I was cold to the heart, and my teeth chattered with an ague. Certainly I never suspected my host’s word; but was even occupied in framing good resolutions and shaping out a reputable future, when I heard the front door gently pulled to, and a man’s footsteps moving quietly to the gate.

The treachery knocked me in a heap for the moment. Then, leaping up and flinging my door wide, I stumbled through the uncertain light of the passage into the front hall.

There was a fan-shaped light over the door, and the place was very still and grey. A quick thought, or, rather, a sudden, prophetic guess at the truth, made me turn to the figure of the mastiff curled under the hall table.

I laid my hand on the scruff of his neck. He was quite limp, and my fingers

sank into the flesh on either side of the vertebrae. Digging them deeper, I dragged him out into the middle of the hall and pulled the front door open to see the better.

His throat was gashed from ear to ear.

How many seconds passed after I dropped the senseless lump on the floor, and before I made another movement, it would puzzle me to say. Twice I stirred a foot as if to run out at the door. Then, changing my mind, I stepped over the mastiff, and ran up the staircase.

The passage at the top was now dark; but groping down it, I found the study door open, as before, and passed in. A sick light stole through the blinds —enough for me to distinguish the glasses and decanters on the table, and find my way to the curtain that hung before the inner room.

I pushed the curtain aside, paused for a moment, and listened to the violent beat of my heart; then felt for the door-handle and turned it.

All I could see at first was that the chamber was small; next, that the light patch in a line with the window was the white coverlet of a bed; and next that somebody, or something, lay on the bed.

I listened again. There was no sound in the room; no heart beating but my own. I reached out a hand to pull up the blind, and drew it back again. I dared not.

The daylight grew minute by minute on the dull oblong of the blind, and minute by minute that horrible thing on the bed took something of distinctness.

The strain beat me at last. I fetched a loud yell to give myself courage, and, reaching for the cord, pulled up the blind as fast as it would go.

The face on the pillow was that of an old man—a face waxen and peaceful, with quiet lines about the mouth and eyes, and long lines of grey hair falling back from the temples. The body was turned a little on one side, and one hand lay outside the bedclothes in a very natural manner. But there were two big dark stains on the pillow and coverlet.

Then I knew I was face to face with the real householder; and it flashed on me that I had been indiscreet in taking service as his butler, and that I knew the face his ex-butler wore.

And, being by this time awake to the responsibilities of the post, I quitted it three steps at a time, not once looking behind me. Outside the house the storm had died down, and white daylight was gleaming over the sodden moors. But my bones were cold, and I ran faster and faster.

CAPTAIN KNOT

AARON KNOT, master of the Virginia barque *Jehoiada*, though a member of the Society of Friends and a religious man by nature, had a tolerant and catholic mind, a quiet but insatiable curiosity in the ways of his fellow-men (seafarers and sinners especially), with a temperate zest for talking with strangers and listening to them. He liked his company to be honest, yet could stretch a point or two in charity. He knew, and liked to think, that it takes all sorts to make a world. At sea—and he had passed forty-five of his sixty years at sea—he would spend long hours, night after night, in his cabin, peaceably thinking about God, and God's wonders, and the purpose of it all. Ashore, his heart warmed to the red light behind the blinds of a decent tavern. He was old enough, and wise enough, to know that for him the adventure would be sober. He knew at first taste good ale and good company from bad, and no stranger to whom he offered a pipeful could deny the quality of his tobacco, the best grown on the Rappahannock. He wore the strict Quaker dress, from broad hat down to square toes with buckles. His features had a large Roman gravity. His hair, of an iron-grey, still strong in growth and combed over temples noticeably massive, was tied at the back with a wisp of black ribbon. His stature was six feet or a little over, and his build proportionate. In a man of sixty years one looks less to the waistband than to the depth of chest.

This Captain Knot, having brought the *Jehoiada* up Avon on a full spring tide, moored her off Wyatt's Wharf, settled with his crew, declared his cargo (mainly tobacco), and done all necessary business with his consignee, bent his steps towards the Welcome Home Tavern at the head of Quay Street. The date was Saturday, 11th August 1742: the time about seven o'clock in the evening.

Of all the taverns in all the ports known to him the Welcome Home was Captain Knot's favourite house of call, and to-night it looked as cosy and well-to-do as ever; the sign newly painted and varnished, the doorstep white with holystone, the brick floor clean as a pin, fresh sawdust in the spittoons; the brass candlesticks on the chimney-piece, the brass chains of the clock-weights, the copper warming-pan on the wall, the ware on the dresser all a-twinkle in so much of evening light as drifted in by the open doorway or over the red window-blinds.

Yes, the place still prospered. 'But why, then, is it so empty?' wondered Captain Knot—'and on a Saturday night?'

There were, in fact, but two customers in the room, two seafaring men seated and talking together on the settle beyond the fire-place; or rather, the one talking low and earnestly, the other listening. The listener—who was clearly the elder—held a long pipe and had a mug of beer beside him. The other had neither pipe nor mug. He leaned forward with his wrists on his knees and his hands clasped, nor did he shift his position when answering Captain Knot's 'Good evening' with a 'Good evening, sir.' Lowering his voice, he went on with his argument, the murmur of which could not hide a Scottish accent.

Captain Knot threw the pair a look before rapping on the table. 'House!' he called, threw the younger man a second, slightly longer look as if searching his face in the dusk, and walking to the window, stared out upon the street.

The landlady entered, and he whipped about.

'Mrs. Walters?'

'At your service, sir . . . Why, if it isn't Captain Knot! For a moment—and you standing there with your back to the light——'

'Husband well?'

'Quite well, sir, the Lord be praised!—and what's more, sir, he warned me the *Jehoiada* had come in . . . but with so much housework on one's mind! And I hope it's been a good passage, Captain? Haler I never saw you looking.'

'Pretty fair, ma'am: nothing to grumble at,' the Captain answered, but absent-mindedly. His brows had drawn together in a slight frown as one of the men on the settle made a sudden shuffling movement with his feet. 'Much, on the contrary, to be thankful for,' he went on briskly, pulling himself together. 'And pretty hale yet, as you say, for a man of sixty. But where's thy husband, that he neglects his old customers? Thou gave me a start, ma'am—a scare, till I took notice thy cap was no widow-woman's.'

'Walters?' said the wife. 'Oh, Walters is like every other fool in Bristol, crazy after the new preacher. You wouldn't think it in a man of his solid habits. He started at four o'clock to walk all the way to Kingswood—on a Saturday, too!'

'But who is this new preacher, ma'am?'

'Why, haven't you heard? Oh, but I forgot—you have only arrived to-day, and all the way from—from——'

'From the Potomac, ma'am.'

'But even in America, sir, you must have heard tell of him—the great John Wesley, that is setting half England by the ears.'

'Well, as a fact, ma'am,' said Captain Knot coolly, 'I *have* heard tell of him once or twice, and the first time was over in Georgia, where I'm sorry to say they did not think much of him.'

' "Not think much of him!" ' The younger of the two seamen rose abruptly

from the settle and thrust himself into the conversation. ‘Show me the man as dares to say he doesn’t think much of John Wesley, and I’ll say to his face: “John Wesley was sent straight from Heaven, as sure as John the Baptist.” ’ The man’s hands and muscles of his still youthful face twitched with excitement.

‘You mustn’t mind Peter Williamson, sir,’ interposed Mrs. Walters. ‘He’s young yet, and was converted almost a week ago——’

‘Glory!’ put in Williamson. ‘Hallelujah!—and I don’t care who knows it.’

‘Though I wonder, Pete,’ Mrs. Walters went on, ‘that with all your fervour you’re not out at Kingswood, too, this fine evening, but sitting here and all the time ordering nothing. One way or the other you’re losing your privileges, and that you can’t gainsay.’

‘I’m here, ma’am, on my Father’s business,’ stammered Williamson. ‘If I’ve forgot the due of your house in this zeal o’ mine——’

‘Fetch Master Williamson a mug of your strong home-brewed, and another for me,’ ordered Captain Knot briskly. He ignored the younger seaman, who had twice made as if to rise and go, and twice faltered and sat down again.

‘My young friend,’ said Captain Knot to Williamson, when the landlady had gone out, ‘so thou art on thy Father’s business? And what might that be?’

‘The saving of souls, sir,’ answered Williamson promptly. ‘This man’s, for instance.’ He jerked a thumb at his companion.

‘Ah? What’s his name?’

‘Haynes, sir—Jim Haynes. I know his need, and it’s a bitter hard one.’

‘ “Haynes”?’ Captain Knot pondered. ‘No, I don’t recall the name. Well, friend, I’ll take thy word about knowing his need. As to knowing his soul, and dealing with it, on a seven-days’-old conversion, I am not so sure. Souls are kittle, friend, as they say up in thy country of North Britain. Take mine, for example—and I dare say a passable example, as souls go. It has its needs, God knows; yet I have a notion that the cure of ’em would give thee much trouble and yield me much amusement.’

‘I take ye for a releegious man, sir; though it beats me how you guessed I was out of Scotland. At first sight I said: “Yon elderly gentleman has had convictions of sin at least, or I’m mistaken.” ’

‘Plenty.’ Captain Knot walked over to the empty fire-place, turned his back to it, and parted his broad coat-tails so that one hung over each arm. ‘Plenty, my friend, at one time and another. But I never crowd sail on my conscience, nor will I allow another man to do it. I’m master of that ship; and so it is, or should be to my notion, with every man. “The Kingdom of God is within you.” Ah, here comes Mrs. Walters with the beer! Thy good health, my friend. As I was saying, or about to say, every man has a soul of his own, and is responsible for it. That’s a tidy number, and all different. On top of that,

there's animals, as some hold. Why there's Indians, over on my side of the world, make gods of the very vermin on their bodies. And what shall we say about ships now?'

'You're talking too deep for me, sir,' said Williamson, rubbing his jaw. 'A ship with a soul, you say?'

'Why not? I put it to thee as a seaman. Well, I won't press the word "soul": but there's a something belonging to her, and to her only, whats'ever ship she may be.'

'I'm not denying as a ship may have a character,' owned Williamson, who was young enough, and enough of a Scotsman, to rub shoulders fondly against anything hard and metaphysical.

' "Character?" ' echoed Captain Knot with a faint accent of scorn, and still nursing his coat-tails. 'Thou art old enough, by thy looks, to have seen a ship —ay, and felt her—running down the trades, with t'gallant sails set and stuns'ls out like the wings on a butterfly, floating and striving after heaven. Hast never had that feeling?'

'I know what you mean, sir,' confessed Williamson.

'Then,' advised Captain Knot, sharply, 'don't pretend to me she was sailing to heaven on her character, like a servant maid after a situation. I don't know at what point in building or rigging the Lord puts the spirit in; but a spirit there is, and a soul, even in my old *Jehoiada*. For all that, she'll nag and sulk like a man's old wife. Ships? There be ships afloat comely as Mary Magdalen, and, like her, torn with devils; beautiful, born to be damned. I've known and pitied 'em, as I'd pity a girl with her pretty face set t'ards hell. Why, I could tell of the——'

Here Captain Knot with a start disengaged both hands from under his coat-tails, smote the palm of his left with the knuckles of his right, and cried: 'I have it! I never forget a face! That man'—he pointed a finger at the older seaman, who shrank back sideways on the settle before it—'I never heard his name till five minutes ago, but the *Rover* was his ship. I remember his face on the deck of her as we parted. Ay, the *Rover*, Captain Kennedy—Mrs. Walters!'

The older seaman staggered up from the settle. He would have made for the door; but Captain Knot had stepped to the exit and stood barring it.

'You can't harm me,' stammered the seaman. 'I got the King's pardon for it these four years.'

'Who wants to harm thee?' asked Captain Knot gently. 'I only want to see thy face. Mrs. Walters, ma'am, the nights are closing in, and I'll ask the favour of a candle.'

Mrs. Walters brought a candle and handed it to Captain Knot. 'We will have a third mug of ale, ma'am, if thou please, and this one mulled hot, with a clove or two.'

He took the candle, placed it on the high chimney-piece, and under it studied the seaman's features, keeping silence until the landlady had left the room. The wick burned dimly in the tallow, and at first the light showed him but a pair of eyes staring out from a frame or fringe of black hair. They were at once defiant in the surface and timid in their depths, eyes of a man at bay, hunted, and even haunted. Captain Knot took up the candle again, and held it close. The lower part of the face was weak, but neither sensual nor unrefined.

'When you've quite finished,' growled the man.

'So Jim Haynes is his name?' Captain Knot set back the candle, and addressed the younger seaman, 'Jim Haynes, formerly of Kennedy's gang in the *Rover*. If either of ye wants to convert this man I would advise thee and thy Master Wesley against starting him to confess his sins in public.'

'I got the King's pardon,' repeated Haynes. 'Can't you let a man alone as has turned a new leaf?'

'I never saw the *Rover*, sir,' put in Williamson. 'But, as it happens, I came across a good part of her crew one time, and this Jim Haynes amongst 'em. What's more, I know how most of 'em ended.'

'On the gallows, I make no doubt,' said Captain Knot. 'Let me hear thy tale presently. But 'tis the *Rover*—the ship herself—that I'm concerned about; the ship and the soul of her. A beautiful ship, hey?' He swung round on Haynes.

'Pretty enough,' Haynes admitted in a hoarse voice.

' "Beautiful" was my word. Dutch built, as I've heard, and Dutch manned when that blackguard Howell Davies took her. But the man who designed her must have despised to call his craft by the name of any nation, for he had been up to heaven and fetched away the Lord's own pattern of a ship. The sheer of her! and the entry! It isn't enough to say that the wave off her cut-water never had time to catch so much as her heel, the dainty! For she cut no water, or none that showed. She touched it, and it made room. The first time I crossed her 'twas in a gale of wind, and she'd come up for a look at us. It couldn't have been but for that, and for wantonness, the seas being too steep and the weather too heavy for so much as hailing us, let alone boarding. I was young in those days—young and proud as a cock, it being my first command. My ship? Oh, the same old *Jehoiada*. I've commanded her and never another these thirty-five years. By rights I should have laid her to, hours and hours before. Nowadays I should lay-to as a matter of course. But I was proud, as I say, and venturesome, and anxious to cut a dash with my owners. So I held her on under close-reefed main-tops'l and a napkin of a fores'l, which answered well enough until the gale moderated, and the seas growing as it lessened began to knock the wind out of our sails, so that she fell slow to her helm in the troughs, why then I began to see my vainglory in a new light. And just then, out of the dirt astern,

this *Rover* came overhauling us, leaping almost atop of us. She had sighted us, no doubt, and made sure we were running in fear of her. So, just to give us a shake, she passed us to windward and close. At one moment she was high up over our heads—high as our mainyard almost; the next I'd be holding hard by the rigging and looking over as she went down and down, craning my neck over her deck and half wondering if she'd spike our very hull as she lifted again. There were two men at her wheel, and a third man just aft of them; and right aft, on her very taffrail, a monkey, cracking nuts and grinning.'

'Roberts's ape,' blurted Jim Haynes.

'I reckoned the third man would be Roberts. He was grinning almost as comfortable as his ape, and once he looked up and shook his fist for a joke. A light-featured man, with a wig, as I remember; but his ship! Dancing past like a fairy on cork heels, the very deck of her dry, and three times the *Jehoiada* had taken it green. She passed us, downed helm, put breast to wave, went over it like a lark over a wall, right across our bows, and left us.

'That was the first time. The second, 'twas about thirty leagues off Barbados, and the *Jehoiada* standing for home with a hold full of negroes from the Guinea Coast. This time she came up on us out of a summer sea, every stitch set, to her butterflies.' Captain Knot turned on Haynes. 'She carried a genius of a sailmaker?'

Haynes nodded. 'Corson—Zeph Corson. He went with the rest.'

'Ay! I can guess how. Well, then, they hanged an artist. The old Greeks or the Romans—I forget which—used to figure the soul in the shape of a butterfly. Master Haynes, what like was the soul of that ship? The beautiful!—I tell thee "beautiful" was my word—and the hands she had passed through! Howell first, then Roberts, and now with that hulking Kennedy for master.

'Kennedy had given Roberts the slip—left him (as I've heard) to rot in a waterless boat—and now was in his shoes, full sail for Execution Dock. There's a silly proverb tells ye to speak of a man as you find him. I found Kennedy well enough. Partly in fun, belike, and it happening to be his humour, he let me off easy. But I sensed him for one of the worst rogues I had ever run across. A hollow man, filled up with dirt—that's what I made of Kennedy.'

'I can tell you his end, sir,' put in Williamson. 'He got back to London and kept a bad house on Deptford Road. One of his women, in a tiff, laid information against him for robbery. While he was in Bridewell on this charge she sought out the ex-mate of a ship that he'd plundered. Grant was his name. Grant pays a visit to Bridewell, spots Kennedy as his man, swears to a warrant for piracy, and gets him shipped to Marshalsea. The rogue, to save his neck, offered King's Evidence against eight or ten old comrades then in hiding.'

‘I was one,’ said Jim Haynes. ‘He was a dirty rogue, was Walter Kennedy —as you say, sir. But the judge wouldn’t listen. So they took him from the Marshalsea and turned him off at Execution Dock. That would be in the summer of ’21, as I make out.’

‘There or thereabouts,’ agreed Captain Knot. ‘That would be about the length of rope I gave him. I haven’t exactly what they call second sight, and yet I saw the hemp about his neck as plain as plain . . . notwithstanding that he used me very civilly.

‘I have told you that I was proud in those days. On one point I’ve continued proud as I was then. I belong to the Society of Friends. Not a gun have I ever carried on the *Jehoiada*; not a pistol nor sword nor cutlass would I ever permit to be brought aboard of her, much less to be worn. My owners called me a fool, and, what was more, they proved it. To which I made no answer but that they must take me or leave me. They took me.

‘I had a sprinkling of Friends among my crew; but the rest, who would have fought the ship if we’d carried arms, treated me to some pretty black looks when the *Rover* bore down upon us. I kept my face as stiff as I could, making believe not to notice; and indeed I saw very little to fear. These gentry would have little use for my ship, which is, and ever was, a good plain sailer in sea-room, but no consort for theirs—not within six points of the wind. “Why,” said I to my mate, Mr. Greenaway, that stood grumbling, “the *Jehoiada*’s as good-looking as any man’s wife has a right to be; but this here dancing beauty, angel or devil, is not coming to enlist the likes of the *Jehoiada*. And as for her cargo, Friend Greenaway,” I said, “didst thou ever hear of a pirate that was hungry for a cargo of blacks? However much treasure he may carry, or however little, he takes only what stows close for its worth, and nine times out of ten he’s in trouble to feed his own mouths. He’ll take victual from us, and victual we have in plenty”—for I always feed my slaves fat as pigs; it’s Christian, and it brings its earthly reward in the market. “But for the rest,” said I, “thou mark my words, he’ll leave us alone.”

‘Well, so it turned out, and to my astonishment even a little better. For what should prove to be this Kennedy’s real reason for bringing us to? Victual he took from us, indeed, and enough to last him for three weeks. But his main purpose, he explained to me, coming aboard to my cabin. It seemed that he and his men, having taken much wealth, were weighted by it, and not only oppressed but frightened. “Of what use is wealth, Master Quaker,” he asked, “if it don’t bring a man peace and comfort?” “Of none at all, friend,” said I, “and I am glad that repentance sits so heavy on thee.” “Devil a bit it does,” said he. “But I want to enjoy my earnings, and it’s the same with my men. Now wealth made at sea will only bring enjoyment ashore, and the enjoyment we seek is not to be found in the islands, or, to my mind, anywhere on this

Main. The most of us are dying to drop this trade, get back to England, bury the past, and live respectable, more or less. But that's the curse of it," said he. "You took note of my ship, maybe, as she came up on you?" "As one seaman to another, Captain Kennedy," I said, "she's the loveliest thing I ever saw on the face of the waters." "She's a devil," says he. "And I'm chained to her. Worse than a devil she is, being damned herself. Face of the waters—ay, there's her prison. Homeless, houseless, fleet as a bird, with all the law and the gospels in chase and giving her no rest. For all my pride in her she might sink under my shoes to-night, so I could win home to a tidy little parlour in Deptford." "It's there, friend," said I, "that I cannot help thee, being bound for the Capes." "No," said he; "but you can take off eight, or maybe nine, men of my company that have a mind to settle in Virginia. They will bring their share of the money, and I don't doubt they'll pay you well. I'm overmanned," said he, "for anything but fighting; and I'm sick of fighting and plundering; I only ask to get away home and live clean."

'The upshot was that I took over eight pirates with their chests and a light cutter boat, in which four of them had a mind to make, as soon as we neared the coast, for Maryland. Eight they were, and, as I remember, Jim Haynes, thou watched 'em pull from ship to ship, yourself in two minds to make the ninth. I had my glass on thee, and I never forget a face.'

'What became of them?' asked Haynes.

Captain Knot made a purring noise in his throat.

'I carried them safe,' said he, 'and delivered them. They made me a present of ten chests of sugar, ten rolls of Brazil tobacco, thirty moidures and some gold dust, in all to the value of two hundred and fifty pounds. They also made presents to the sailors. But they gave me a great deal of trouble with their jovial ways, and it was difficult for me to keep any discipline because they wore arms day and night. So I was glad enough when we reached coast water, and half the party left us in the boat to make across the bay for Maryland. For the other four, I may tell thee that, coming to Hampton and anchoring, I made haste ashore to Mr. Spottswood, the Governor, who sent off a guard, had them all bound, and hanged them out of hand. Nay, he did more, being a man to great energy. He sent patrols up the coast after the four that were making for Maryland, but (as it happened) had been forced by weather to land where they could, and were having good entertainment with the planters in those parts. These also he hanged. So all the eight were accounted for.'

'And a d——n dirty trick!' swore Haynes, 'when they had paid their passage.'

'Ah, to be sure,' said Captain Knot. 'I forgot to tell that I handed the Governor all their property taken on board, and all the presents they had made me, and forced my men to do the like. I've no taste—never had—for pirates or

pirates' money.'

'Well, I'm glad I made up my mind as I did—that's all,' Haynes growled.

Captain Knot fairly beamed on him. 'I thought I had made it clear, friend,' said he, ' 'twas the ship, and only the ship, that moved my bowels of pity. The beauty she was!' He sighed. 'I never saw her again, nor heard what became of her.'

Peter Williamson took up the story.

'I canna tell you, sir, what became of the ship. But I ken very well how the crew came to land, and it was not in this same *Rover*.

'Jamie Haynes, here, did once tell me a part of your tale, sir—how that they fell in with a Virginiaman, the master of which was a Quaker (saving your presence), and would carry no arms. He named me the eight men that went along with you, but the names, you'll understand, don't stick in my head.'

'Nor in mine,' Captain Knot assured him heartily.

'I dare say Jamie could put names to them now.' Williamson glanced at Haynes, who had thrust his shoulders back into the settle-corner and was brooding inattentive, with his chin sunk on his chest. 'But there! they're hanged long syne and don't signify. He said he'd often wished he had gone along with them.'

'Ha?' was Captain Knot's comment, short and grim.

'But he said, sir, that some days after parting company with you, cruising off Jamaica, they took a sloop thither-bound from Boston, loaded with bread and flour. Aboard of this sloop went all hands that was in compact for breaking the gang and living honest—or all but Kennedy himself. They mistrusted Kennedy for his dirty ways, forbye that he had no skill in navigation, nor even in the reading and writing, but was only useful in a fight. He pleaded so bitterly, however, when they were about to throw him overboard—he having got ahead of them and sneaked into the sloop—that in the end they took him along, having first made him swear to be faithful, putting his hand upon the Bible, and taking the most dreadfullest oaths.

'So the *Rover* was left on the high seas, with the few that had a mind to hold on in her; and the sloop, with Kennedy's party (as we'll call them) and their shares of plunder aboard, shaped right away for Ireland, where they had agreed to land and scatter. By bad navigation, however, they ran away to the north-west of Scotland, and into one gale upon another; whereby, with all bearings lost, they came near to perishing.

'Upon this coast, sir, in those days, my father kept what you might call a shebeen, a mile from Clashnessie, to the south of Eddruchillis Bay. Alec Williamson his name was, a widower, and myself a lad of sixteen, very industrious to learn penmanship and the casting of accounts—my father doing some business off and on in the Free Trade, and, as he maintained, losing half

his just profits by reason of his ignorance in these branches.

'Late one night, then—and the wind still blowing hard—there came a knocking at the door, and I opened it upon this very James Haynes as you see on this settle. He was wet through, and scared; and his first word was: "Shut the door, for God's sake, and for God's sake close that chink of light between your shutters!" "Is it a run?" asked my father, awake and coming downstairs at the noise of the latch. "If so," says my father, "no warning has been put on me; and, what's more, my man, I never saw your face in my life." "By the smell of this house," says Haynes, "the usquebah is not very far away. Fetch me a drink, and in the morning, if ye're early risers, I'll make ye rich for life." I went with the jug, and, that side of the house being dead to leeward, I heard a roaring of tipsy voices away beyond the cross-roads. When I brought it to him the man took the liquor down like milk. "I gave 'em the slip at the turning," says he, and laughs. "They're for Edinburgh, poor devils." He would answer no questions. After another drink and a bite he laid himself down in his sodden clothes before what was left of the fire, and was asleep as soon as his head touched the hearthstone.

'But before day he was up and led us—a little unsurely, having come in the dark—down to a cove we called the Sow's Shelter; a hole well-kenned as serviceable by the free-traders, running in narrow and steep-to, with a shelf of sand for the landing. What should we see there in the light of morning, but a good-sized sloop almost filling the hole, stem-on to the beach, and there grounded, hard and fast! . . . "Take your run through her," says this Haynes, pointing, "and take your pickings before the whole country's on top of 'ee—as it will be within these two hours. For the fools who ran her here," says he, "are rolling south down the road and passing themselves for shipwrecked men; and the money is in their pockets and the drink in their heads. So help yourselves, honest men, while you may," says he. "There's silks aboard, and chinaware, and plenty good tobacco; but to look for the dollars and the precious stones and the gold dust will only waste your time." " 'Tis hard we three must work then before his lordship's factor come and claims wreckage," said my father. "Begging your pardon," says Haynes, "but it will not be healthy for me to be taken here. You two must do without me, and that not until your lad here has taken me to safe hiding." There was reason in this, and I led the man around a point of the foreshore to a snug cave. His clothing was stuffed with money so that he clinked as he climbed across the rocks. Well, in this cave by day, and by night in our cottage, we kept him hid for more than a month, it being sure capture for him within that time to try south after the rest of the crew. For I must tell you, sir——'

'I am not curious to hear about this man,' put in Captain Knot, with a pretty grim look at Haynes, 'seeing that I missed the pleasure to hang him.

He's alive, as I see, so we will say no more about it. As for the rest, it will content me to hear that they came to the gallows—never mind how.'

'Very well, sir,' said Williamson; 'then I'll be as short as you please. Kennedy cut loose from them at Cromarty, and by some means got himself shipped across to Ireland; which delayed *his* sail into Execution Dock for a season. Six or seven others had sense after a while to break away singly or in couples, and reached London without being disturbed or suspicioned. But the main gang flamed it down through Scotland, drinking and roaring at such a rate that in places folk shut themselves within doors. In others they treated the whole township to drink; which procured two of their stragglers to be knocked on the head, their bodies being found murdered on the road and their money taken from them. The residue, to the number of seventeen, won almost to the gates of Edinburgh. But, a post having ridden ahead, they were arrested and put into jail on suspicion of they kent not what. The magistrates were not long at a loss over warrants; for two of the pact, offering themselves for evidence, were accepted; which put the others on trial: whereby nine were convicted and executed. To get back to Jamie Haynes here——'

'I tell thee,' Captain Knot interrupted, 'I am fair sick hearing of Haynes.'

Haynes stood up, wiping his mouth weakly with the back of his hand. His knees shook as he straightened himself. He seemed like a man in a twitter after long drinking.

'Is it the *Rover*? . . . I can tell you, sir, about the *Rover*. She was a fine ship, sir. There was no mistaking her——'

'Look here, my man,' put in Captain Knot. 'There's no need to stand up and tell what I have been telling thee these twenty minutes.'

'There was no mistaking her,' Haynes went on, as though not hearing. His eyes were as if they withdrew their look deep in his head, and anon they stared out past the captain as though they saw a picture out in the twilight beyond the window-pane. He paused and gulped.

—'No mistaking her,' he went on. 'In the end I got away, first to Wick, then to Leith. There I shipped honest on the *Anna* brig for Jamaica. We called at St. Vincent in the Wind'ard Islands. Two days out from St. Vincent—and me forward, it being my watch—at daybreak there stood the *Rover* right ahead, and not two miles from us. There was no mistaking her, as you say, sir. She came on me out of the night like, as if she had been searching, with all her sins aboard—her sins and mine, sir. Instead of calling out I ran aft to the master, and threw myself down, there by the wheel, at his feet, crying out her name, and how that was once a lost ship.

Haynes passed a hand over his eyes.

'There she was, sir—heeling to it—the main t'gallant sail blown away, and all the rest of her canvas crowded. The master put up his glass. "They must be

mad aboard then," says he; "or else blazing drunk—the way she's behaving"—For she fetched up in the wind, staggered dead, and after a bit the breeze fetched her a clap that laid her rail under. She righted, paid off again, and again she fetched up shivering. "We'll hail her," says the old man. "I'm not afraid of any seaman that handles his ship so." He hailed, and none answered.

'The master, then, manning up close, saw that her decks were empty. There was no one at the wheel, which wasn't even lashed. He ordered me and five others to board her along with him.'

Haynes covered his eyes again, and henceforth to the end kept them covered.

'There was no crew aboard, sir: no trace of a crew. The hold was empty, but for nine niggers—live niggers, starved to the bone—sitting there with the whites of their eyes shining. Oh, my God! Nine niggers, and not a word to be got from them!

'What is it you say, sir? There was no trace, I swear! Not a spot of blood on her decks or anywhere. Cleaned down from fo'c'sle to cabin. Food enough on board, too. No, the men were not chained. But there they sat, the flesh shrunk on their bones and the whites of their eyes shining. . . .'

Haynes dropped back on the settle, and covered his face with both hands.

'Well?' asked Captain Knot. 'What did your skipper do with her?'

'Put half a dozen hands aboard of her, sir: with orders to keep company and bear up with us for Kingston.

'And——'

'And that night she skipped ahead. . . . We never saw her again. She never came to port.'

'Amen,' said Captain Knot after a pause. 'She never was for port.'

SINDBAD ON BURRATOR

I HEARD this story in a farmhouse upon Dartmoor, and I give it in the words of the local doctor who told it. We were a reading-party of three undergraduates and a Christ Church don. The don had slipped on a boulder, two days before, while fishing the river Meavy, and sprained his ankle; hence Dr. Miles's visit. The two had made friends over the don's fly-book and the discovery that what the doctor did not know about Dartmoor trout was not worth knowing; hence an invitation to extend his visit over dinner. At dinner the talk diverged from sport to the ancient tin-works, stone circles, camps, and cromlechs on the tors about us, and from there to touch speculatively on the darker side of the old religions: hence at length the doctor's story, which he told over the pipes and whisky, leaning his arms upon the table and gazing at it rather than at us, as though drawing his memories out of depths below its polished surface.

It must be thirty—yes, thirty—years ago (he said) since I met the man, on a bright November morning, when the Dartmoor hounds were drawing Burrator Wood. Burrator House in those days belonged to the Rajah Brooke—Brooke of Sarawak—who had bought it from Harry Terrell; or rather it had been bought for him by the Baroness Burdett-Coutts and other admirers in England. Harry Terrell—a great sportsman in his day—had been loath enough to part with it, and when the bargain was first proposed, had named at random a price which was about double what he had given for the place. The Rajah closed with the sum at once, asked him to make a list of everything in the house, and put a price on whatever he cared to sell. Terrell made a full list, putting what seemed to him fair prices on most of the furniture, and high ones—prohibitive he thought—on the sticks he had a fancy to keep. The Rajah glanced over the paper in his grand manner, and says he: 'I'll take it all.' 'Stop! stop!' cried Terrell, 'I bain't going to let you have the bed I was married in!' 'As you please; we'll strike out the bed, then,' the Rajah answered. That is how he took possession.

Burrator House, as I dare say you know, faces across the Meavy upon Burrator Wood; and the wood, thanks to Terrell, had always been a sure draw for a fox. I had tramped over from Tavistock on this particular morning—for I was new to the country, a young man looking around me for a practice, and did not yet possess a horse—and I sat on the slope above the house, at the foot of

the tor, watching the scene on the opposite bank. The fixture, always a favourite one, and the Rajah's hospitality—which was noble, like everything about him—had brought out a large and brightly dressed field; and among them, in his black coat, moved Terrell on a horse twice as good as it looked. He had ridden over from his new home, and I dare say in the rush of old associations had forgotten for the while that the familiar place was no longer his.

The Rajah, a statue of a man, sat on a tall grey at the covert's edge, directly below me; and from time to time I watched him through my field-glass. He had lately recovered from a stroke of paralysis, and was (I am told) the wreck of his old self; but the old fire lived in the ashes. He sat there, tall, lean, upright as a ramrod, with his eyes turned from the covert and gazing straight in front, over his horse's ears, on the rushing Meavy. He had forgotten the hounds; his care for his guests was at an end; and I wondered what thoughts, what memories of the East, possessed him. There is always a loneliness about a great man, don't you think? But I have never felt one to be so terribly—yes, terribly—alone as the Rajah was that morning among his guests and the Devonshire tors.

'Every inch a king!' said a voice at my elbow, and a little man settled himself down on the turf beside me. I set down my glasses with a start. He was a spare dry fellow of about fifty, dressed in what I took for the working suit of a mechanic. Certainly he did not belong to the moor. He wore no collar, but a dingy yellow handkerchief knotted about his throat; and both throat and face were seamed with wrinkles—so thickly seamed that at first glance you might take them for tattoo-marks; but I had time for a second, for without troubling to meet my eyes he nodded towards the Rajah.

'I've cut a day's work and travelled out from Plymouth to get a sight of him; and I've a wife will pull my hair out when I get home and she finds I haven't been to the docks to-day; and I've had no breakfast but thirty grains of opium; but he's worth it.'

'Thirty grains of opium!' I stared at him. He did not turn, but, still with his eyes on the valley below us, stretched out a hand. Its fingers were gnarled, and hooked like a bird's claw, and on the little finger a ruby flashed in the morning sunlight—not a large ruby, but of the purest pigeon's blood shade, and even to my ignorant eye a stone of price.

'You see this? My wife thinks it a sham one, but it's not. And some day, when I'm drunk or in low water, I shall part with it—but not yet. You've an eye for it, I see'—and yet he was not looking towards me—'but the Rajah, yonder, and I are the only two within a hundred miles that can read what's in the heart of it.'

He gazed for a second or two at the stone, lifted it to his ear as if listening,

and lowering his hand to the turf, bent over it and gazed again. ‘Ay, *he* could understand and see into you, my beauty! *He* could hear the little drums tum-a-rumbling, and the ox-bells and bangles tinkling, and the shuffle of the elephants going by; *he* could read the lust in you, and the blood and the sun flickering and licking round the *kris* that spilt it—for it’s the devil you have in you, my dear. But we know you—he and I—he and I. Ah, there you go,’ he muttered as the hounds broke into cry, and the riders swept round the edge of the copse towards the sound of a view-halloo. ‘There you go,’ he nodded after the Rajah; ‘but ride as you will, the East is in you, great man—its gold in your blood, its dust in your eyelids, its own stink in your nostrils; and, ride as you will, you can never escape it.’

He clasped his knees and leaned back against the slope, following the grey horse and its rider with idolatrous gaze; and I noted that one of the clasped hands lacked the two middle fingers.

‘You know him?’ I asked. ‘You have seen him out there, at Sarawak?’

‘I never saw him; but I heard of him.’ He smiled to himself. ‘It’s not easy to pass certain gates in the East without hearing tell of the Rajah Brooke.’

For a while he sat nursing his knee while I filled and lit a pipe. Then he turned abruptly, and over the flame of the match I saw his eyes, the pupils clouded around the iris and, as it were, withdrawn inward and away from the world. ‘Ever heard of Cagayan Sulu?’ he asked.

‘Never,’ said I. ‘Who or what is it?’

‘It’s an island,’ said he. ‘It lies a matter of eighty miles off the north-east corner of Borneo—facing Sandakan, as you might say.’

‘Who owns it?’

He seemed to be considering the question. ‘Well,’ he answered slowly, ‘if you asked the Spanish Government I suppose they’d tell you the King of Spain; but that’s a lie. If you asked the natives—the Hadji Hamid, for instance—you’d be told it belonged to them; and that’s half a lie. And if you asked the Father of Lies he might tell you the truth and call me for witness. I lost two fingers there—the only English flesh ever buried in those parts—so I’ve bought my knowledge.’

‘How did you come there?’ I asked,—‘if it’s a fair question.’

He chuckled without mirth. ‘As it happens, that’s *not* a fair question. But I’ll tell you this much, I came there with a brass band.’

I began to think the man out of his mind.

‘With the instruments, that is. I’d dropped the bandmaster on the way. Look here,’ he went on sharply, ‘the beginning is funny enough, but I’m telling you no lies. We’ll suppose there was a ship, a British man-of-war—name not necessary just now.’

‘I think I understand,’ I nodded.

‘Oh no, you don’t,’ said he. ‘I’m not a deserter—at least not exactly—or I shouldn’t be telling this to you. Well, we’ll suppose this ship bound from Labuan to Hong Kong, with orders to keep along the north side of Borneo, to start with, and do a bit of exploring by the way. This would be in ’forty-nine, when the British Government had just taken over Labuan. *Very* good. Next we’ll suppose the captain puts in at Kudat, in Marudu Bay, to pay a polite call on the Rajah there or some understrapper of the Sultan’s, and takes his ship’s band ashore by way of compliment, and that the band gets too drunk to play *Annie Laurie*.’ He chuckled again. ‘I never saw such a band as we were, down by the water’s edge; and O’Hara, the bandmaster, took on and played the fool to such a tune, while we waited for the boat to take us aboard, that for the very love I bore him I had to knock him down and sit on him in a quiet corner.

‘While I sat keeping guard on him I must have dropped asleep myself; for the next I remember was waking up to find the beach deserted and the boat gone. This put me in a sweat, of course; but after groping some while about the foreshore (which was as dark as the inside of your hat), I tripped over a rope and so found a native boat. O’Hara wouldn’t wake, so I just lifted him on board like a sack, tossed in his cornet and my bombardon, tumbled in on top of them, and started to row for dear life towards the ship’s light in the offing.

‘But the Rajah, or rather his servants, had filled us up with a kind of sticky drink that only begins to work when you think it about time to leave off. I must have pulled miles towards that ship, and every time I cast an eye over my shoulder her light was shining just as far away as ever. At last I remember feeling sure I was bewitched, and with that I must have tumbled off the thwart in a sound sleep.

‘When I awoke I had both arms round the bombardon; there wasn’t a sight of land, or of the ship, anywhere; and, if you please, the sun was near sinking! This time I managed to wake up O’Hara. We had splitting headaches, the pair of us; but we snatched up our instruments and started to blow on them like mad. Not a soul heard, though we blew till the sweat poured down us, and kept up the concert pretty well all through the night. You may think it funny, and I suppose we did amount to something like a joke—we two bandsmen booming away at the Popular Airs of Old England and the Huntsmen’s Chorus under those everlasting stars. You wouldn’t say so, if you had been the audience when O’Hara broke down and began to confess his sins.

‘Luckily the sea kept smooth, and next morning I took the oars in earnest. We had no compass, and I was famished; but I stuck to it, steering by the sun and pulling in the direction where I supposed land to lie. O’Hara kept a look-out. We saw nothing, however, and down came the night again.

‘Though the hunger had been gnawing and griping me for hours, yet—dog-tired as I was—I curled myself at the bottom of the boat and slept, and

dreamed I was on board ship again and in my hammock. A sort of booming in my ears awoke me. Looking up I saw daylight around—clear morning light and blue sky—and right overhead, as it were, a great cliff standing against the blue. And there in the face of day O'Hara sat on the thwart, tugging like mad, now cricking his neck almost to stare up at the cliff, and now grinning down at me in silly triumph.

'With that I caught at the meaning of the sound in my ears. "You infernal fool!" I shouted, staggering up and making to snatch the paddle from him. "Get her nose round to it and back her!" For it was the noise of breaking water.

'But I was too late. Our boat, I must tell you, was a sort of Dutch pram, about twelve feet long and narrowing at the bows, which stood well out of water; handy enough for beaching, but not to be taken through breakers, by reason of its sitting low in the stern. O'Hara, as I yelled at him, pulled his starboard paddle and brought her (for these prams spin round easily) almost broadside on to a tall comber. As we slid up the side of it and hung there, I had a glimpse of a steep clean fissure straight through the wall of rock ahead; and in that instant O'Hara sprawled his arms and toppled overboard. The boat and I went by him with a rush. I saw a hand and wrist lifted above the foam, but when I looked back for them they were gone—gone as I shot over the bar and through the cleft into smooth water. I shouted and pulled back to the edge of the breakers; but he was gone, and I never saw him again.

'I suppose it was ten minutes before I took heart to look about me. I was floating on a lake of the bluest water I ever set eyes on, and as calm as a pond except by the entrance where the spent waves, after tumbling over the bar, spread themselves in long ripples, widening and widening until the edge of them melted and they were gone. The banks of the lake rose sheer from its edge, or so steeply that I saw no way of climbing them—walls you might call them, a good hundred feet high, and widening gradually towards the top, but in a circle as regular as ever you could draw with a pair of compasses. Any fool could see what had happened—that here was the crater of a dead volcano, one side of which had been broken into by the sea. But the beauty of it, sir, coming on top of my weakness, fairly made me cry. For the walls at the top were fringed with palms and jungle trees, and hung with creepers like curtains that trailed over the face of the cliff and down among the ferns by the shore. I leaned over the boat and stared into the water. It was clear, clear—you've no notion how clear; but no bottom could I see. It seemed to sink right through and into the sea on the other side of the world!

'Well, all this was might pretty, but it didn't tell me where to find a meal; so I baled out the boat and paddled along the eastern edge of the lake, searching the cliffs for a path: and after an hour or so I hit on what looked to me like a foot-track, zigzagging up through the creepers and across the face of

the rock. I determined to try it, made the boat fast to a clump of fern, slung O'Hara's cornet on to my side-belt and began to climb.

'I saw no marks of footsteps; but the track was a path all right, though a teaser. A dozen times I had to crawl on hands and knees under the creepers—creepers with stems as thick as my two wrists—and once, about two-thirds of the way up, I was forced to push sideways through a crevice dripping with water, and so steep under foot that I slid twice and caked myself with mud. I very nearly gave out here; but it was do or die, and after ten minutes more of scratching, pushing, and scrambling, I reached the top and sat down to mop my face and recover.

'I dare say it was another ten minutes before I fetched breath enough and looked about me; and as I turned my head, there, close behind me, lay another crater with another lake smiling below, all blue and peaceful as the one I had left! I gazed from one to the other. This new crater had no opening on the sea; its sides were steeper, though not quite so tall; and either my eyes played me a trick or its water stood at a higher level. I stood there, comparing the two, when suddenly against the skyline, and not two hundred yards away, I caught sight of a man.

'He was walking towards me around the edge of the crater, and halting every now and then to stare down at my boat. He might be a friend, or he might be a foe; but anyway it was not for me, in my condition, to choose which; so I waited for him to come up. And first I saw that he carried a spear, and wore a pair of wide dirty-white trousers and a short coat embroidered with gold; and next that he was a true Malay, pretty well on in years, with a greyish beard falling over his chest. He had no shirt, but a scarlet sash wrapped about his waist and holding a *kris* and two long pistols handsomely inlaid with gold. In spite of his weapons he seemed a benevolent old boy.

'He pointed towards my boat and tried me with a few questions, first in his own language, then in Spanish, of which I knew very little beyond the sound. But I spread out my hands towards the sea, by way of explaining our voyage, and then pointed to my mouth. If he understood, he seemed in no hurry. He tapped O'Hara's cornet gingerly with two fingers. I unstrung it and made shift to play *Home, Sweet Home*. This delighted him; he nodded, rubbed his hands, and stepped a few paces from me, then turned and began fingering his spear in a way I did not like at all. "It's a matter of taste, sir," said I, or words to that effect, dropping the cornet like a hot potato; but he pointed towards it, and then over a ridge inland, and I gathered I must pick it up and follow him—which I did, and pretty quick.

'From the top of this ridge we faced across a small plain bounded on the north with a tier of hills, most of which seemed by their shape to be volcanoes, and out of action—for the sky lay quite blue and clear above them. The way

down into this plain led through jungle; but the plain itself had been cleared of all but small clumps dotted here and there, which gave it, you might say, the look of an English park; and about half-way across, in a clear stretch of lalang grass, stood a village of white huts huddling round a larger and much taller house.

'The old man led me straight towards this, and, coming closer, I saw that the large house had a rough glacis about it and a round wall pierced with loopholes. A number of goats were feeding here and a few small cattle; also the ground about the village had been cleared and planted with fruit-trees—mangoes, bananas, limes, and oranges—but as yet I saw no inhabitants. The old Malay, who had kept ahead of me all the way, walking at a fair pace, here halted and once more signed to me to blow on the cornet. I obeyed, of course, this time with *The British Grenadiers*. I declare to you it was like starting a swarm of bees. You wouldn't believe the troops that came pouring out of those few huts—the women in loose trousers pretty much like the men's, but with arms bare and loose *sarongs* flung over their right shoulders, the children with no more clothes than a pocket-handkerchief apiece. I can't tell you what first informed me of my guide's rank among them—whether the salaams they offered him, or the richness of his dress—he was the only one with gold lace and the only one who carried pistols—or the air with which he paraded me through the crowd, waving the people back to right and left, and clearing a way to a narrow door in the wall around the great house. A man armed with a long fowling-piece saluted him at the entry; and once inside he pointed from the house to his own breast, as much as to say: "I am the Chief, and this is mine." I saluted him humbly.

'A veranda ran around the four sides of the house, with a trench between it and the fortified wall. A plank bridge led across the trench to the veranda steps, where my master—or, to call him by his right name, Hadji Hamid—halted again and clapped his hands. A couple of young Malay women, dressed like those I had passed in the street, ran out in answer, and were ordered to bring me food. While it was preparing I rested on a low chair, blinking at the sunlight on the fortified wall. It had been pierced, on the side of the house, for eleven guns, but six of the embrasures were empty, and of the five pieces standing no two were alike in size, age, or manufacture, and the best seemed to be a nine-pounder, strapped to its carriage with rope. Hadji Hamid saw what I was looking at, and chuckled to himself solemnly. All through the meal—which began with a mess of rice and chopped fowl and ended with bananas—he sat beside me, chewing betel, touching this thing and that, naming it in his language and making me repeat the words after him. He smiled at every mistake, but never lost his patience. Indeed it was clear that my quickness delighted him, and I did my best, wondering all the while what he meant to do

with me.

‘Well, to be short, sir, he intended to keep me. I believe he would have done it for the sake of the cornet; but before I had finished eating, up stepped a sentry escorting a man with my bombardon under his arm. I had left it, as you know, in the boat, and had heard no order given; but the boat I never saw again, and here was my bombardon. Hadji Hamid took it in both hands, felt it all over, patted it, and ended by turning it over to me and calling in dumb show for a tune. I tell you, my performance was a success. At the first blast he leaned back suddenly in his chair; at the second he turned a kind of purple under his yellow skin; but at the third he caught hold of his stomach and began to roll in his seat and laugh. You never saw a man laugh like it. He made scarcely any sound; he was too near apoplexy to speak; but the tears ran down his face, and one minute his hand would be up waving feebly to me to stop, the next he’d be signalling to go on again. I wanted poor O’Hara; he used to give himself airs and swear at my playing, but among these people he and his cornet would have had to stand down.

‘They gave me a bed that night in a corner of the veranda, and next morning my master came himself to wake me, and took me down to the village bathing-pool, just below the fortifications. It hurt my modesty to find the whole mob of inhabitants gathered there and waiting, and it didn’t set me at ease, exactly, to notice that each man carried his spear. For one nasty moment I pictured a duck-hunt, with me playing duck. But there was no cause for alarm. At a signal from Hamid, who stripped and led the way, in we tumbled together —men, women, and children—the men first laying their spears on the bank beside their clothes. Six remained on shore to keep guard, and were relieved after five minutes by another six from the pool. There was a good deal of splashing and horse-play, but nothing you could call immodest, though my fair skin came in for an amount of attention I had to get used to.

‘My breakfast was served to me alone, and soon after I was summoned to attend my master in one of the state rooms of the house. I found him on a shaded platform, seated opposite an old native as well-dressed and venerable-looking as himself, but stouter. The pair lolled on cushions at either end of the platform, smoking and smoothing their grey beards. I understood that the visitor was a personage and (somehow) that he had been sent for expressly to hear and be astonished by my performance.

‘The two instruments were brought in upon cushions, and I began to play. The visitor—who had less sense of humour than Hamid—did not laugh at all. Instead, he took the mouthpiece of his *tchibouk* slowly from his lips and held it at a little distance, while his mouth and eyes opened wider and wider. Hamid eyed him keenly, with a kind of triumph under his lids; and the triumph grew as the old man’s stare lit up with a jealousy there was no mistaking.

‘This, too, passed as I wound up with a flourish and stood at attention, waiting for orders. The visitor put out his hand, but as I offered him the bombardon he waved it aside impatiently and pointed to the cornet. I passed it up to him; he patted and examined it for a while, laid it on his knee, and the two men began talking in low voices.

‘I could see that compliments were passing; but you’ll guess I wasn’t prepared for what followed. Hamid stood up suddenly and whispered to one of his six guards stationed below the platform. The man went out, and returned in five minutes followed by a girl. Now that the island girls were beautiful I had already discovered that morning, and this one was no exception—a small thing about five feet, with glossy black hair and the tiniest feet and hands. She seemed to me to walk nervously, as if brought up for punishment; and a thought took me—and I shall be glad of it when I come to die—that if they meant to ill-use her I might do worse than assault that venerable pair with my bombardon and end my adventure with credit.

‘My eyes were so taken up with the girl that for a full minute I paid no attention to my master. She had come to a halt under the platform, a couple of paces from me, with her eyes cast down upon the floor; and he on the platform was speaking. By and by he stopped, and glancing up I saw that he was motioning me to leave the room. Well, they had made no show as yet of ill-treating her; so I flung her one more look and obeyed, feeling pretty mean. I went out into the veranda, walked the length of it and turned—and there stood the girl right before me! Her little feet had followed me so softly that I had heard nothing; and now, as I stared at her, she crept close with a sort of sidelong motion, and knelt at my feet, at the same moment drawing her *sarong* over her head to hide it. Then the truth came upon me—I was married!

‘Aoodya was her name. What else can I tell you about her, to describe her? She was a child, and all life came as play to her, yet she understood love to the tips of her little madder-brown fingers. She was my teacher, too, and I sat at her feet day after day and learned while she drilled the island-language into me; learned by the hour while she untwisted her hair and rubbed it with grated coco-nut, and broke off her toilet to point to this thing and that and tell me its name, laughing at my mistakes or flipping bits of betel at me by way of reward. I had no wife at home to vex my conscience at all. All day we played about Hamid’s veranda like two children, and Hamid watched us with a sort of twinkle in his eye, seemingly well content. It was plain he had taken a fancy to me, and I thought, as time passed, he grew friendlier.

‘I blessed the old fellow, too. Had he not given me Aoodya? I puzzled my head over this favour, until Aoodya explained. “You see,” she said, “it was done to oblige the Hadji Hassan.” This was the old man who had listened to my performance on the bombardon. He lived in a stockaded house on the far

side of the island, the chieftaincy of which he and Hamid shared between them and without dispute.

‘ “How should it oblige Hassan?” I asked.

‘ “Because Hassan could not see or hear my lord and lover without longing to possess such a man for his very own. As who could?” And here she blew me a kiss.

‘ “Thank you, jewel of my heart,” said I; “but yet I don’t see. Was it me he wanted, or the bombardon?”

‘ “I fancy he thought of you together; but of course he did not ask for the big thing—that would have been greedy. He would be content with the little one, the what-you-call cornet; and—don’t you see?”

‘ “No doubt it’s stupid of me, my dear,” said I, “but I’ll be shot if I do.”

‘She was sitting with a lapful of pandanus leaves, blue and green, weaving a mat of them while we talked, and had just picked out a beater from the tools scattered round her—a flat piece of board with a bevelled edge, and shaped away to a handle. “Stupid!” she says to me, just like so, and at the same time raps me over the hand smartly. “He thought—if peradventure there came to us a little one——”

‘ “*With* a what-you-call cornet?”—I clapped my hand to my mouth over a guffaw; and, with that, she—who had started laughing too—came to a stop, with her eyes fastened on the back of it. I saw them stiffen, and the pretty round pupils draw in and shrink to narrow slits like a cat’s, and her arm went back slowly behind her, and her bosom leaned nearer and nearer. I thought she was going to spring at me, and as my silly laugh died out I turned my hand and held it palm outward, to fend her off. On the back of it was a drop of blood where the bevelled edge of the beater had by accident broken the skin.

‘Somehow this movement of mine seemed to fetch her to bearings. Her hand came slowly forward again, hesitated, seemed to hover for a moment at her throat, then went swiftly down to her bosom between bodice and flesh, and came up again tugging after it what looked to me a piece of coarse thread. She tossed it into my lap as I still sat there cross-legged, and with that sprang up and raced away from me, down to the veranda. There was no chance of catching her, and I was (to tell the truth) a bit too much taken aback to try. I picked up the string. On it was threaded a silk purse no bigger than a shilling, and from this I shook into my palm a small stone like an opal. I turned it over once or twice, put it back in the purse, and stowed string, purse, and all in my breeches pocket.

‘I strolled down the veranda to our quarters in search of Aoodya, but the room was empty; and after that I’m afraid I smoked and sulked for the rest of the day, until nightfall. After playing the Hadji Hamid through his meal I went out to our favourite seat on the edge of the dry ditch, when she came to me out

of nowhere across the withered grass of the compound.

‘ “Have you the charm, O beloved?” she whispered.

‘ “Oh, it’s a charm, is it?” said I, partly sulky yet.

‘ “Yes, and you must never lose it—never part with it—never, above all, give it back to me. Promise me that, beloved; and I, who have wept much, am happy again.”

‘So I promised, and she snuggled close to me, and all was as before. No more was said between us, and by next morning she seemed to have clean forgotten the affair. But I thought of it at times, and it puzzled me.

‘Now, as I said, my master had taken a fancy to me quite apart from the bombardon, and a token of it was his constantly taking me out as companion on his walks. You may think it odd that he never troubled about my being an unbeliever—for of course he held by the Prophet, and so did all the islanders, Aoodya included. But in fact, though his people called themselves Mohammedans, each man treated his religion much as he chose, and Hamid talked to me as freely as if I had been his son.

‘In this way I learned a deal of the island and its customs, and of the terms by which Hamid and Hassan between them shared its rule. But that any others laid claim to it I had no idea, until one day as we were walking on the coast, and not far from the crater where he had found me first, my master asked suddenly: “Was I happy?”

‘ “Quite happy,” I answered.

‘ “You would not leave us if you could?” he went on, and began to laugh quiet-like, behind his beard. “Oho! Love, love! I that am old have been merry in my day.” We walked for another mile, maybe, without speaking, and came to the edge of a valley. “Look down yonder,” said he.

‘Below us, and in the mouth of the valley, I saw a hill topped by a round wall and compound. There might have been half a dozen houses within the compound, all thatched, and above them stood up a flag painted in red and yellow stripes, and so stiff in the breeze that with half an eye you could tell it was no bunting but a sheet of tin.

‘ “Hallo!” said I. “Spaniards?”

‘ “Puf!” Hamid grinned at the flag and spat. “A Captain Marquinez inhabits there, with four Manila men and their wives. He is a sensible fellow, and does no harm, and if it pleases him to hoist that toy on a bamboo, he is welcome.”

‘ “They claim the island, then?”

‘ “What matters it if they claim? There was a letter once came to us from the Spanish Governor at Tolo. That man was a fool. He gave us warning that by order of the Government at Manila he would send a hundred men to build a fort inland and set up a garrison. Hassan and I took counsel together. ‘He is a fool,’ said Hassan; ‘but we must answer him.’ So we answered him thus. ‘Send

your men. To-day they come; to-morrow they die—yet trouble not; *we* will bury them.' "

' "Were they sent?" I asked.

' "They were not sent. He was a fool, yet within bounds. Nevertheless a time may come for us—not for Hassan and me, we shall die in our beds—but for our sons. Even for this we are prepared." He would have said more, but checked himself. (I learned later on that the islanders kept one of the craters fortified for emergency, to make a last stand there; but they never allowed me to see the place.) "We have gods of our own," said Hamid slyly, "who will be helpful—the more so that we do not bother them over trifles. Also there are—other things; and the lake Sinquan, and another which you have not seen, are full of crocodiles." He stamped his foot. "My son, beneath this spot there has been fire, and still the men of Cagayan walk warily and go not without their spears. For you it is different; yet when you come upon aught that puzzles you, it were well to put no questions even to yourself."

' "Not even about this?" I asked, and showed him the purse and stone which Aoodya had tossed to me.

' "You are in luck's way," said he, "whoever gave you that." He pulled a small pouch from his breast, opened it, and showed me a stone exactly like mine. "It is a coco-nut pearl. Keep it near to your hand, and forget not to touch it if you hear noises in the air or a man meet you with eyes like razors."

'I wanted to ask him more, but he started to walk back hastily, and when I caught him up would talk of nothing but the sugar and sweet-potato crops, and the yield of coco-nut oil to be carried to Kudat at the next north-east monsoon. I noticed that the fruit-trees planted along the shore were old, and that scores of them had ceased bearing. "They will last my day," said he. "Let my sons plant others if they so will." He always spoke in this careless way of his children, and I believe he had many, for an islander keeps as many wives as he can afford; but they lived about the villages, and could not be told from the other inhabitants by any sign of rank or mark of favour he showed them.

'For a long while I believed that Aoodya must be a daughter of his. She always denied it, but owned that she had never known her mother and had lived in Hamid's house ever since she could remember. Anyhow, he took the greatest care of me, and never allowed me to join the expeditions which sailed twice a year from the island—to Palawan for paddy, and to the north of Borneo with oil and nuts and pandanus mats. He may have mistrusted me; but more likely he forbade it out of care for me and the music I played; for the *prahus* regularly came back with three or four of their number missing—either capsized on the voyage or blown away towards Tawi-Tawi, where the pirates accounted for them.

'Though I might not sail abroad he allowed me to join the tuburing parties

off the shore. We would work along the reefs there in rafts of bamboo, towing with us two or three dug-outs filled with mashed *tubur*-roots. At the right spot the dug-outs would be upset, and after a while the fish came floating up on their sides, or belly uppermost, to be speared by us; for the root puddles the water like milk, and stupefies them somehow without hurting the flesh, which in an hour or so is fit to eat.

'We had been tuburing one afternoon, and put back with our baskets filled to a spit of the shore where we had left an old islander, Kotali by name, alone and tending a fire for our meal. Coming near we saw him stretched on the sand by his cooking-pots, and shouted to wake him, for his fire was low. Kotali did not stir. I was one of the first to jump ashore and run to him. He lay with his legs drawn up, his hands clenched, his eyes wide open and staring at us horribly. The man was as dead as a nail.

'I never saw people worse frightened. "The Berbalangs!" said someone in a dreadful sort of whisper, and we started to run back to the raft for our lives—I with the rest, for the panic had taken hold of me, though I could see no sign of an enemy. I supposed these Berbalangs, named with such awe, to be pirates or marauders from Tawi-Tawi or some neighbouring island, and the first hint that reached me of anything worse was a wailing sound which grew as we ran, and overhauled us, until the air was filled with roaring, so that I swung round to defend myself, yet could see nothing. To my surprise a man who had been running beside me dropped on the sand, pulled a sigh of relief, and began to mop his face—and this in the very worst of the racket. "They are gone by," he shouted; "the worse the noise the farther off they are. They have taken their fill to-day on poor old Kotali."

'Suddenly the noise ceased altogether, and we picked up courage to return and bury the body. We had a basket of limes on the raft, and these were fetched and the juice squeezed over the grave; but no one seemed inclined to answer the questions I put about these Berbalangs. It seemed that unless they were close at hand there was ill-luck even in mentioning them, and I walked back to the village in a good deal of perplexity.

'I should tell you, sir, that by this time I was the father of a fine boy; and that Aoodya doted on him. When she was not feeding him or calling on me to admire his perfections, from the cleverness of his smile to the beautiful shape of his toes, he lay and slept, or kicked in a basket slung on a long bamboo fastened across the rafters. Aoodya would give the basket a pull, and this set it bobbing up and down on the spring of the bamboo for minutes at a time.

'Now when I reached home with my string of fish, I walked round to the back of the house to clean them before going in. This took me past the window of our room, and glancing inside—the window was unglazed, you understand—I saw Aoodya standing before the cradle and talking quick and angry, with a

man posted in the doorway opening on the veranda.

'I was not jealous. The thought never entered my head. But I dropped my fish and whipped round to the doorway in time to catch him as he turned to go, having heard my footstep belike.

' "Who the something-or-other are you?" I asked. "And what's your business in my private house?"

'The man—a yellow-faced fellow, but young in figure—muttered something in a gibberish new to me, and made as if excusing himself. It gave me an ugly start to see that his eyes were yellow too, with long slits for pupils; but I saw too that he was afraid of me, and being in a towering rage myself, I outed with my *kris*.

' "Now look here," I said; "I don't understand what you say, but maybe you understand this. Walk! And if I catch you here again, you'll need someone to sew you up."

'I watched him as he went across the compound. The guard at the gate scarcely looked up, and if the thing hadn't been impossible, there, in the broad daylight, I could have fancied he saw no one. I turned to Aoodya and took her hands, for she was trembling from head to foot. At my touch she burst out sobbing, clung to my shoulder and begged me to protect her.

' "Why, of course I will," said I, more cheerfully than I felt by a long sight. "If I'd known you were frightened like this, I'd have slit his body to match his eyes. But who is he, at all?"

' "He—he said he was my brother!" she wailed, and clung to me again. "I cannot—I cannot!"

' "I'll brother him!" cried I. "But what is it he wants?"

' "I cannot—I cannot!" was all she would say; and now her sobs were so loud that the child woke up screaming and had to be soothed. And this seemed to do her good.

'Well, I got her to bed and asleep early that night; but before morning I had a worse fright than ever. Somehow in my dream I had a feeling come to me that the bed was empty, and sat up suddenly, half awake and scared. Aoodya had risen and was standing by the cradle, with one hand on its edge; in the other was the lamp—a clam-shell fastened in a split handle of bamboo, and holding a pith wick and a little oil. The flame wavered against her eyes as she held it up and peered into the baby's face—and her eyes were like as I had seen them once before, and devilish like the eyes I had seen in another face that afternoon.

'A man never knows what he can do till the call comes. There, betwixt sleep and waking, I knew that happiness had come to an end for us. Yet I slipped out of bed very softly, took the lamp from her as gentle as you please, set it on a stool and, turning, reached out for her two wrists and held them—for

how long I can't tell you. She didn't try to fend me away, or struggle at all; and not a word did I utter, but stood holding her—the babe asleep beside us—and listened to her breathing until it grew easier, and she leaned to me, weak as water.

'Then I let go, and lifting the child's head from the pillow pulled Aoodya's charm, the coco-nut pearl, from my neck and hung it about his. "That's for you, sonny," said I, "and if the Berbalangs come along you can pass them on to your father." I faced round on Aoodya with a smile which no doubt was thin enough, though honestly meant to hearten her. "It's all right, old girl. Come back to bed," said I, and held her in my arms until I fell asleep in the dawn.

'But of course it was not all right; and after two days spent with this dismal secret between us, and Aoodya all the while play-acting at her old tricks of love for me and the babe—as if, God knows, I doubted that they, and not the horror, were her real self—I could stand it no longer, but did what I ought to have done before; sought out my master and made a clean breast of it.

'I could see that it took the old man between wind and water. When I had done he sat for some time pulling his beard and eyeing me once or twice rather queerly, as I thought.

' "My friend," said he at last, "I suppose you will be suspecting me; yet I give you my word—and the Hadji Hamid is no liar—that if Aoodya is a Berbalang, or a daughter of Berbalangs, the same was unknown to me when I married you."

' "I'll believe that," I answered; "the more by token that I never suspected you."

' "She had no known father, which (as you know) is held a disgrace among us; so much a disgrace that she grew up without suitors in spite of her looks and my favour. Therefore I seized my chance of giving her a husband, and in that I am not guiltless towards you; but of anything worse I was ignorant, and for proof I am going to help you if I can." He frowned to himself, still tugging at his beard. "Her mother was of good family, on this side of the island. Therefore she cannot be pure Berbalang, and most likely the Berbalangs have no more than a fetch upon her"—he used a word new to me, but "fetch" I took to be the meaning of it. "If so, we must go to them and persuade them to take it off. They owe me something; for though, as we value peace and quiet, Hassan and I leave them alone in their own dirty village and ask no tax nor homage, we could make things uncomfortable if we chose. Yes, yes," said he, "I think it can be done; but it will be dangerous. You are wearing your coco-nut pearl, of course?"

'I told him that I had given it up to the baby.

'He nodded. "Yes, that was well done; but you must borrow it for the day. Run and fetch it at once; we have a long walk before us."

‘So I ran back, and without telling Aoodya, who was washing her linen behind the house, slipped the pearl off the child’s neck and returned to Hamid. I found him, with two spears in his hand, waiting for me. He gave me one, and forth we set.

‘The Berbalangs’ village stands on a sort of table-land in the hills which rise all the way to Mount Tebulian, near the centre of the island. After the first two miles I found myself in strange country, and Hamid kept silence and signed to me to do the same. In this way we sweated up the slopes until, a little after noon, we reached a pass, and saw the roofs of the village over the edge of a broad step, as it were, half a mile above us. Here we sat down, and Hamid, drawing a couple of limes from his pocket, explained that I must on no account taste any food the Berbalangs set before us unless I first sprinkled it with lime juice. It might look like curried fish, but would, as likely as not, be human flesh disguised, the taste of which would destroy my soul and convert me into a Berbalang; a touch of the lime juice would turn such food back to its proper shape and show me what I was being asked to eat.

‘We now moved forward again, very cautiously, and soon came to the village. The houses, perhaps a dozen in all, were scandalously dirty, otherwise pretty much like those in Hamid’s own village. But not a living creature could be seen. Hamid, I could tell, was puzzled, and even a bit frightened. He put a good face on it, all the same, and began to walk from house to house, keeping his spear handy as he peered in at the doors. Still not a soul could we find, barring an old goat tethered and a few roaming fowls. The stink of the place sickened us, and I wanted to run, though we came across no actual horrors. In one room we found a pan of rice lately boiled and still smoking, and sprinkled it with lime juice. It remained good rice. Out into the street we went, and Hamid, growing bolder, raised a loud halloo. The noise of it sent the fowls scudding, and the hills around took it up and echoed it.

‘He looked at me. “They must be out on the hunt,” said he.

‘ “Good Lord!” I gasped. “And the child at home—without the pearl!” I turned and plunged for it down the slope like a madman.

‘What to do I had no idea; but I hadn’t a doubt that the Berbalangs were after Aoodya or the child, or both, and I headed for home with the wind singing by my ears. At the foot of the pass I looked back. Hamid was following, skipping from one lava stone to another at a pace that did credit to his old legs. He waved a hand and called—as I thought, to encourage me; and away down I pounded.

‘I must have reached the edge of the plain in twenty minutes (the climb had taken us more than two hours), and, once there, I squeezed my elbows into my sides and settled into stride. Luckily the season was dry, and a fire, three weeks before, had swept over the tall lalang grass, leaving a thin layer of ash, which

made running easy. For all that, I was pretty near dead-beat when I reached the compound and ran past the sentry. The man cried out at sight of me as I went by; but I thought he was just pattering out his challenge, being taken unawares; and knowing he would not let off his musket if he recognized me, I paid no attention.

'I had prepared myself (as I thought) for anything—to find Aoodya dead beside the child, or to find them both unharmed and flourishing as I had left them. But what happened was that I burst in and stared around an empty room. *That* knocked the wind out of my sails. I called twice, leaned my head against the door-post and panted; called again, and, getting no answer, walked stupidly back across the compound to the gate.

'The sentry there was pointing. I believe he was telling me, too, that Aoodya, with the child in her arms, had passed out some while before. But as he waved a hand towards the plain I saw a figure running there, and recognized Hamid. The old man was heading, not towards us, but for the seashore, and, plain as daylight, he was heading there with a purpose. I remembered now his cry to me from the head of the pass. So I pressed elbows to side again and lit out after him.

'He was making for a thick patch of jungle between us and the sea, and though I had run at least a mile out of the way I soon began to overhaul him. But long before I reached the clump he had found an opening in it and dived out of sight, and I overtook him only when the growth thinned suddenly by the edge of a crater, plunging down to a lake so exactly like Sinquan that I had to look about me and take my bearings before making sure that this was another, and one I had never yet seen.

'I caught him by the arm, and we peered down the slope together. At the foot of it, and by the edge of the lake, there ran a strip of white beach; and there, and almost directly below us, were gathered the Berbalangs.

'They were moving and pushing into place in a sort of circle around a small bundle which at first sight I took for a heap of clothes. At that distance they seemed harmless enough, and, barring the strangeness of the spot, might have been an ordinary party of islanders forming up for a dance. But when, all of a sudden, the ring came to a standstill, and a figure stepped out of it towards the bundle in the centre, my wits came back to me, and I flung up both arms, shouting "Aoodya! Aoodya!"

'She must have made three paces in the time my voice took to reach her. She was close to the child. Then she halted and stood for a moment gazing up at me. I saw something bright drop from her. And with that she stooped, caught up the child, and was racing up the slope towards us.

' "Steady!" muttered Hamid, as a man broke from the circle, plucked up the knife from the sand and rushed after her. "Steady!" he said again.

‘Aoodya had a start of twenty yards or more, and in the first half-minute she actually managed to better it. Hamid, beside me, rubbed a bullet quickly on the rind of one of his lime-fruits and rammed it home. He took an eternal time about it; and below, now, the man was gaining. Unluckily their courses brought them into line, and twice the old man cursed softly and lowered his piece.

‘Flesh and blood could not stand this. I let out a groan and sprang down the cliff. It was madness, and at the third step all foothold slipped from under me; but my clutch was tight on a fistful of creepers, and their tendrils were tough as a ship’s rope. So down I went, now touching earth, now fending off from the rock with my feet, now missing hold and sprawling into a mass of leaves and roots, among which I clutched wildly and checked myself by the first thing handy—until, with the crack of Hamid’s musket above, the vine, or whatever it was to which I clung for the moment, gave way as if shorn by the bullet, and I pitched a full twenty feet with a rush of loose earth and dust.

‘I fell almost at the heels of Aoodya’s enemy, upon a ledge along which he was swiftly running her down. Hamid’s bullet had missed him, and before I could make the third in the chase he was forty yards ahead. I saw his bare shoulders parting the creepers—threading their way in and out like a bobbin, and jogging as the pace fell slower; for now we were all three in difficulties. Perhaps Aoodya had missed the track; at any rate the ledge we were now following grew shallower as it curved over the corner of the beach and ran sheer over the water of the lake. A jungle tree leaned out here, with a clear drop of a hundred feet. As I closed on my man, he swerved and began to clamber out along the trunk; and over his shoulder I saw Aoodya, with the babe in the crick of her arm, upon a bough which swayed and sank beneath her.

‘I clutched at his ankle. He reached back with a hiss of his breath and jabbed his knife down on my left hand, cutting across the two middle fingers and pinning me through the small bones to the trunk. I tell you, sir, I scarcely felt it. My right went down to my waist and pulled out the *kris* there. He was the man I had caught within the veranda three days before; these were the same eyes shining, like a cat’s, back into mine, and what I had promised then I gave him now. But it was Hamid who killed him. For as my *kris* went into the flank of him, above the hip, Hamid’s second shot cut down through his neck. His face at the moment rested sideways against the branch, and I suppose the bullet passed through to the bough and cost me Aoodya. For as the Berbalang fell, the bough seemed to rip away from where his cheek had rested, and Aoodya, with my child in her arms, swung back under my feet and dropped like a stone into the lake.

‘I can’t tell you, sir, how long I lay stretched out along that trunk, with the

Berbalang's knife still pinned through my hand. I was staring down into the water. Aoodya and my child never rose again; but the Berbalang came to the surface at once and floated, bobbing for a while on the ripple, his head thrown back, his brown chest shining up at me, and the blood spreading on the water around it.

'It was Hamid who unpinned me and led me away. He had made shift to climb down, and while binding up my wounded hand pointed towards the beach. It was empty. The crowd of Berbalangs had disappeared.

'He found the track which Aoodya had missed, and as he led me up and out of the crater I heard him talking—talking. I suppose he was trying to comfort me—he was a good fellow; but at the top I turned on him, and "Master," I said, "you have tried to do me much kindness, but to-day I have bought my quittance." With that I left him standing and walked straight over the brow of the hill. I never looked behind me until I reached the Spaniards' compound, and called out at the gate to be let pass.

'Captain Marquinez was lying in a hammock in the cool of his veranda when the gate-keeper took me to him. He was, I think, the weariest man I ever happened on. "So you want to leave the island?" said he when my tale was out. "Yes, yes, I believe you; I've learnt to believe anything of those devils up yonder. But you must wait a fortnight, till the relief boat arrives from Jola"——'

Here the story-teller broke off as a rider upon a grey horse came at a footpace round the slope of Burrator below us and passed on without seeing. It was the Rajah, returning solitary from the hunt, and his eyes were still fastened ahead of him.

'Ah, great man! England is a weary hole for the likes of you and me. It's here they talk of the East: but we have loved it and hated it and known it, and remember. Our eyes have seen—our eyes have seen.'

He stood up, pulled himself together with a kind of shiver, and suddenly shambled away across the slope, having said no good-bye, but leaving me there at gaze.

THE ROOM OF MIRRORS

A story of Hate, told by the Pursuer

A LATE hansom came swinging round the corner into Lennox Gardens, cutting it so fine that the near wheel ground against the kerb and jolted the driver in his little seat. The jingle of bells might have warned me; but the horse's hoofs came noiselessly on the half-frozen snow, which lay just deep enough to hide where the pavement ended and the road began; and, moreover, I was listening to the violins behind the first-floor windows of the house opposite. They were playing the *Wiener Blut*.

As it was, I had time enough and no more to skip back and get my toes out of the way. The cabby cursed me. I cursed him back so promptly and effectively that he had to turn in his seat for another shot. The windows of the house opposite let fall their light across his red and astonished face. I laughed, and gave him another volley. My head was hot, though my feet and hands were cold; and I felt equal to cursing down any cabman within the four-mile radius. That second volley finished him. He turned to his reins again and was borne away defeated; the red eyes of his lamps peering back at me like an angry ferret's.

Up in the lighted room shadows of men and women crossed the blinds, and still the *Wiener Blut* went forward.

The devil was in that waltz. He had hold of the violins and was weaving the air with scents and visions—visions of Ascot and Henley; green lawns, gay sunshades, midsummer heat, cool rivers flowing, muslins rippled by light breezes; running horses and silken jackets; white tables heaped with roses and set with silver and crystal, jewelled fingers moving in the soft candle-light, bare necks bending, diamonds, odours, bubbles in the wine; blue water and white foam beneath the leaning shadow of sails; hot air flickering over stretches of moorland; blue again—Mediterranean blue—long façades, the din of bands and King Carnival parading beneath showers of blossom:—and all this noise and warmth and scent and dazzle flung out into the frozen street for a beggar's portion. I had gone under.

The door of the house opposite had been free to me once—and not six months ago; freer to me perhaps than to any other. Did I long to pass behind it again? I thrust both hands into my pockets for warmth, and my right hand knocked against something hard. Yes . . . just once. . . .

Suddenly the door opened. A man stood on the threshold for a moment while the butler behind him arranged the collar of his fur overcoat. The high light in the portico flung the shadows of both down the crimson carpet laid on the entrance-steps. Snow had fallen and covered the edges of the carpet, which divided it like a cascade of blood pouring from the hall into the street. And still overhead the *Wiener Blut* went forward.

The man paused in the bright portico, his patent-leather boots twinkling under the lamp's rays on that comfortable carpet. I waited, expecting him to whistle for a hansom. But he turned, gave an order to the butler, and stepping briskly down into the street, made off eastwards. The door closed behind him. He was the man I most hated in the world. If I had longed to cross the threshold a while back it was to seek him, and for no other reason.

I started to follow him, my hands still in my pockets. The snow muffled our footfalls completely, for as yet the slight north-east wind had frozen but the thinnest crust of it. He was walking briskly, as men do in such weather, but with no appearance of hurry. At the corner of Sloane Street he halted under a lamp, pulled out his watch, consulted it, and lit a cigarette; then set off again up the street towards Knightsbridge.

This halt of his had let me up within twenty paces of him. He never turned his head; but went on, presenting me his back, a target not to be missed. Why not do it now? Better now and here than in a crowded thoroughfare. My right hand gripped the revolver more tightly. No, there was plenty of time: and I was curious to know what had brought Gervase out at this hour: why he had left his guests, or his wife's guests, to take care of themselves: why he chose to be trudging afoot through this infernally unpleasant snow.

The roadway in Sloane Street was churned into a brown mass like chocolate, but the last bus had rolled home and left it to freeze in peace. Half-way up the street I saw Gervase meet and pass a policeman, and altered my own pace to a lagging walk. Even so, the fellow eyed me suspiciously as I went by—or so I thought: and guessing that he kept a watch on me, I dropped still farther behind my man. But the lamps were bright at the end of the street, and I saw him turn to the right by the great drapery shop at the corner.

Once past this corner I was able to put on a spurt. He crossed the roadway by the Albert Gate, and by the time he reached the Park railings the old distance separated us once more. Half-way up the slope he came to a halt, by the stone drinking-trough: and flattening myself against the railings, I saw him try the thin ice in the trough with his finger-tips, but in a hesitating way, as if his thoughts ran on something else and he scarcely knew what he did or why he did it. It must have been half a minute before he recovered himself with a shrug of his shoulders, and plunging both hands deep in his pockets, resumed his pace.

As we passed Hyde Park Corner I glanced up at the clock there: the time was between a quarter and ten minutes to one. At the entrance of Down Street he turned aside again, and began to lead me a zigzag dance through the quiet thoroughfare: and I followed, still to the tune of the *Wiener Blut*.

But now, at the corner of Charles Street, I blundered against another policeman, who flashed his lantern in my face, stared after Gervase, and asked me what my game was. I demanded innocently enough to be shown the nearest way to Oxford Street, and the fellow, after pausing a moment to chew his suspicions, walked with me slowly to the south-west corner of Berkeley Square, and pointed northwards.

'That's your road,' he growled, 'straight on. And don't you forget it!'

He stood and watched me on my way. Nor did I dare to turn aside until well clear of the square. At the crossing of Davies and Grosvenor Streets, however, I supposed myself safe, and halted for a moment.

From the shadow of a porch at my elbow a thin voice accosted me.

'Kind gentleman——'

'Heh?' I spun round on her sharply: for it was a woman, stretching out one skinny hand and gathering her rags together with the other.

'Kind gentleman, spare a copper! I've known better days—I have indeed.'

'Well,' said I, 'as it happens, I'm in the same case. And they couldn't be much worse, could they?'

She drew a shuddering breath back through her teeth, but still held out her hand. I felt for my last coin, and her fingers closed on it so sharply that their long nails scraped the back of mine.

'Kind gentleman——'

'Ay, they are kind, are they not?'

She stared at me, and in a nerveless tone let one horrible oath escape her.

'There'll be one less before morning,' said I, 'if that's any consolation to you. Good night!' Setting off at a shuffling run, I doubled back along Grosvenor Street and Bond Street to the point where I hoped to pick up the trail again. And just there, at the issue of Bruton Street, two constables stood ready for me.

'I thought as much,' said the one who set me on my way. 'Hi, you! Wait a moment, please'; then to the other, 'Best turn his pockets out, Jim.'

'If you dare to try——' I began, with my hand in my pocket: the next moment I found myself sprawling face downward on the sharp crust of snow.

'Hallo, constables!' said a voice. 'What's the row?' It was Gervase. He had turned leisurely back from the slope of Conduit Street, and came strolling down the road with his hands in his pockets.

'This fellow, sir—we have reason to think he was followin' you.'

'Quite right,' Gervase answered cheerfully. 'Of course he was.'

‘Oh, if you knew it, sir——’

‘Certainly I knew it. In fact, he was following at my invitation.’

‘What for did he tell me a lie, then?’ grumbled the constable, chapfallen.

I had picked myself up by this time and was wiping my face. ‘Look here,’ I put in, ‘I asked you the way to Oxford Street, that and nothing else.’ And I went on to summarize my opinion of him.

‘Oh! it’s you can swear a bit,’ he growled. ‘I heard you just now.’

‘Yes,’ Gervase interposed suavely, drawing the glove from his right hand and letting flash a diamond finger-ring in the lamplight. ‘He *is* a bit of a beast, policeman, and it’s not for the pleasure of it that I want his company.’

A sovereign passed from hand to hand. The other constable had discreetly drawn off a pace or two.

‘All the same, it’s a rum go.’

‘Yes, isn’t it?’ Gervase assented in his heartiest tone. ‘Here is my card, in case you’re not satisfied.’

‘If *you’re* satisfied, sir——’

‘Quite so. Good night!’ Gervase thrust both hands into his pockets again and strode off. I followed him, with a heart hotter than ever—followed him like a whipped cur, as they say. Yes, that was just it. He who had already robbed me of everything else had now kicked even the pedestal from under me as a figure of tragedy. Five minutes ago I had been the implacable avenger tracking my unconscious victim across the city. Heaven knows how small an excuse it was for self-respect; but one who has lost character may yet chance to catch a dignity from circumstances; and to tell the truth, for all my desperate earnestness I had allowed my vanity to take some artistic satisfaction in the sinister chase. It had struck me—shall I say?—as an effective ending, nor had I failed to note that the snow lent it a romantic touch.

And behold, the unconscious victim knew all about it, and had politely interfered when a couple of unromantic Bobbies threatened the performance by tumbling the stalking avenger into the gutter! They had knocked my tragedy into harlequinade as easily as you might bash in a hat; and my enemy had refined the cruelty of it by coming to the rescue and ironically restarting the poor play on lines of comedy. I saw too late that I ought to have refused his help, to have assaulted the constable and been hauled to the police-station. Not an impressive wind-up, to be sure; but less humiliating than this! Even so, Gervase might have trumped the poor card by following with a gracious offer to bail me out!

As it was, I had put the whip into his hand, and must follow him like a cur. The distance he kept assured me that the similitude had not escaped him. He strode on without deigning a single glance behind, still in cold derision presenting me his broad back and silently challenging me to shoot. And I

followed, hating him worse than ever, swearing that the last five minutes should not be forgotten, but charged for royally when the reckoning came to be paid.

I followed thus up Conduit Street, up Regent Street, and across the Circus. The frost had deepened and the mud in the roadway crackled under our feet. At the Circus I began to guess, and when Gervase struck off into Great Portland Street, and thence by half a dozen turnings northwards by east, I knew to what house he was leading me.

At the entrance of the side street in which it stood he halted and motioned me to come close.

'I forget,' he said with a jerk of his thumb, 'if you still have the entry. These people are not particular, to be sure.'

'I have not,' I answered, and felt my cheeks burning. He could not see this, nor could I see the lift of his eyebrows as he answered:

'Ah? I hadn't heard of it. . . . You'd better step round by the mews, then. You know the window, the one which opens into the passage leading to Pollox Street. Wait there. It may be ten minutes before I can open.'

I nodded. The house was a corner one, between the street and a by-lane tenanted mostly by cabmen; and at the back of it ran the mews where they stabled their horses. Half-way down this mews a narrow alley cut across it at right angles: a passage unfrequented by traffic, known only to the stablemen, and in the daytime used only by their children, who played hop-scotch on the flagged pavement, where no one interrupted them. You wondered at its survival—from end to end it must have measured a good fifty yards—in a district where every square foot of ground fetched money; until you learned that the house had belonged, in the twenties, to a nobleman who left a name for eccentric profligacy, and who, as owner of the land, could afford to indulge his humours. The estate since his death was in no position to afford money for alterations, and the present tenants of the house found the passage convenient enough.

My footsteps disturbed no one in the sleeping mews; and doubling back noiselessly through the passage, I took up my station beside the one low window which opened upon it from the blank back premises of the house. Even with the glimmer of snow to help me, I had to grope for the window-sill to make sure of my bearings. The minutes crawled by, and the only sound came from a stall where one of the horses had kicked through his thin straw bedding and was shuffling an uneasy hoof upon the cobbles. Then, just as I too had begun to shuffle my frozen feet, I heard a scratching sound, the unbolting of a shutter, and Gervase drew up the sash softly.

'Nip inside!' he whispered. 'No more noise than you can help. I have sent off the night porter. He tells me the bank is still going in the front of the house

—half a dozen playing, perhaps.'

I hoisted myself over the sill, and dropped inside. The wall of this annexe —which had no upper floor, and invited you to mistake it for a harmless studio —was merely a sheath, so to speak. Within, a corridor divided it from the true wall of the room: and this room had no window or top-light, though a handsome one in the roof—a dummy—beguiled the eyes of its neighbours.

There was but one room: an apartment of really fine proportions, never used by the tenants of the house, and known but to a few curious ones among its frequenters.

The story went that the late owner, Earl C——, had reason to believe himself persistently cheated at cards by his best friends, and in particular by a Duke of the Blood Royal, who could hardly be accused to his face. The Earl's sense of honour forbade him to accuse any meaner man while the big culprit went unrebuked. Therefore he continued to lose magnificently while he devised a new room for play: the room into which I now followed Gervase.

I had stood in it once before and admired the courtly and costly thoroughness of the Earl's rebuke. I had imagined him conducting his expectant guests to the door, ushering them in with a wave of the hand, and taking his seat tranquilly amid the dead, embarrassed silence: had imagined him facing the Royal Duke and asking: 'Shall we cut?' with a voice of the politest inflection.

For the room was a sheet of mirrors. Mirrors panelled the walls, the doors, the very backs of the shutters. The tables had mirrors for tops: the whole ceiling was one vast mirror. From it depended three great candelabra of cut-glass, set with reflectors here, there, and everywhere.

I had heard that even the floor was originally of polished brass. If so, later owners must have ripped up the plates and sold them: for now a few cheap Oriental rugs carpeted the unpolished boards. The place was abominably dusty: the striped yellow curtains had lost half their rings and drooped askew from their soiled vallances. Across one of the wall-panels ran an ugly scar. A smell of rat pervaded the air. The present occupiers had no use for a room so obviously unsuitable to games of chance, as they understood chance: and I doubt if a servant entered it once a month. Gervase had ordered candles and a fire: but the chimney was out of practice, and the smoke wreathed itself slowly about us as we stood surrounded by the ghostly company of our reflected selves.

'We shall not be disturbed,' said Gervase. 'I told the man I was expecting a friend, that our business was private, and that until he called I wished to be alone. I did not explain by what entrance I expected him. The people in the front cannot hear us. Have a cigar?' He pushed the open case towards me. Then, as I drew back: 'You've no need to be scrupulous,' he added, 'seeing

that they were bought with your money.'

'If that's so, I will,' said I; and having chosen one struck a match. Glancing round, I saw a hundred small flames spurt up, and a hundred men hold them to a hundred glowing cigar-tips.

'After you with the match.' Gervase took it from me with a steady hand. He, too, glanced about him while he puffed. 'Ugh!' He blew a long cloud, and shivered within his furred overcoat. 'What a gang!'

'It takes all sorts to make a world,' said I fatuously, for lack of anything better.

'Don't be an infernal idiot!' he answered, flicking the dust off one of the gilt chairs, and afterwards cleaning a space for his elbow on the looking-glass table. 'It takes only two sorts to make the world we've lived in, and that's you and me.' He gazed slowly round the walls. 'You and me, and a few fellows like us—not to mention the women, who don't count.'

'Well,' said I, 'as far as the world goes—if you must discuss it—I always found it a good enough place.'

'Because you started as an unconsidering fool: and because, afterwards, when we came to grips, you were the under-dog, and I gave you no time. My word—how I have hustled you!'

I yawned. 'All right: I can wait. Only if you suppose I came here to listen to your moral reflections——'

He pulled the cigar from between his teeth and looked at me along it.

'I know perfectly well why you came here,' he said slowly, and paused. 'Hadn't we better have it out—with the cards on the table?' He drew a small revolver from his pocket and laid it with a light clink on the table before him. I hesitated for a moment, then followed his example, and the silent men around us did the same.

A smile curled his thin lips as he observed this multiplied gesture. 'Yes,' he said, as if to himself, 'that is what it all comes to.'

'And now,' said I, 'since you know my purpose here, perhaps you will tell me yours.'

'That is just what I am trying to explain. Only you are so impatient, and it—well, it's a trifle complicated.' He puffed for a moment in silence. 'Roughly, it might be enough to say that I saw you standing outside my house a while ago; that I needed a talk with you alone, in some private place; that I guessed, if you saw me, you would follow with no more invitation; and that, so reasoning, I led you here, where no one is likely to interrupt us.'

'Well,' I admitted, 'all that seems plain sailing.'

'Quite so; but it's at this point the thing grows complicated.' He rose, and walking to the fire-place, turned his back on me and spread his palms to the blaze. 'Well,' he asked, after a moment, gazing into the mirror before him,

‘why don’t you shoot?’

I thrust my hands into my trouser-pockets and leaned back staring—I dare say sulkily enough—at the two revolvers within grasp. ‘I’ve got my code,’ I muttered.

‘The code of—these mirrors. You won’t do the thing because it’s not the thing to do; because these fellows’—he waved a hand and the ghosts waved back at him—‘don’t do such things, and you haven’t the nerve to sin off your own bat. Come’—he strolled back to his seat and leaned towards me across the table—‘it’s not much to boast of, but at this eleventh hour we must snatch what poor credit we can. You are, I suppose, a more decent fellow for not having fired: and I——By the way, you did feel the temptation?’

I nodded. ‘You may put your money on that. I never see you without wanting to kill you. What’s more, I’m going to do it.’

‘And I,’ he said, ‘knew the temptation and risked it. No: let’s be honest about it. There was no risk: because, my good sir, I know you to a hair.’

‘There was,’ I growled.

‘Pardon me, there was none. I came here having a word to say to you, and these mirrors have taught me how to say it. Take a look at them—the world we are leaving—that’s it: and a cursed second-hand, second-class one at that.’

He paced slowly round on it, slewing his body in the chair.

‘I say a second-class one,’ he resumed, ‘because, my dear Reggie, when all’s said and done, we are second-class, the pair of us, and pretty bad second-class. I met you first at ——. Our fathers had money: they wished us to be gentlemen without well understanding what it meant: and with unlimited pocket-money and his wits about him any boy can make himself a power in a big school. That is what we did: towards the end we even set the fashion for a certain set; and a rank bad fashion it was. But, in truth, we had no business there: on every point of breeding we were outsiders. I suspect it was a glimmering consciousness of this that made us hate each other from the first. We understood one another too well. Oh, there’s no mistake about it! Whatever we’ve missed in life, you and I have hated.’

He paused, eyeing me queerly. I kept my hands in my pockets. ‘Go on,’ I said.

‘From —— we went to College—the same business over again. We drifted, of course, into the same set; for already we had become necessary to each other. We set the pace of that set—were its apparent leaders. But in truth we were alone—you and I—as utterly alone as two shipwrecked men on a raft. The others were shadows to us: we followed their code because we had to be gentlemen, but we did not understand it in the least. For, after all, the roots of that code lay in the breeding and tradition of honour, with which we had no concern. To each other you and I were intelligible and real; but as concerned

that code and the men who followed it by right of birth and nature, we were looking-glass men imitating—imitating—imitating.'

'We set the pace,' said I. 'You've allowed that.'

'To be sure we did. We even modified the code a bit—to its hurt; though as conscious outsiders we could dare very little. For instance, the talk of our associates about women—and no doubt their thoughts, too—grew sensibly baser. The sanctity of gambling debts, on the other hand, we did nothing to impair: because we had money. I recall your virtuous indignation at the amount of paper floated by poor W—— towards the end of the great baccarat term. Poor devil! He paid up—or his father did—and took his name off the books. He's in Ceylon now, I believe. At length you have earned a partial right to sympathize: or would have, if only you had paid up.'

'Take care, Gervase!'

'My good sir, don't miss my point. Wasn't I just as indignant with W——? If I'd been warned off Newmarket Heath, if I'd been shown the door of the hell we're sitting in, shouldn't I feel just as you are feeling? Try to understand!'

'You forget Elaine, I think.'

'No: I do not forget Elaine. We left College: I to add money to money in my father's office; you to display your accomplishments in spending what your father had earned. That was the extent of the difference. To both of us, money and the indulgence it buys meant everything in life. All I can boast of is the longer sight. The office-hours were a nuisance, I admit: but I was clever enough to keep my hold on the old set; and then, after office-hours, I met you constantly, and studied and hated you—studied you because I hated you. Elaine came between us. You fell in love with her. That I, too, should fall in love with her was no coincidence, but the severest of logic. Given such a woman and two such men, no other course of fate is conceivable. She made it necessary for me to put hate into practice. If she had not offered herself, why, then it would have been somebody else: that's all. Good Lord!' he rapped the table, and his voice rose for the first time above its level tone of exposition: 'You don't suppose all my study—all my years of education—were to be wasted!'

He checked himself, eyed me again, and resumed in his old voice:

'You wanted money by this time. I was a solicitor—your old college friend—and you came to me. I knew you would come, as surely as I knew you would not fire that pistol just now. For years I had trained myself to look into your mind and anticipate its working. Don't I tell you that from the first you were the only real creature this world held for me? You were my only book, and I had to learn you: at first without fixed purpose, then deliberately. And when the time came I put into practice what I knew: just that and no more. My

dear Reggie, you never had a chance.'

'Elaine?' I muttered again.

'Elaine was the girl for you—or for me: just that again and no more.'

'By George!' said I, letting out a laugh. 'If I thought that!'

'What?'

'Why, that after ruining me, you have missed being happy!'

He sighed impatiently, and his eyes, though he kept them fastened on mine, seemed to be tiring. 'I thought,' he said, 'I could time your intelligence over any fence. But to-night there's something wrong. Either I'm out of practice or your brain has been going to the deuce. What, man! You're shying at every bank! Is it drink, hey? Or hunger?'

'It might be a little of both,' I answered. 'But stay a moment and let me get things straight. I stood between you and Elaine—no, give me time—between you and your aims, whatever they were. Very well. You trod over me; or, rather, you pulled me up by the roots and pitched me into outer darkness to rot. And now it seems that, after all, you are not content. In the devil's name, why?'

'Why? Oh, cannot you see? . . . Take a look at these mirrors again—our world, I tell you. See—you and I—you and I—always you and I! Man, I pitched you into darkness as you say, and then I woke and knew the truth—that you were necessary to me.'

'Hey?'

'*I can't do without you!*' It broke from him in a cry. 'So help me God, Reggie, it is the truth!'

I stared in his face for half a minute maybe, and broke out laughing. 'Jeshurun waxed fat and—turned sentimental! A nice copy-book job you make of it, too.'

Oh, send my brother back to me—
I cannot play alone!

Perhaps you'd like me to buy a broom and hire the crossing in Lennox Gardens? Then you'd be able to contemplate me all day long, and nourish your fine fat soul with delicate eating. Pah! You make me sick.'

'It's the truth,' said he quietly.

'It may be. To me it looks a sight more like *foie gras*. Can't do without me, can't you? Well, I can jolly well do without you, and I'm going to.'

'I warn you,' he said: 'I have done you an injury or two in my time, but by George if I stand up and let you shoot me—well, I hate you badly enough, but I won't let you do it without fair warning.'

'I'll risk it anyway,' said I.

'Very well.' He stood up, and folded his arms. 'Shoot, then, and be hanged!'

I put out my hand to the revolver, hesitated, and withdrew it.

'That's not the way,' I said. 'I've got my code, as I told you before.'

'Does the code forbid suicide?' he asked.

'That's a different thing.'

'Not at all. The man who commits suicide kills an unarmed man.'

'But the unarmed man happens to be himself.'

'Suppose that in this instance your distinction won't work? Look here,' he went on, as I pushed back my chair impatiently, 'I have one truth more for you. I swear I believe that what we have hated, we two, is not each other, but ourselves or our own likeness. I swear I believe we two have so shared natures in hate that no power can untwist and separate them to render each his own. But I swear also I believe that if you lift that revolver to kill, you will take aim, not at me, but by instinct at a worse enemy—yourself, vital in my heart.'

'You have some pretty theories to-night,' I sneered. 'Perhaps you'll go on to tell me which of us two had been Elaine's husband, feeding daintily in Lennox Gardens, clothed in purple and fine linen, while the other——'

He interrupted me by picking up his revolver and striding to the fire-place again.

'So be it, since you will have it so. Kill me,' he added, with a queer look, 'and perhaps you may go back to Lennox Gardens and enjoy all these things in my place.'

I took my station. Both revolvers were levelled now. I took sight along mine at his detested face. It was white but curiously eager—hopeful even. I lowered my arm, scanning his face still; and still scanning it, set my weapon down on the table.

'I believe you are mad,' said I slowly. 'But one thing I see—that, mad or not, you're in earnest. For some reason you want me to kill you; therefore that shall wait. For some reason it is torture to you to live and do without me: well, I'll try you with that. It will do me good to hurt you a bit.' I slipped the revolver into my pocket and tapped it. 'Though I don't understand them, I won't quarrel with your sentiments so long as you suffer for them. When that fails, I'll find another opportunity for this. Good night.' I stepped to the door.

'Reggie!'

I shut the door on his cry: crossed the corridor, and climbing out through the window, let myself drop into the lane.

As my feet touched the snow a revolver-shot rang out in the room behind me.

I caught at the frozen sill to steady myself: and crouching there, listened. Surely the report must have alarmed the house! I waited for the sound of footsteps: waited for three minutes—perhaps longer. None came. To be sure, the room stood well apart from the house: but it was incredible that the report

should have awakened no one! My own ears still rang with it.

Still no footsteps came. The horse in the stable close by was still shuffling his hoof on the cobbles, no other sound. . . .

Very stealthily I hoisted myself up on the sill again, listened, dropped inside, and tiptoed my way to the door. The candles were still burning in the Room of Mirrors. And by the light of them, as I entered, Gervase stepped to meet me.

'Ah, it's you,' I stammered. 'I heard—that is, I thought——'

And with that I saw—recognized with a catch of the breath—that the figure I spoke to was not Gervase, but my own reflected image, stepping forward with pale face and ghastly from a mirror. Yet a moment before I could have sworn it was Gervase.

Gervase lay stretched on the hearthrug with his hand towards the fire. I caught up a candle, and bent over him. His features were not to be recognized.

As I straightened myself up, with the candle in my hand, for an instant those features, obliterated in the flesh, gazed at me in a ring, a hundred times repeated behind a hundred candles. And again, at a second glance, I saw that the face was not Gervase's but my own.

I set down the candle and made off, closing the door behind me. The horror of it held me by the hair, but I flung it off and pelted down the lane and through the mews. Once in the street I breathed again, pulled myself together, and set off at a rapid walk, southwards, but not clearly knowing whither.

As a matter of fact, I took the line by which I had come: with the single difference that I made straight into Berkeley Square through Bruton Street. I had, I say, no clear purpose in following this line rather than another. I had none for taking Lennox Gardens on the way to my squalid lodgings in Chelsea. I had a purpose, no doubt; but will swear it only grew definite as I came in sight of the lamp still burning beneath Gervase's portico.

There was a figure, too, under the lamp—the butler—bending there and rolling up the strip of red carpet. As he pulled its edges from the frozen snow I came on him suddenly.

'Oh, it's you, sir!' He stood erect, and with the air of a man infinitely relieved.

'Gervase!'

The door opened wide and there stood Elaine in her ball-gown, a-glitter with diamonds.

'Gervase, dear, where have you been? We have been terribly anxious——'

She said it, looking straight down on me—on me—who stood in my tattered clothes in the full glare of the lamp. And then I heard the butler catch his breath, and suddenly her voice trailed off in wonder and pitiful disappointment.

‘It’s not Gervase! It’s Reg—Mr. Travers. I beg your pardon. I thought ____’

But I passed up the steps and stood before her: and said, as she drew back:

‘There has been an accident. Gervase has shot himself.’ I turned to the butler. ‘You had better run to the police station. Stay: take this revolver. It won’t count anything as evidence: but I ask you to examine it and make sure all the chambers are loaded.’

A thud in the hall interrupted me. I ran in and knelt beside Elaine, and as I stooped to lift her—as my hand touched her hair—this was the jealous question on my lips:

‘What has *she* to do with it. It is *I* who cannot do without him—who must miss him always!’

THE MIRACLE OF THE ‘WHITE WOLF’

I

THE TALE OF SNORRI GAMLASON

IN the early summer of 1358, with the breaking up of the ice, there came to Brattahlid, in Greenland, a merchant-ship from Norway, with provisions for the Christian settlements on the coast. The master’s name was Snorri Gamlason, and it happened that, as he sailed into Eric’s Fiord and warped alongside the quay, word was brought to him that the Bishop of Garda had arrived that day in Brattahlid, to hold a confirmation. Whereupon this Snorri went ashore at once, and, getting audience of the Bishop, gave him a little book, with an account of how he had come by it.

The book was written in Danish, and Snorri could not understand a word of it, being indeed unable to read or to write; but he told this tale:

His ship, about three weeks before, had run into a calm, which lasted for three days and two nights, and with a northerly drift she fell away, little by little, towards a range of icebergs which stretched across and ahead of them in a solid chain. But about noon of the third day the colour of the sky warned him of a worse peril, and soon there came up from the westward a bank of fog, with snow in it, and a wind that increased until they began to hear the ice grinding and breaking up—as it seemed—all around them. Snorri steered at first for the southward, where had been open water; but by and by found that even here were drifting bergs. He therefore put his helm down and felt his way through the weather by short boards, and so, with the most of his men stationed forward to keep a look-out, fenced, as it were, with the danger, steering and tacking, until by God’s grace the fog lifted, and the wind blew gently once more.

And now in the clear sunshine he saw that the storm had been more violent than any had supposed; since the wall of ice, which before had been solid, was now burst and riven in many places, and in particular to the eastward, where a broad path of water lay before them almost like a canal, but winding here and there. Towards this Snorri steered, and entered it with a fair breeze.

They had come, he said, but to the second bend of this waterway, when a seaman, who had climbed the mast on the chance of spying an outlet, called out in surprise that there was a ship ahead of them, but two miles off, and

running down the channel before the wind, even as they. At first he found no credit for this tale, and even when those on deck spied her mast and yard overtopping a gap between two bergs, they could only set it down for a mirage or cheat of eyesight in the clear weather.

But by and by, said Snorri, they could not doubt they were in chase of a ship, and, further, that they were fast overtaking her. For she steered with no method, and shook with every slant of wind, and anon went off before it like a helpless thing, until in the end she was fetched up by the jutting foot of a berg, and there shook, her one sail flapping with such noise that Snorri's men heard it, though yet a mile away.

They bore down upon her, and now took note that this sail of hers was ragged and frozen, so that it flapped like a jointed board, and that her rigging hung in all ways and untended, but stiff with rime; and drawing yet nearer, they saw an ice-line about her hull, so deep that her timbers seemed bitten through, and a great pile of frozen snow upon her poop, banked even above her tiller; but no helmsman, and no living soul upon her.

Then Snorri let lower his boat, and was rowed towards her; and, coming alongside, gave a hail, which was unanswered. But from the frozen pile by the tiller there stuck out a man's arm, ghastly to see. Snorri climbed on board by the waist, where her sides were low and a well reached aft from the mast to the poop. There was a cabin beneath the poop, and another and larger room under the deck forward, between the step of the mast and the bows. Into each of these he broke with axes and bars, and in the one found nothing but some cooking-pots and bedding; but in the other—that is, the after-cabin—the door, as he burst it in, almost fell against a young man seated by a bed. So life-like was he that Snorri called aloud in the doorway; but anon, peering into the gloomy place, he perceived the body to be frozen upright and stiff, and that on the bed lay another body, of a lady slight and young, and very fair. She, too, was dead and frozen; yet her cheeks, albeit white as the pillow against which they rested, had not lost their roundness. Snorri took note also of her dress and of the coverlet reaching from the bed's foot to her waist, that they were of silk for the most part, and richly embroidered, and her shift and the bed-sheets about her of fine linen. The man's dress was poor and coarse by comparison; yet he carried a sword, and was plainly of gentle nurture. The sword Snorri drew from its sheath and brought away; also he took a small box of jewels; but little else could he find on the ship, and no food of any kind.

His design was to leave the ship as he found it, carrying away only these tokens that his story, when he arrived at Brattahlid, might be received with faith; and to direct where the ship might be sought for. But as he quitted the cabin some of his men shouted from the deck, where they had discovered yet another body frozen in a drift. This was an old man seated with crossed legs

and leaning against the mast, having an ink-horn slung about his neck, and almost hidden by his grey beard, and on his knee a book, which he held with a thumb frozen between two pages.

This was the book which Snorri had brought to Brattahlid, and which the Bishop of Garda read aloud to him that same afternoon, translating as he went; the ink being fresh, the writing clerkly, and scarcely a page damaged by the weather. It bore no title; but the Bishop, who afterwards caused his secretary to take a copy of the tale, gave it a very long one, beginning: 'God's mercy shown in a Miracle upon certain castaways from Jutland, at the Feast of the Nativity of His Blessed Son, our Lord, in the year MCCCLVII, whereby He made dead trees to put forth in leaf, and comforted desperate men with summer in the midst of the Frozen Sea' . . . with much beside. But all this appears in the tale, which I will head only with the name of the writer.

II

PETER KURT'S MANUSCRIPT[1]

Now that our troubles are over, and I sit by the mast of our late unhappy ship, not knowing if I am on earth or in paradise, but full-fed and warm in all my limbs, yea pierced and glowing with the love of Almighty God, I am resolved to take pen and use my unfrozen ink in telling out of what misery His hand hath led us to this present Paradise.

I who write this am Peter Kurt, and I was the steward of my master Ebbe while he dwelt in his own castle of Nebbegaard. Poor he was then, and poor, I suppose, he is still in all but love and the favour of God; but in those days the love was but an old servant's (to wit, my own), and the favour of God not evident, but the poverty, on the other hand, bitterly apparent in all our housekeeping.

We lived alone, with a handful of servants—sometimes as few as three—in the castle which stands between the sandhills and the woods, as you sail into Veile Fiord. All these woods, as far away as to Rosenvold, had been the good knight his father's, but were lost to us before Ebbe's birth, and leased on pledge to the Knight Borre, of Egeskov, of whom I am to tell; and with them went all the crew of verderers, huntsmen, grooms, prickers, and ostringers that had kept Nebbegaard cheerful the year round. His mother had died at my master's birth, and the knight himself but two years after, so that the lad grew up in his poverty with no heritage but a few barren acres of sand, a tumbling house, and his father's sword, and small prospect of winning the broad lands out of Borre's clutches.

Nevertheless, under my tutoring he grew into a tall lad and a bold, a good

swordsman, skilful at the tilt and in handling a boat; but not talkative or free in his address of strangers. The most of his days he spent in fishing, or in the making and mending of gear; and his evenings, after our lesson in sword-play, in the reading of books (of which Nebbegaard had good store), and specially of the Icelanders, skalds and sagamen; also at times in the study of Latin with me, who had been bred to the priesthood, but left it for love of his father, my foster-brother, and now had no ambition of my own but to serve this lad and make him as good a man.

But there were days when he would have naught to do with fishing or with books; dark days when I forbore and left him to mope by the dunes, or in the great garden which had been his mother's, but was now a wilderness untended. And it was there that he first met with the lady Mette.

For as he walked there one morning, a little before noon, a swift shadow passed overhead between him and the sun, and almost before he could glance upward a body came dropping out of the sky and fell with a thud among the rose-bushes by the eastern wall. It was a heron, and after it swooped the bird which had murdered it; a white ger-falcon of the kind which breeds in Greenland, but a trained bird, as he knew by the sound of the bells on her legs as she plunged through the bushes. Ebbe ran at once to the corner where the birds struggled; but as he picked up the pelt he happened to glance towards the western wall, and in the gateway there stood a maiden with her hand on the bridle of a white palfrey. Her dog came running towards Ebbe as he stood. He beat it off, and carrying the pelt across to its mistress, waited a moment silently, cap in hand, while she called the great falcon back to its lure and leashed it to her wrist, which seemed all too slight for the weight.

Then, as Ebbe held out the dead heron, she shook her head and laughed. 'I am not sure, sir, that I have any right to it. We flushed it yonder between the wood and the sandhills, and, though I did not stay to consider, I think it must belong to the owner of the shore-land.'

'It is true,' said Ebbe, 'that I own the shore-land, and the forest, too, if law could enforce right. But for the bird you are welcome to it, and to as many more as you care to kill.'

Upon this she knit her brows. 'The forest? But I thought that the forest was my father's? My name,' said she, 'is Mette, and my father is the Knight Borre, of Egeskov.'

'I am Ebbe of Nebbegaard, and,' said he, perceiving the mirth in her eyes, 'you have heard the rhyme upon me:

> 'Ebbe from Nebbe, with all his men good,
> Has neither food nor firing-wood.'

'I had not meant to be discourteous,' said she contritely; 'but tell me more of these forest-lands.'

‘Nay,’ answered Ebbe, ‘hither comes riding your father with his men. Ask him for the story, and when he has told it you may know why I cannot make him or his daughter welcome at Nebbegaard.’

To this she made no reply, but with her hand on the palfrey’s bridle went slowly back to meet her father, who reined up at a little distance and waited, offering Ebbe no salutation. Then a groom helped her to the saddle, and the company rode away towards Egeskov, leaving the lad with the dead bird in his hand.

For weeks after this meeting he moped more than usual. He had known before that Sir Borre would leave no son, and that the lands of Nebbegaard, if ever to be won back, must be wrested from a woman—and this had ever troubled him. It troubled me the less because I hoped there might be another way than force; and even if it should come to that, Sir Borre’s past treachery had killed in me all kindness towards his house, male or female.

He and my old master and five other knights of the eastern coast had been heavily oppressed by the Lord of Trelde, Lars Trolle, who owned many ships and, though no better than a pirate, claimed the right of levying tribute along the shore that faces Funen, upon pretence of protecting it. After enduring many raids and paying toll under threat for years, these seven knights banded together to rid themselves of this robber; but word of their meetings being carried to Trolle, he came secretly one night to Nebbegaard with three ships’ crews, broke down the doors, and finding the seven assembled in debate, made them prisoners and held them at ransom. My master, a poor man, could only purchase release by the help of his comrade, Borre, who found the ransom, but took in exchange the lands of Nebbegaard, to hold them until repaid out of their revenues; but of these he could never after be brought to give an account. We on our side had lost the power to enforce it, and behind his own strength he could now threaten us with Lars Trolle’s, to whom he had been reconciled.

Therefore I felt no tenderness for Sir Borre’s house, if by any means our estates could be recovered. But after this meeting with Sir Borre’s daughter, I could see that my young lord went heavily troubled; and I began to think of other means than force.

It may have been six months later that word came to us of great stir and bustle at Egeskov. Sir Borre, being aged, and anxious to see his daughter married before he died, had proclaimed a Bride-show. Now the custom is, and the rule, that any suitor (so he be of gentle birth) may offer himself in these contests; nor will the parents begin to bargain until he has approved himself—a wise plan, since it lessens the disputing, which else might be endless. So when this news reached us I looked at my master, and he, perceiving what I would say, answered it.

‘If Holgar will carry me,’ said he, ‘we will ride to Egeskov.’

This Holgar was a stout roan horse, foaled at Nebbegaard, but now well advanced in years, and the last of that red stock for which our stables had been famous.

'He will carry you thither,' said I; 'and, by God's grace, bring you home with a bride behind you.'

Upon this my master hung his head. 'Peter,' he said, 'do not think I attempt this because it is the easier way.'

'It comes easier than fighting with a woman,' I answered. 'But you will find it hard enow when the old man begins to haggle.'

I did not know then that the lad's heart was honestly given to this maid; but so it was, and had been from the moment when she stood before him in the gateway.

So to Egeskov we rode, and there found no less than forty suitors assembled, and some with a hundred servants in retinue. Sir Borre received us with no care to hide his scorn, though the hour had not come for putting it into words; and truly my master's arms were old-fashioned, and with the dents they had honourably taken when they cased his father, made a poor battered show, for all my scouring.

Nevertheless, I had no fear when his turn came to ride the ring. Three rides had each wooer under the lady Mette's eyes, and three rings Ebbe carried off and laid on the cushion before her. She stooped and passed about his neck the gold chain which she held for the prize; but I think they exchanged no looks. Only one other rider brought two rings, and this was a son of Lars Trolle, Olaf by name, a tall young knight, and well-favoured, but disdainful; whom I knew Sir Borre must favour if he could.

I could not see that the maiden favoured him above the rest, yet I kept a close eye upon this youth, and must own that in the jousting which followed he carried himself well. For this the most of the wooers had fresh horses, and I drew a long breath when, at the close of the third course, my master, with two others, remained in the lists. For it had been announced to us that the last courses should be ridden on the morrow. But now Sir Borre behaved very treacherously, for perceiving (as I am sure) that the horse Holgar was overwearied and panting, he gave word that the sport should not be stayed. More by grace of Heaven it was than by force of riding that Ebbe unhorsed his next man, a knight's son from Smalling; but in the last course, which he rode against Olaf of Trolle, who had stood a bye, his good honest beast came to the tilt-cloth with knees trembling, and at a touch rolled over, though between the two lances (I will swear) there was nothing to choose. I was quick to pick up my dear lad; but he would have none or my comfort, and limped away from the lists as one who had borne himself shamefully. Yes, and my own heart was hot as I led Holgar back to stable, without waiting to see the prize claimed by

one who, though a fair fighter, had not won it without foul aid.

Having stalled Holgar I had much ado to find his master again, and endless work to persuade him to quit his sulks and join the other suitors in the hall that night, when each presented his bride-gift. Even when I had won him over, he refused to take the coffer I placed in his hands, though it held his mother's jewels, few but precious. But entering with the last, as became his humble rank of esquire, he laid nothing at the lady's feet save his sword and the chain that she herself had given him.

'You bring little, Squire Ebbe,' said Knight Borre, from his seat beside his daughter.

'I bring what is most precious in the world to me,' said Ebbe.

'Your lance is broken, I believe?' said the old knight scornfully.

'My lance is not broken,' he answered; 'else you should have it to match your word.' And rising, without a look at Mette, whose eyes were downcast, he strode back to the door.

I had now given up hope, for the maid showed no sign of kindness, and the old man and the youth were like two dogs—the very sight of the one set the other growling. Yet—since to leave in a huff would have been discourteous—I prevailed on my master to bide over the morrow, and even to mount Holgar and ride forth to the hunt which was to close the Bride-show. He mounted, indeed, but kept apart and well behind Mette and her brisk group of wooers. For, apart from his lack of inclination, his horse was not yet recovered; and by and by, as the prickers started a deer, the hunt swept ahead of him and left him riding alone.

He had a mind to turn aside and ride straight back to Nebbegaard, whither he had sent me on to announce him (and dismally enough I obeyed), when at the end of a green glade he spied Mette returning alone on her white palfrey.

'For I am tired of this hunting,' she told him, as she came near. 'And you? Does it weary you also, that you lag so far behind?'

'It would never weary me,' he answered; 'but I have a weary horse.'

'Then let us exchange,' said she. 'Though mine is but a palfrey, it would carry you better. Your roan betrayed you yesterday, and it is better to borrow than to miss excelling.'

'My house,' answered Ebbe, still sulkily, 'has had enough borrowing of Egeskov; and my horse may be valueless, but he is one of the few things dear to me, and I must keep him.'

'Truly then,' said she, 'your words were naught, last night, when you professed to offer me the gifts most precious to you in the world.'

And before he could reply to this, she had pricked on and was lost in the woodland.

Ebbe sat for a while as she left him, considering, at the crossing of two

glades. Then he twitched Holgar's rein and turned back towards Nebbegaard. But at the edge of the wood, spying a shepherd seated below in the plain by his flock, he rode down to the man, and called to him and said:

'Go this evening to Egeskov and greet the lady Mette, and say to her that Ebbe of Nebbegaard could not barter his good horse, the last of his father's stable. But that she may know he was honest in offering her the thing most precious to him, tell her further what thou hast seen.'

So saying, he alighted off Holgar, and, smoothing his neck, whispered a word in his ear. And the old horse turned his muzzle and rubbed it against his master's left palm, whose right gripped a dagger and drove it straight for the heart. This was the end of the roan stock of Nebbegaard.

My master Ebbe reached home that night with the mire thick on his boots. Having fed him, I went to the stables, and finding no Holgar made sure that he had killed the poor beast in wrath for his discomfiture at the tilt. The true reason he gave me many days after. I misjudged him, judging him by his father's temper.

On the morrow of the Bride-show the suitors took their leave of Egeskov, under promise to return again at the month's end and hear how the lady Mette had chosen. So they went their ways, none doubting that the fortunate one would be Olaf of Trelde; and, for me, I blamed myself that we had ever gone to Egeskov.

But on the third morning after the Bride-show I changed this advice very suddenly; for going at six of the morning to unlock our postern gate, as my custom was, I found a tall black stallion tethered there and left without a keeper. His harness was of red leather, and each broad crimson rein bore certain words embroidered: on the one, 'A Straight Quarrel is Soonest Mended'; on the other, 'Who Will Dare Learns Swiftness.'

Little time I lost in calling my master to admire, and having read what was written, he looked in my eyes and said: 'I go back to Egeskov.'

'That is well done,' said I; 'may the Almighty God prosper it!'

'But,' said he doubtfully, 'if I determine on a strange thing, will you help me, Peter? I may need a dozen men; men without wives to miss them.'

'I can yet find a dozen such along the fiord,' I answered.

'And we go on a long journey, perhaps never to return to Nebbegaard.'

'Dear master,' said I, 'what matter where my old bones lie after they have done serving you?' He kissed me and rode away to Egeskov.

'I thought that the Squire of Nebbe had done with us,' Sir Borre began to sneer, when Ebbe found audience. 'But the Bride-show is over, my man, and I give not my answer for a month yet.'

'Your word is long to pledge, and longer to redeem,' said Ebbe. 'I know that, were I to wait a twelve-month, you would not of free will give me Mette.'

‘Ah, you know that, do you? Well, then, you are right, Master Lackland, and the greater your impudence in hoping to wile from me through my daughter what you could not take by force.’

Ebbe replied: ‘I was prepared to find it difficult, but let that pass. As touching my lack of land, I have Nebbegaard left; a poor estate and barren, yet I think you would be glad of it, to add to the lands of which you robbed us.’

‘Well,’ said Borre, ‘I would give a certain price for it, but not my daughter, nor anything near so precious to me.’

‘Give me one long ship,’ said Ebbe; ‘the swiftest of your seven which ride in the strait between Egeskov and Stryb. You shall take Nebbegaard for her, since I am weary of living at home and care little to live at all without Mette.’

Borre’s eyes shone with greed. ‘I commend you,’ said he; ‘for a stout lad there is nothing like risking his life to win a fortune. Give me the deeds belonging to Nebbegaard, and you shall have my ship *Gold Mary*.’

‘By your leave,’ said Ebbe, ‘I have spent some time in watching your ships upon the fiord; and the ship in my mind was the *White Wolf*.’

Sir Borre laughed to find himself outwitted, for the *White Wolf* could outsail all his fleet. But in any case he had the better of the bargain and could afford to show some good-humour. Moreover, though he knew not that Mette had any tenderness for this youth, his spirits rose at the prospect of getting him out of the way.

So the bargain was struck, and as Nebbe rode homewards to his castle for the last time, he met the shepherd who had taken his former message. The man was waiting for him, and (as you guess) by Mette’s orders.

‘Tell the lady Mette,’ said Ebbe, ‘that I have sold Nebbegaard for the *White Wolf*, and that two nights from now my men will be aboard of her; also that I sup with her father that evening before the boat takes me off from the Bent Ness.’

So it was that two nights later Ebbe supped at Egeskov, and was kept drinking by the old knight for an hour maybe after the lady Mette had risen and left the hall for her own chamber.

And at the end, after the last speeding-cup, needs must Sir Borre (who had grown friendly beyond all belief) see him to the gate and stand there bare-headed among his torch-bearers while my master mounted the black stallion that was to bear him to Bent Ness, three miles away, where I waited with the boat.

But as Ebbe shook his rein, and moved out of the torchlight, came the damsel Mette stealing out of the shadow upon the far side of the house. He reached down a hand, and she took it, and sprang up behind him.

‘For this bout, Sir Borre, I came with a fresh horse!’ called my master blithely; and so, striking spur, galloped off into the dark.

Little chance had Sir Borre to overtake them. The stallion was swift, our boat waiting in the lee of the Ness, the wind southerly and fresh, the *White Wolf* ready for sea, with sail hoisted and but one small anchor to get on board or cut away if need were. But there was no need. Before the men of Egeskov reached the Ness and found there the black stallion roaming, its riders were sailing out of the Strait with a merry breeze. So began our voyage.

My master was minded to sail for Norway and take service under the king. But first, coming to the island of Laesö, he must put ashore and seek a priest, by whom he and the lady Mette were safely made man and wife. Two days he spent at the island, and then, with fresh store of provisions, we headed northward again.

It was past Skagen that our troubles began, with a furious wind from the north-east against which there was no contending, so that we ran from it and were driven for two days and a night into the wide sea. Even when it lessened, the wind held in the east; and we, who could handle the ship, but knew little of reckoning, crept northward again in the hope to sight the coast of Norway. For two days we held on at this, lying close by the wind, and in good spirits, although our progress was not much; but on the third blew another gale—this time from the south-east—and for a week gale followed gale, and we went in deadly peril, yet never losing hope. The worst was the darkness, for the year was now drawing towards Yule, and as we pressed farther north we lost almost all sight of the sun.

At length, with the darkness and the bitter cold and our stores running low, we resolved to let the wind take us with what swiftness it might to whatsoever land it listed; and so ran westward, with darkness closing upon us, and famine and a great despair.

But the lady Mette did not lose heart; and the worst of all (our failing cupboard) we kept from her, so that she never lacked for plenty. Truly her cheerfulness paid us back, and her love for my master, the like of which I had not seen in this world; no, nor dreamed of. Hand in hand this pair would sit, watching the ice which was our prison and the great North Lights, she close against Ebbe’s side for warmth, and (I believe) as happy as a bird; he trembling for the end. The worst was to see her at table, pressing food to his mouth and wondering at his little hunger; while his whole body cried out for the meat, only it could not be spared.

Though she must know soon, none of us had the bowels to tell her; and not out of pity alone, but because with her must die out the last spark by which we warmed ourselves.

But there came a morning—I write it as of a time long ago, and yet it was but yesterday, praise be unto God!—there came a morning when I awoke and found that two of our men had died in the night, of frost and famine. They

must be hidden before my mistress discovered aught; and so before her hour of waking we weighted and dropped the bodies overside into deep water; for the ice had not yet wholly closed about us. Now as I stooped, I suppose that my legs gave way beneath me. At any rate, I fell; and in falling struck my head against the bulwarks, and opened my eyes in that unending dusk to find the lady Mette stooping over me.

Then somehow I was aware that she had called for wine to force down my throat, and had been told that there was no wine; and also that with this answer had come to her the knowledge, full and sudden, of our case. Better had we done to trust her than to hide it all this while: for she turned to Ebbe, who stood at her shoulder, and 'Is not this the feast of Yule?' she asked. My master bent his head, but without answering.

'Ah!' she cried to him. 'Now I know what I have longed to know, that your love is less than mine, for you can love yet be doubtful of miracles; while to me, now that I have loved, no miracle can be aught but small!' She bowed herself over me. 'Art dying, old friend? Look up and learn that God, being Love, deserts not lovers.'

Then she stooped and gathered, as I thought, a handful of snow from the deck; but lo! when she pressed it to my lips, and I tasted, it was heavenly manna.

And looking up past her face I saw the ribbons of the North Lights fade in a great and wide sunlight, bathing the deck and my frozen limbs. Nor did they feel it only, but on the wind came the noise of bergs rending, springs breaking, birds singing, many and curious. And with that, as I am a sinful man, I gazed up into green leaves; for either we had sailed into Paradise or the timbers of the *White Wolf* were swelling with sap and pushing forth bough upon bough. Yea, and there were roses at the mast's foot, and my fingers, as I stretched them, dabbled in mosses. While I lay there, breathing softly, as one who dreams and fears to awake, I heard her voice talking among the noises of birds and brooks, and by the scene it seemed to be in a garden; but whether it spake to me or to Ebbe I knew not, nor cared. 'The Lord is my Shepherd, and guides me,' it said, 'wherefore I lack nothing. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me by comfortable streams: He reviveth my soul. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no harm: Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.' But, a little after, I knew that the voice spake to my master, for it said: 'Let us go forth into the field, O beloved: let us lodge in the villages: let us get up betimes to the vineyard and see if the vine have budded, if its blossom be open, the pomegranates in flower. Even there will I give thee my love.' Then looking again I saw that the two had gone from me and left me alone.

But, blessed be God, they took not away the vision, and now I know

certainly that it is no cheat. For here sit I, dipping my pen into the unfrozen ink, and, when a word will not come, looking up into the broad branches and listening to the birds till I forget my story. It is long since they left me; but I am full fed, and the ship floats pleasantly. After so much misery I am as one rocked on the bosom of God; and the pine resin has a pleasant smell.

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[1] The courtship of Ebbe, the poor esquire of Nebbegaard, and the maiden Mette is a traditional tale of West Jutland. A version of it was Englished by Thorpe from Carit Etlar's *Eventyr og Folkesagen fra Jylland*: but this, while it tells of Ebbe's adventures at the 'Bride-show,' and afterwards at the hunting-party, contains no account of the lovers' escape and voyage, or of the miracle which brought them comfort at the last. Indeed, Master Kurt contradicts the common tale in many ways, but above all in his ending, wherein (although he narrates a miracle) I find him worthy of belief.

THE AFFAIR OF BLEAKIRK-ON-SANDS

The events, which took place on 23rd November, 186-, are narrated by Reuben Cartwright, Esq., of Bleakirk Hall, Bleakirk-on-Sands, in the North Riding of Yorkshire.

A ROUGH, unfrequented bridle-road rising and dipping towards the coast, with here and there a glimpse of sea beyond the sad-coloured moors: straight overhead, a red and wintry sun just struggling to assert itself: to right and left, a stretch of barren down still coated white with hoar-frost.

I had flung the reins upon my horse's neck, and was ambling homewards. Between me and Bleakirk lay seven good miles, and we had come far enough already on the chance of the sun's breaking through; but as the morning wore on, so our prospect of hunting that day faded farther from us. It was now high noon, and I had left the hunt half an hour ago, turned my face towards the coast, and lit a cigar to beguile the way. When a man has turned twenty-seven he begins to miss the fun of shivering beside a frozen cover.

The road took a sudden plunge among the spurs of two converging hills. As I began to descend, the first gleam of sunshine burst from the dull heaven and played over the hoar-frost. I looked up and saw, on the slope of the hill to the right, a horseman also descending.

At first glance I took him for a brother sportsman who, too, had abandoned hope of a fox. But the second assured me of my mistake. The stranger wore a black suit of antique, clerical cut, a shovel hat, and gaiters; his nag was the sorriest of ponies, with a shaggy coat of flaring yellow, and so low in the legs that the broad flaps of its rider's coat all but trailed on the ground. A queerer turn-out I shall never see again, though I live to be a hundred.

He appeared not to notice me, but pricked leisurably down the slope, and I soon saw that, as our paths ran and at the pace we were going, we should meet at the foot of the descent: which we presently did.

'Ah, indeed!' said the stranger, reining in his pony as though now for the first time aware of me: 'I wish you a very good day, sir. We are well met.'

He pulled off his hat with a fantastic politeness. For me, my astonishment grew as I regarded him more closely. A mass of lanky, white hair drooped on either side of a face pale, pinched, and extraordinarily wrinkled; the clothes that wrapped his diminutive body were threadbare, greasy, and patched in all directions. Fifty years' wear could not have worsened them; and, indeed, from the whole aspect of the man, you might guess him a century old, were it not for the nimbleness of his gestures and his eyes, which were grey, alert, and keen as

needles.

I acknowledged his salutation as he ranged up beside me.

‘Will my company, sir, offend you? By your coat I suspect your trade: *venatorem sapit*—hey?’

His voice exactly fitted his eyes. Both were sharp and charged with expression; yet both carried also a hint that their owner had lived long in privacy. Somehow they lacked touch.

‘I am riding homewards,’ I answered.

‘Hey? Where is that?’

The familiarity lay rather in the words than the manner; and I did not resent it.

‘At Bleakirk.’

His eyes had wandered for a moment to the road ahead; but now he turned abruptly, and looked at me, as I thought, with some suspicion. He seemed about to speak, but restrained himself, fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, and producing a massive snuff-box, offered me a pinch. On my declining, he helped himself copiously; and then, letting the reins hang loose upon his arm, fell to tapping the box.

‘To me this form of the herb *nicotiana* commends itself by its cheapness: the sense is tickled, the purse consenting—like the complaisant husband in *Juvenal*: you take me? I am well acquainted with Bleakirk-*super-sabulum*. By the way, how is Squire Cartwright of the Hall?’

‘If,’ said I, ‘you mean my father, Angus Cartwright, he is dead these twelve years.’

‘Hey?’ cried the old gentleman, and added after a moment: ‘Ah, to be sure, time flies—*quo dives Tullus et*—Angus, eh? And yet a hearty man, to all seeming. So you are his son?’ He took another pinch. ‘It is very sustaining,’ he said.

‘The snuff?’

‘You have construed me, sir. Since I set out, just thirteen hours since, it has been my sole viaticum.’ As he spoke he put his hand nervously to his forehead, and withdrew it.

‘Then,’ thought I, ‘you must have started in the middle of the night,’ for it was now little past noon. But looking at his face, I saw clearly that it was drawn and pinched with fasting. Whereupon I remembered my flask and sandwich-box, and pulling them out, assured him, with some apology for the offer, that they were at his service. His joy was childish. Again he whipped off his hat, and clapping it to his heart, swore my conduct did honour to my dead father; ‘and with Angus Cartwright,’ said he, ‘kindness was intuitive. Being a habit, it outran reflection; and his whisky, sir, was undeniable. Come, I have a fancy. Let us dismount, and, in heroic fashion, spread our feast upon the turf;

or, if the hoar-frost deter you, see, here are boulders, and a running brook to dilute our cups; and, by my life, a foot-bridge, to the rail of which we may tether our steeds!'

Indeed, we had come to a hollow in the road across which a tiny beck, now swollen with the rains, was chattering bravely. Falling in with my companion's humour, I dismounted, and, after his example, hitched my mare's rein over the rail. There was a raciness about the adventure that took my fancy. We chose two boulders from a heap of lesser stones close beside the beck, and divided the sandwiches; for though I protested I was not hungry, the old gentleman insisted on our sharing alike. And now, as the liquor warmed his heart and the sunshine smote upon his back, his eyes sparkled, and he launched on a flood of the gayest talk—yet always of a world that I felt was before my time. Indeed, as he rattled on, the feeling that this must be some Rip Van Winkle restored from a thirty years' sleep grew stronger and stronger upon me. He spoke of Bleakirk, and displayed a knowledge of it sufficiently thorough—intimate even—yet of the old friends for whom he inquired many names were unknown to me, many familiar only through their epitaphs in the windy cemetery above the cliff. Of the rest, the pretty girls he named were now grandmothers, the young men long since bent and rheumatic; the youngest well over fifty. This, however, seemed to depress him little. His eyes would sadden for a moment, then laugh again. 'Well, the tomb—we have our day notwithstanding. Pluck the bloom of it—hey? A commonplace of the poets.'

'But, sir,' I put in as politely as I might, 'you have not yet told me with whom I have the pleasure of lunching.'

'Gently, young sir.' He waved his hand towards the encircling moors. 'We have feasted *more Homerico*, and in Homer, you remember, the host allowed his guest fourteen days before asking that question. Permit me to delay the answer only till I have poured libation on the turf here. Ah! I perceive the whisky is exhausted: but water shall suffice. May I trouble you—my joints are stiff—to fill your drinking-cup from the brook at your feet?'

I took the cup from his hands and stooped over the water. As I did so, he leapt on me like a cat from behind. I felt a hideous blow on the nape of the neck: a jagged flame leapt up: the sunshine turned to blood—then to darkness. With hands spread out, I stumbled blindly forward and fell at full length into the beck.

When my senses returned, I became aware, first that I was lying, bound hand and foot and securely gagged, upon the turf; secondly, that the horses were still tethered, and standing quietly at the foot-bridge; and, thirdly, that my companion had resumed his position on the boulder, and there sat watching my recovery.

Seeing my eyes open, he raised his hat and addressed me in tones of grave

punctilio.

‘Believe me, sir, I am earnest in my regret for this state of things. Nothing but the severest necessity could have persuaded me to knock the son of my late esteemed friend over the skull and gag his utterance with a stone—to pass over the fact that it fairly lays my sense of your hospitality under suspicion. Upon my word, sir, it places me in a cursedly equivocal position!’

He took a pinch of snuff, absorbed it slowly, and pursued.

‘It was necessary, however. You will partly grasp the situation when I tell you that my name is Teague—the Reverend William Teague, Doctor of Divinity, and formerly incumbent of Bleakirk-on-Sands.’

His words explained much, though not everything. The circumstances which led to the Reverend William’s departure from Bleakirk had happened some two years before my birth: but they were startling enough to supply talk in that dull fishing-village for many a long day. In my nursery I had heard the tale that my companion’s name recalled: and if till now I had felt humiliation, henceforth I felt absolute fear, for I knew that I had to deal with a madman.

‘I perceive by your eyes, sir,’ he went on, ‘that with a part of my story you are already familiar: the rest I am about to tell you. It will be within your knowledge that late on a Sunday night, just twenty-nine years ago, my wife left the Vicarage-house, Bleakirk, and never returned; that subsequent inquiry yielded no trace of her flight, beyond the fact that she went provided with a small hand-bag containing a change of clothing; that, as we had lived together for twenty years in the entirest harmony, no reason could then, or afterwards, be given for her astonishing conduct. Moreover, you will be aware that its effect upon me was tragical; that my lively emotions underneath the shock deepened into a settled gloom; that my faculties (notoriously eminent) in a short time became clouded, nay, eclipsed—necessitating my removal (I will not refine) to a madhouse. Hey, is it not so?’

I nodded assent as well as I could. He paused, with a pinch between finger and thumb, to nod back to me. Though his eyes were now blazing with madness, his demeanour was formally, even affectedly, polite.

‘My wife never came back: naturally, sir—for she was dead.’

He shifted a little on the boulders, slipped the snuff-box back into his waistcoat pocket, then crossing his legs and clasping his hands over one knee, bent forward and regarded me fixedly.

‘I murdered her,’ he said slowly, and nodded.

A pause followed that seemed to last an hour. The stone which he had strapped in my mouth with his bandanna was giving me acute pain; it obstructed, too, what little breathing my emotion left me; and I dared not take my eyes off his. The strain on my nerves grew so tense that I felt myself fainting when his voice recalled me.

‘I wonder now,’ he asked, as if it were a riddle—‘I wonder if you can guess why the body was never found?’

Again there was an intolerable silence before he went on.

‘Lydia was a dear creature: in many respects she made me an admirable wife. Her affection for me was canine—positively. But she was fat, sir; her face a jelly, her shoulders mountainous. Moreover, her voice!—it was my cruciation—monotonously, regularly, desperately voluble. If she talked of archangels, they became insignificant—and her themes, in ordinary, were of the pettiest. Her waist, sir, and my arm had once been commensurate; now not three of Homer’s heroes could embrace her. Her voice could once touch my heart-strings into music; it brayed them now, between the millstones of the commonplace. Figure to yourself a man of my sensibility condemned to live on these terms!’

He paused, tightened his grasp on his knee, and pursued.

‘You remember, sir, the story of the baker in Langius? He narrates that a certain woman conceived a violent desire to bite the naked shoulders of a baker who used to pass underneath her window with his wares. So imperative did this longing become, that at length the woman appealed to her husband, who (being a good-natured man, and unwilling to disoblige her) hired the baker, for a certain price, to come and be bitten. The man allowed her two bites, but denied a third, being unable to contain himself for pain. The author goes on to relate that, for want of this third bite, she bore one dead child, and two living. My own case,’ continued the Reverend William, ‘was somewhat similar. Lydia’s unrelieved babble reacted upon her bulk, and awoke in me an absorbing, fascinating desire to strike her. I longed to see her quiver. I fought against the feeling, stifled it, trod it down: it awoke again. It filled my thoughts, my dreams; it gnawed me like a vulture. A hundred times while she sat complacently turning her inane periods, I had to hug my fist to my breast, lest it should leap out and strike her senseless. Do I weary you? Let me proceed:

‘That Sunday evening we sat, one on each side of the hearth, in the Vicarage drawing-room. She was talking—talking; and I sat tapping my foot and whispering to myself: “You are too fat, Lydia! you are too fat!” Her talk ran on the two sermons I had preached that day, the dresses of the congregation, the expense of living, the parish ailments—inexhaustible, trivial, relentless. Suddenly she looked up and our eyes met. Her voice trailed off and dropped like a bird wounded in full flight. She stood up and took a step towards me. “Is anything the matter, William?” she asked solicitously. “You are too fat, my dear,” I answered, laughing, and struck her full in the face with my fist.

‘She did not quiver much—not half enough—but dropped like a half-full

sack on to the carpet. I caught up a candle and examined her. Her neck was dislocated. She was quite dead.'

The madman skipped up from his boulder, and looked at me with indescribable cunning.

'I am so glad, sir,' he said, 'that you did not bleed when I struck you; it was a great mercy. The sight of blood affects me—ah!' he broke off with a subtle quiver and drew a long breath. 'Do you know the sands by Woeful Ness—the Twin Brothers?' he asked.

I knew that dreary headland well. For half a mile beyond the great Church and Vicarage of Bleakirk it extends, forming the northern arm of the small fishing-bay, and protecting it from the full set of the tides. Towards its end it breaks away sharply, and terminates in a dorsal ridge of slate-coloured rock that runs out for some two hundred feet between the sands we call the Twin Brothers. Of these, that to the south, and inside the bay, is motionless, and bears the name of the 'Dead-Boy'; but the 'Quick-Boy,' to the north, shifts continually. It is a quicksand, in short; and will swallow a man in three minutes.

'My mind,' resumed my companion, 'was soon made up. There is no murder, thought I, where there is no corpse. So I propped Lydia in the arm-chair, where she seemed as if napping, and went quietly upstairs. I packed a small hand-bag carefully with such clothes as she would need for a journey, descended with it, opened the front door, went out to be sure the servants had blown out their lights, returned, and hoisting my wife on my shoulder, with the bag in my left hand, softly closed the door and stepped out into the night. In the shed beside the garden-gate the gardener had left his wheelbarrow. I fetched it out, set Lydia on the top of it, and wheeled her off towards Woeful Ness. There was just the rim of a waning moon to light me, but I knew every inch of the way.

'For the greater part of it I had turf underfoot; but where this ended and the rock began, I had to leave the barrow behind. It was ticklish work, climbing down; for footing had to be found, and Lydia was a monstrous weight. Pah! how fat she was and clumsy—lolling this way and that! Besides, the bag hampered me. But I reached the foot at last, and after a short rest clambered out along the ridge as fast as I could. I was sick and tired of the business.

'Well, the rest was easy. Arrived at the farthest spit of rock, I tossed the bag from me far into the northern sand. Then I turned to Lydia, whom I had set down for the moment. In the moonlight her lips were parted as though she were still chattering; so I kissed her once, because I had loved her, and dropped her body over into the Quick-Boy Sand. In three minutes or so I had seen the last of her.

'I trundled home the barrow, mixed myself a glass of whisky, sat beside it

for half an hour, and then aroused the servants. I was cunning, sir; and no one could trace my footprints on the turf and rock of Woeful Ness. The missing hand-bag, and the disarray I had been careful to make in the bedroom, provided them at once with a clue—but it did not lead them to the Quick-Boy. For two days they searched. At the expiration of that time it grew clear to them that grief was turning my brain. Your father, sir, was instant with his sympathy—at least ten times a day I had much ado to keep from laughing in his face. Finally two doctors visited me, and I was taken to a madhouse.

'I have remained within its walls twenty-nine years; but no—I have never been thoroughly at home there. Two days ago I discovered that the place was *boring* me. So I determined to escape; and this to a man of my resources presented few difficulties. I borrowed this pony from a stable not many yards from the madhouse wall; he belongs, I think, to a chimney-sweep, and I trust that, after serving my purpose, he may find a way back to his master.'

I suppose at this point he must have detected the question in my eyes, for he cried sharply:

'You wish to know my purpose? It is simple.' He passed a thin hand over his forehead. 'I have been shut up, as I say, for twenty-nine years, and I now discover that the madhouse bores me. If they retake me—and the hue and cry must be out long before this—I shall be dragged back. What, then, is my proposal? I ride to Bleakirk and out along the summit of Woeful Ness. There I dismount, turn my pony loose, and, descending along the ridge, step into the sand that swallowed Lydia. Simple, is it not? *Excessi, evasi, evanui.* I shall be there before sunset—which reminds me,' he added, pulling out his watch, 'that my time is nearly up. I regret to leave you in this plight, but you see how I am placed. I felt, when I saw you, a sudden desire to unbosom myself of a secret which, until the past half-hour, I have shared with no man. I see by your eyes again that if set at liberty you would interfere with my purpose. It is unfortunate that scarcely a soul ever rides this way—I know the road of old. But to-morrow is Sunday: I will scribble a line and fix it on the church-door at Bleakirk, so that the parish may at least know your predicament before twenty-four hours are out. I must now be going. The bandanna about your mouth I entreat you to accept as a memento. With renewed apologies, sir, I wish you good day; and count it extremely fortunate that you did not bleed.'

He nodded in the friendliest manner, turned on his heel, and walked quietly towards the bridge. As he untethered his pony, mounted, and ambled quietly off in the direction of the coast, I lay stupidly watching him. His black coat for some time lay, a diminishing blot, on the brown of the moors, stood for a brief moment on the skyline, and vanished.

I must have lain above an hour in this absurd and painful position, wrestling with my bonds, and speculating on my chances of passing the night by the beckside. My ankles were tied with my own handkerchief, my wrists with the thong of my own whip, and this especially cut me. It was knotted immovably; but by rolling over and rubbing my face into the turf, I contrived at length to slip the gag down below my chin. This done, I sat up and shouted lustily.

For a long time there was no reply but the whinnying of my mare, who seemed to guess something was wrong, and pulled at her tether until I thought she would break away. I think I called a score of times before I heard an answering 'Whoo-oop!' far back on the road, and a scarlet coat, then another, and finally a dozen or more appeared on the crest of the hill. It was the hunt returning.

They saw me at once, and galloped up, speechless from sheer amazement. I believe my hands were loosened before a word was spoken. The situation was painfully ridiculous; but my story was partly out before they had time to laugh, and the rest of it was gasped to the accompaniment of pounding hoofs and cracking whips.

Never did the Netherkirk Hunt ride after fox as it rode after the Reverend William Teague that afternoon. We streamed over the moor, a thin red wave, like a rank of charging cavalry, the whip even forgetting his tired hounds that straggled aimlessly in our wake. On the hill above Bleakirk we saw that the tide was out, and our company divided without drawing rein, some four horsemen descending to the beach, to ride along the sands out under Woeful Ness, and across the Dead-Boy, hoping to gain the ridge before the madman and cut him off. The rest, whom I led by a few yards, breasted the height above and thundered past the grey churchyard wall. Inside it I caught a flying glimpse of the yellow pony quietly cropping among the tombs. We had our prey, then, enclosed in that peninsula as in a trap; but there was one outlet.

I remember looking down towards the village as we tore along, and seeing the fisher-folk run out at their doors and stand staring at the two bodies of horsemen thus rushing to the sea. The riders on the beach had a slight lead of us at first; but this they quickly lost as their horses began to be distressed in the heavy sand. I looked back for an instant. The others were close at my heels; and, behind again, the bewildered hounds followed, yelping mournfully. But neither man nor hound could see him whom they hunted, for the cliff's edge hid the quicksand in front.

Presently the turf ceased. Dismounting, I ran to the edge and plunged down the rocky face. I had descended about twenty feet, when I came to the spot where, by craning forward, I could catch sight of the spit of rock, and the Quick-Boy Sand to the right of it.

The sun—a blazing ball of red—was just now setting behind us, and its level rays fell full upon the man we were chasing. He stood on the very edge of the rocks, a black spot against the luminous yellow of sea and sand. He seemed to be meditating. His back was towards us, and he perceived neither his pursuers above nor the heads that at this moment appeared over the ridge behind him, and not fifteen yards away. The party on the beach had dismounted and was clambering up stealthily. Five seconds more and they could spring upon him.

But they under-estimated a madman's instinct. As if for no reason, he gave a quick start, turned, and at the same instant was aware of both attacking parties. A last gleam of sunlight fell on the snuff-box in his left hand; his right thumb and fore-finger hung arrested, grasping the pinch. For fully half a minute nothing happened; hunters and hunted eyed each other and waited. Then carrying the snuff to his nose, and doffing his hat, with a satirical sweep of the hand and a low bow, he turned again and tripped off the ledge into the jaws of the Quick-Boy.

There was no help now. At his third step the sand had him by the ankles. For a moment he fought it, then, throwing up his arms, sank forward, slowly and as if bowing yet, upon his face. Second by second we stood and watched him disappear. Within five minutes the ripples of the Quick-Boy Sand met once more above him.

In the course of the next afternoon the Vicar of Bleakirk called at the Hall with a paper which he had found pinned to the church-door. It was evidently a scrap torn from an old letter, and bore, scribbled in pencil by a clerkly hand, these words: 'The young Squire Cartwright in straits by the foot-bridge, six miles toward Netherkirk. *Orate pro arma Gulielmi Teague*.'

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTMAS

And moreover, at this Fair there is at all times to be seen Jugglings, Cheats, Games, Plays, Fools, Apes, Knaves, and Rogues, and that of every kind. . . . Now, as I said, the way to the Celestial City lies just through this town, where this lusty Fair is kept; and he that will go to the City, and yet not go through this Town, must needs go out of the World.—BUNYAN.

I

AT the theatre in Shoreditch, on Christmas Eve, 1598, the Lord Chamberlain's servants presented a new comedy. Never had the Burbages played to such a house. It cheered every speech—good, bad, or indifferent. To be sure, some of the *dramatis personae*—Prince Hal and Falstaff, Bardolph and Mistress Quickly—were old friends; but this alone would not account for such a welcome. A cutpurse in the twopenny gallery who had been paid to lead the applause gave up toiling in the wake of it, and leaned back with a puzzled grin.

'Bravo, master!' said he to his left-hand neighbour, a burly, red-faced countryman well past middle age, whose laughter kept the bench rocking. 'But have a care, lest they mistake you for the author!'

'The author? Ho-ho!'——but here he broke off to leap to his feet and lead another round of applause. 'The author?' he repeated, dropping back and glancing an eye sidelong from under his handkerchief while he mopped his brow. 'You shoot better than you know, my friend: the bolt grazes. But a miss, they say, is as good as a mile.'

The cutpurse kept his furtive grin, but was evidently mystified. A while before it had been the countryman who showed signs of bewilderment. Until the drawing of the curtains he had fidgeted nervously, then, as now, mopping his forehead in despite of the raw December air. The first shouts of applause had seemed to astonish as well as delight him. When, for example, a player stepped forward and flung an arm impressively towards heaven while he recited—

> When we mean to build,
> We first survey the plot, then draw the model—

and so paused with a smile, his voice drowned in thunder from every side of the house, our friend had rubbed his eyes and gazed around in amiable protest, as who should say: 'Come, come . . . but let us discriminate!' By and by, however, as the indiscriminate applause grew warmer, he warmed with it. At

the entrance of Falstaff he let out a bellowing laugh worthy of Olympian Jove, and from that moment led the house. The fops on the sixpenny stools began to mimic, the pit and lower gallery to crane necks for a sight of their fugleman; a few serious playgoers called to have him pitched out, but the mass of the audience backed him with shouts of encouragement. Some wag hailed him as 'Burbage's Landlord,' and apparently there was meaning, if not merit, in the jest. Without understanding it he played up to it royally, leaning forward for each tally-ho! and afterwards waving his hat as a huntsman laying on his hounds.

The pace of the performance (it had begun at one o'clock) dragged sensibly with all this, and midway in Act IV, as the edge of a grey river-fog overlapped and settled gradually upon the well of the roofless theatre, voices began to cough and call for lanterns. Two lackeys ran with a dozen. Some they hung from the balcony at the back, others they disposed along both sides of the stage, in front of the sixpenny stools, the audience all the while chaffing them by their Christian names and affectionately pelting them with nuts. Still the fog gathered, until the lantern-rays criss-crossed the stage in separate shafts, and among them the actors moved through Act V in an opaline haze, their figures looming large, their voices muffled and incredibly remote.

An idle apprentice, seated on the right of the cutpurse, began for a game to stop and unstop his ears. This gave the cutpurse an opportunity to search his pockets. *Cantat vacuus*: the apprentice felt him at it and went on with his game. Whenever he stopped his ears the steaming breath of the players reminded him of the painted figures he had seen carried in my Lord Mayor's Show, with labels issuing from their mouths.

He had stopped his ears during the scene of King Henry's reconciliation with Chief Justice Gascoigne, and unstopped them eagerly again when his old friends reappeared—Falstaff and Bardolph and Pistol, all agog and hurrying, hotfoot, boot-and-saddle, to salute the rising sun of favour. 'Welcome these pleasant days!' He stamped and clapped, following his neighbour's lead, and also because his feet and hands were cold.

Eh? What was the matter? Surely the fog had taken hold of the rogues! What was happening to Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet? Poor souls, they were but children: they had meant no harm. For certain this plaguy fog was infecting the play; and yet, for all the fog, the play was a play no longer, but of a sudden had become savagely real. Why was this man turning on his puppets and rending them. The worst was, they bled—not sawdust, but real blood.

The apprentice cracked a nut and peeled it meditatively, with a glance along the bench. The countryman still fugled; the cutpurse cackled, with lips drawn back like a wolf's, showing his yellow teeth.

'Hist, thou silly knave!' said the apprentice. 'Canst not see 'tis a tragedy?'

The rascal peered at him for a moment, burst out laughing and nudged the countryman.

‘Hi, master! Breeds your common at home any such goose as this, that cannot tell tickling from roasting?’

The apprentice cracked another nut. ‘Give it time,’ he answered. ‘I said a tragedy. Yours, if you will, my friend; *his* too, may be’—with a long and curious stare at the countryman.

II

‘My tongue is weary: when my legs are too, I will bid you goodnight: and so kneel down before you; but indeed to pray for the Queen.’

Play, epilogue, dance, all were over; the curtains drawn, the lanterns hidden behind them. The cutpurse had slipped away, and the countryman and apprentice found themselves side by side waiting while the gallery dissolved its crowd into the fog.

‘A brisk fellow,’ remarked the one, nodding at the vacant seat as he stowed away his handkerchief. ‘But why should he guess me a rustic?’

‘The fellow has no discernment,’ the apprentice answered dryly. ‘He even took the play for a merry one.’

The countryman peered forward into the young-old face silhouetted against the glow which, cast upward and over the curtain-rod across the stage, but faintly reached the gallery.

‘I love wit, sir, wherever I meet it. For a pint of sack you shall prove me this play a sad one, and choose your tavern!’

‘I thank you, but had liefer begin and discuss the epilogue: and the epilogue is “Who’s to pay?” ’

‘A gentleman of Warwickshire, Master What-d’ye-lack—will that content you? A gentleman of Warwickshire, with a coat-of-arms, or the College’s promise—which, I take it, amounts to the same thing.’ The countryman puffed his cheeks.

‘So-so?’ The apprentice chuckled.

‘When we mean to build
We first survey the plot, then search our pockets.

How goes it? Either so, or to that effect.’

‘The devil!’ The countryman, who had been fumbling in his breek pockets, drew forth two hands blankly, spreading empty fingers.

‘That was your neighbour, sir: a brisk fellow, as you were clever enough to detect, albeit unserviceably late. I wish we had made acquaintance sooner: ’twould have given me liberty to warn you.’

‘It had been a Christian’s merest duty.’

‘La, la, master! In London the sneaking of a purse is no such rarity that a poor ’prentice pays twopence to gape at it. I paid to see the play, sir, and fought hard for my seat. Before my master gave over beating me, in fear of my inches and his wife (who has a liking for me), he taught me to husband my time. For your purse, the back of my head had eyes enough to tell me what befalls when a lean dog finds himself alongside a bone.’

He seated himself on the bench, unstrapped a shoe, slipped two fingers beneath his stocking, and drew forth a silver piece. ‘If a gentleman of Warwickshire will be beholden to a poor apprentice of Cheapside?’

‘Put it up, boy; but it up! I need not your money, good lad: but I like the spirit of that offer, and to meet it will enlarge my promise. A pint of sack, did I say? You shall sup with me to-night, and of the best, or I am a Dutchman. We will go see the town together—the roaring, gallant town. I will make you free of great company: you shall hear the talk of gods.’ Lord, how a man rusts in the country!—for, I will confess it to you, lad, the rogue hit the mark: the country is my home.’

‘I cannot think how he guessed it.’

‘Nor I. And yet he was wrong, too: for that cannot be called home where a man is never at his ease. I had passed your years, lad, before ever I saw London; and ever since, when my boots have been deepest in Midland clay, I have heard her bells summon me, clear as ever they called to Whittington, “London, thou art of townes *a per se*.” Nay, almost on that first pilgrimage I came to her as a son. *Urbem quam dicunt Romam*—I was no such clodpate as that rustic of Virgil’s. I came expecting all things, and of none did she disappoint me. Give me the Capital before all! ’Tis only there a man measures himself with men.’

‘And cutpurses?’ the apprentice interjected.

‘Good and bad, rough and smooth,’ the countryman assented, with a large and catholic smile. ‘ ’Tis no question of degrees, my friend, but of kind. I begin to think that, dwelling in London, you have not made her acquaintance. But you shall. As a father, lad,—for I like you,—I will open your eyes and teach you your inheritance. What say you to the Bankside, for example?’

‘The Bankside—hem!—and as a father!’ scoffed the youth, but his eyes glistened. He was wise beyond his opportunities, and knew all about the Bankside, albeit he had never walked through that quarter but in daylight, wondering at the histories behind its house-fronts.

‘As a father, I said; and evil be to him who evil thinks.’

‘I can tell you of one who will think evil; and that is my master. I can tell you of another; and that will be the sheriff, when I am haled before him.’

‘You said just now—or my hearing played a trick—that your mistress had

a liking for you.'

'And *you* said: "Evil be to him that evil thinks." She hath a double chin, and owns to fifty-five.'

'What, chins!'

'Years, years, master. Like a grandmother she dotes on me and looks after my morals. Nathless, when you talk of Bankside——' The apprentice hesitated: in the dusk his shrewd young eyes glistened. 'Say that I risk it?' He hesitated again.

'Lads were not so cautious in my young days. I pay the shot, I tell you—a gentleman of Warwickshire and known to the College of Arms.'

'It standeth on Paul's Wharf and handy for the ferry to Bankside: but the College closes early on Christmas Eve, and the Heralds be all at holiday. An you think of pawning your coat-of-arms with them to raise the wind, never say that I let you take that long way round without warning.'

'Leave the cost to me, once more!' The countryman gazed down into the well of the theatre as if seeking an acquaintance among the figures below. 'But what are they doing? What a plague means this hammering? A man cannot hear himself speak for it.'

' 'Tis the play.'

'The play?'

'The true play—the play you applauded: and writ by the same Will Shakespeare, they tell me—some share of it at least. Cometh he not, by the way, from your part of the world?'

The countryman's eyes glistened in their turn: almost in the dusk they appeared to shine with tears.

'Ay, I knew him, down in Warwickshire: a good lad he was, though his mother wept over him for a wild one. Hast ever seen a hen when her duckling takes to water? So it is with woman when, haply, she has hatched out genius.'

The apprentice slapped his leg. 'I could have sworn it!'

'Hey?'

'Nay, question me not, master, for I cannot bring it to words. You tell me that you knew him: and I—on the instant I clapped eyes on you it seemed that somehow you were part of his world and somehow had belonged to him. Nearer I cannot get, unless you tell me more.'

'I knew him: to be sure, down in Warwickshire: but, he has gone someway beyond my knowledge, living in London you see.'

'He goes beyond any man's knowledge: he that has taught us to ken the world with new eyes. I tell you, master,'—the apprentice stretched out a hand,—'I go seeking him like one seeking a father who has begotten him into a new world, seeking him with eyes derived from him. Tell me——'

But the countryman was leaning over the gallery-rail and scanning the pit

again. He seemed a trifle bored by a conversation if not of less, then certainly of other, wit than he had bargained for. Somebody had drawn the curtains back from the stage, where the two lackeys who had decked the balcony with lanterns were busy now with crowbars, levering its wooden supports from their sockets.

'Sure,' said he, musing, 'they don't lift and pack away the stage every night, do they? Or is this some new law to harass players?' He brought his attention back to the apprentice with an effort. 'If you feel that way towards him, lad,' he answered, 'why not accost him? He walks London streets; and he has, if I remember, a courteous, easy manner.'

'If the man and his secret were one! But they are not, and there lies the fear—that by finding one I shall miss the other and recover it never. I cannot dare either risk: I want them both. You saw, this afternoon, how, when the secret came within grasp, the man slipped away; how, having taught us to know Falstaff as a foot its old shoe, he left us wondering on a sudden why we laughed! And yet 'twas not sudden, but bred in the play from the beginning; no, nor cruel, but merely right: only he had persuaded us to forget it.'

The countryman put up a hand to hide a yawn: and the yawn ended in a slow chuckle.

'Eh? that rogue Falstaff was served out handsomely: though, to tell the truth, I paid no great heed to the last scene, my midriff being sore with laughing.'

The apprentice sighed.

'But what is happening below?' the other went on impatiently. 'Are they taking the whole theatre to pieces?'

'That is part of the play.'

'A whole regiment of workmen!'

'And no stage-army, neither. Yet they come into the play—not the play you saw without understanding, but the play you understood without seeing. They call it *The Phoenix*. Be seated, master, while I unfold the plot: this hammering deafens me. The Burbages, you must know——'

'I knew old James, the father. He brought me down a company of players to our town the year I was High Bailiff; the first that ever played in our Guildhall. Though a countryman, I have loved the arts—even to the length of losing much money by them. A boon fellow, old James! and yet dignified as any alderman. He died—let me see—was it two year agone? The news kept me sad for a week.'

'A good player, too,'—the apprentice nodded,—'though not a patch upon his son Richard. Cuthbert will serve, in ripe sententious parts that need gravity and a good memory for the lines. But Richard bears the bell of the Burbages. Well, sir, old James being dead, and suddenly, and (as you say) these two

years come February, his sons must go suing to the ground-landlord, the theatre being leased upon their dad's life. You follow me?'

The countryman nodded in his turn.

'Very well. The landlord, being a skinflint, was willing to renew the lease, but must raise the rent. If they refused to pay it, the playhouse fell to him. You may fancy how the Burbages called gods and men to witness. Being acquainted with players, you must know how little they enjoy affliction until the whole town shares it. Never so rang Jerusalem with all the woes of Jeremy as did City and suburb,—from north beyond Bishopsgate to south along the river, with the cursings of this landlord, who—to cap the humour of it—is a precisian, and never goes near a playhouse. Nevertheless, he patched up a truce for two years ending to-night, raising the rent a little, but not to the stretch of his demands. To-morrow—or, rather, the day after, since to-morrow is Christmas—the word is pay or quit. But in yielding this he yielded our friends the counterstroke. They have bought a plot across the water, in the Clink liberty: and to-morrow, should he pass this way to church, no theatre will be here for him to smack his Puritan lips over. But for this hammering and the deep slush outside you might even now hear the rumbling of wagons; for wagons there be, a dozen of them, ready to cart the Muses over the bridge before midnight. 'Tis the proper vehicle of Thespis. See those dozen stout rascals lifting the proscenium——'

The countryman smote his great hands together, flung back his head, and let his lungs open in shout after shout of laughter.

'But, master——'

'Oh—oh—oh! Hold my sides, lad, or I start a rib. . . . Nay, if you keep st-staring at me with that s-sol-ol-ol-emn face. Don't—oh, *don't*!'

'Now I know,' murmured the apprentice, 'what kind of jest goes down in the country: and, by 'r Lady, it goes deep!'

But an instant later the man had heaved himself upon his feet; his eyes expanded from their creases into great O's; his whole body towered and distended itself in gigantic indignation. 'The villain.' The nip-cheese curmudgeonly villain! And we tarry here, talking, while such things are done in England! A Nabal, I say. Give me a hammer!' He heaved up an enormous thigh and bestrode the gallery-rail.

'Have a care, master: the rail——'

'A hammer! Below there.—A hammer!' He leaned over, bellowing. The gang of workmen lifting the proscenium stared up open-mouthed into the foggy gloom—a ring of ghostly faces upturned in a luminous haze.

Already the man's legs dangled over the void. Twelve, fifteen feet perhaps, beneath him projected a lower gallery, empty but for three tiers of disordered benches. Plumb as a gannet he dropped, and an eloquent crash of timber

reported his arrival below. The apprentice, craning over, saw him regain his feet, scramble over the second rail, and vanish. Followed an instant's silence, a dull thud, a cry from the workmen in the area. The apprentice ran for the gallery stairs and leapt down them, three steps at a time.

It took him, maybe, forty seconds to reach the area. There already, stripped to the shirt, in a whirl of dust and voices, stood his friend waving a hammer and shouting down the loudest. The man was possessed, transformed, a Boanerges; his hammer, a hammer of Thor! He had caught it from the hand of a douce, sober-looking man in a plum-coloured doublet, who stood watching but taking no active share in the work.

'By your leave, sir!'

'With or without my leave, good sir, since you are determined to have it,' said the quiet man, surrendering the hammer.

The countryman snatched and thrust it between his knees while he loosened his collar. Then, having spat on both hands, he grasped the hammer and tried its poise. ' 'Tis odd, now,' said he, as if upon an afterthought, staring down on the quiet man, 'but methinks I know your voice?'

'Marry and there's justice in that,' the quiet man answered; 'for 'tis the ghost of one you drowned erewhile.'

III

'Tom! What, Tom! Where be the others? I tell thee, Tom, there have been doings . . .'

'Is that Dick Burbage?' A frail, thin windle-straw of a man came coughing across the foggy courtyard with a stable-lantern, holding it high. Its rays wavered on his own face, which was young but extraordinarily haggard, and on the piles of timber between and over which he picked his way—timbers heaped pell-mell in the slush of the yard or stacked against the boundary wall, some daubed with paint, others gilded wholly or in part and twinkling as the lantern swung. 'Dick Burbage already? Has it miscarried, then?'

'Miscarried? What in the world was there to miscarry? I tell thee, Tom—but where be the others?'

The frail man jerked a thumb at the darkness behind his shoulder. 'Hark to them, back yonder, stacking the beams! Where should they be? and what doing but at work like galley-slaves, by the pace you have kept us going? Look around. I tell you from the first 'twas busy-all to get the yard clear between the wagons' coming, and at the fifth load we gave it up. My shirt clings like a dish-clout; a chill on this will be the death o' me. What a plague! How many scoundrels did you hire, that they take a house to pieces and cart it across Thames faster than we can unload it?'

‘That’s the kernel of the story, lad. I hired the two score rogues agreed on, neither more nor less: but one descended out of heaven and raised the number to twelve score. Ten-score extra, as I am a sinner; and yet but one man, for I counted him. His name he told me, was Legion.’

‘Dick,’ said the other sadly, ‘when a sober man gives way to drinking—I don’t blame you: and your pocket will be the loser more than all the rest if you’ve boggled to-night’s work; but poor Cuthbert will take it to heart.’

‘There was a man, I tell you——’

‘Tut, tut, pull yourself together and run back across the bridge. Or let me go: take my arm now, before the others see you. You shall tell me on the way what’s wrong at Shoreditch.’

‘There is naught wrong with Shoreditch, forby that it has lost a theatre: and I am not drunk, Tom Nashe—no, not by one-tenth as drunk as I deserve to be, seeing that the house is down, every stick of it, and the bells scarce yet tolling midnight. ’Twas all this man, I tell you!’

‘Down? The Theatre down? Oh, go back, Dick Burbage!’

‘Level with the ground, I tell you—his site a habitation for the satyr. *Cecidit, cecidit Babylon illa magna!* and the last remains of it, more by token, following close on my heels in six wagons. Hist, then, my Thomas, my Didymus, my doubting one!—Canst not hear the rumble of their wheels? and—and—oh, good Lord!’ Burbage caught his friend by the arm and leaned against him heavily. ‘*He* ’s there, and following!’

The wagons came rolling over the cobbles of the Clink along the roadway outside the high boundary-wall of the yard: and as they came, clear above their rumble and the slow clatter of hoofs a voice like a trumpet declaimed into the night:

> ‘Above all ryvers thy Ryver hath renowne,
> Whose beryall streamys, pleasaunt and predare,
> Under thy lusty wallys renneth downe,
> Where many a swan doth swymme with wyngis fair,
> Where many a barge doth sail and row with are——

We had done better—a murrain on their cobbles!—we had done better, lad, to step around by Paul’s Wharf and take boat. . . . This jolting ill agrees with a man of my weight. . . .

> ‘Where many a barge doth sail aund row with are—

Gr-r-r! Did I not warn thee beware, master wagoner, of the kerbstones at the corners? We had done better by water, what though it be dark. . . . Lights of Bankside on the water . . . no such sight in Europe, they tell me. . . . My Lord of Surrey took boat one night from Westminster and fired into their windows with a stone-bow, breaking much glass . . . drove all the longshore queans screaming into the streets in their night-rails. . . . He went to the Fleet for it . . .

a Privy Council matter. . . . I forgive the lad, for my part: for only think of it—all those windows aflame on the river, and no such river in Europe!—

‘Where many a barge doth sail and row with are;
Where many a ship doth rest with top-royall.
O towne of townes! patrone and not compare,
London, thou art the flow’r of Cities all!

Who-oop!’

‘In the name of——’ stammered Nashe, as he listened, Burbage all the while clutching his arm.

‘He dropped from the top gallery, I tell you—clean into the pit from the top gallery—and he weighs eighteen stone if an ounce. “Your servant, sir, and of all the Muses,” he says, picking himself up; and with that takes the hammer from my hand and plays Pyrrhus in Troy—Pyrrhus with all the ravening Danai behind him: for those hired scoundrels of mine took fire, and started ripping out the bowels of the poor old theatre as though it had been the Fleet and lodged all their cronies within! It went down before my eyes like a sand-castle before the tide. Within three hours they had wiped the earth of it. The Lord be praised that Philip Gosson had ne’er such an arm, nor could command such! Oh, but he’s a portent! Troy’s horse and Bankes’s bay gelding together are a fool to him: he would harness them as Samson did the little foxes, and fire brushwood under their tails. . . .’

‘Of a certainty you are drunk, Dick.’

‘Drunk? I?’ Burbage gripped the other’s thin arm hysterically. ‘If you want to see a man drunk, come to the gate. Nay, then stay where you are: for there’s no escaping him.’

Nor was there. Between them and the wagoners’ lanterns at the gate a huge shadow thrust itself, the owner of it rolling like a ship in a seaway, while he yet recited:

‘Strong be thy wallis that about thee standis,

(meaning the Clink, my son),

‘Wise be the people that within thee dwellis,

(which you may take for the inhabitants thereof),

‘Fresh is thy ryver with his lusty strandis,
Blith be thy chirches, wele sowning be thy bellis.’

‘Well sounding is my belly, master, any way,’ put in a high, thin voice; ‘and it calls on a gentleman of Warwickshire to redeem his promise.’

‘He shall, he shall, lad—in the fullness of time: “but before dining, ring at the bell,” says the proverb. Grope, lad, feel along the gate-posts if this yard, this courtlage, this base-court, hath any such thing as bell or knocker.

‘And when they came to mery Carleile
All in the mornyng tyde-a,
They found the gates shut them until
About on every syde-a.

‘Then Adam Bell bete on the gates
With strokès great and stronge-a—

Step warely, lad. Plague of this forest! Have we brought timber to Sherwood?

‘With strokès great and stronge-a—
The porter marveiled who was thereat,
And to the gates he thronge-a.

‘They called the porter to counsell,
And wrange his necke in two-a,
And caste him in a depe dungeon,
And took hys keys hym fro-a.

Within! You rascal, there, with the lantern! . . . Eh? but these be two gentlemen, it appears? I cry you mercy, sirs.’

‘For calling us rascals?’ Nashe stepped forward. ‘ ’T hath been done to me before now, in print, upon as good evidence; and to my friend here by Act of Parliament.’

‘But seeing you with a common stable-lantern——’

‘Yet Diogenes was a gentleman. Put it that, like him, I am searching for an honest man.’

‘Then we are well met. I’ faith we are very well met,’ responded the countryman, recognizing Burbage’s grave face and plum-coloured doublet.

‘Or, as one might better say, well overtaken,’ said Burbage.

‘Marry, and with a suit. I have some acquaintance, sir, with members of your honourable calling, as in detail and at large I could prove to you. Either I have made poor use of it or I guess aright, as I guess with confidence, that after the triumph will come the speech-making, and the supper’s already bespoken.’

‘At Nance Witwold’s, by the corner of Paris Garden, sir, where you shall be welcome.’

‘I thank you, sir. But my suit is rather for this young friend of mine, to whom I have pledged my word.’

‘He shall be welcome, too.’

‘He tells me, sir, that you are Richard Burbage. I knew your father well, sir—an honest Warwickshire man: he condescended to my roof and tasted my poor hospitality many a time; and belike you, too, sir, being then a child, may have done the same, for I talk of prosperous days long since past—nay, so long since that t’would be a wonder indeed had you remembered me. The more pleasure it gives me, sir, to find James Burbage’s sappy virtues flourishing in the young wood, and by the branch be reminded of the noble stock.’

‘The happier am I, sir, to have given you welcome or ever I heard your claim.’

‘Faith!’ said the apprentice to himself, ‘compliments begin to fly when gentlefolks meet.’ But he had not bargained to sup in this high company, and the prospect thrilled him with delicious terror. He glanced nervously across the yard, where someone was approaching with another lantern.

‘My claim?’ the countryman answered Burbage. ‘You have heard but a part of it as yet. Nay, you have heard none of it, since I use not past hospitalities with old friends to claim a return from their children. My claim, sir, is a livelier one——’

‘Tom Nashe! Tom Nashe!’ called a voice, clear and strong and masculine, from the darkness behind the advancing lantern.

‘Anon, anon, sir,’ quoted Nashe, swinging his own lantern about and mimicking.

‘Don’t tell me there be yet more wagons arrived?’ asked the voice.

‘Six, lad—six, as I hope for mercy: and outside the gate at this moment.’

‘There they must tarry, then, till our fellows take breath to unload ’em. But—six? How is it managed, think you? Has Dick Burbage called out the train-bands to help him? Why, hallo, Dick! What means——’ The new-comer’s eyes, round with wonder as they rested a moment on Burbage, grew rounder yet as they travelled past him to the countryman. ‘Father?’ he stammered, incredulous.

‘Good evening, Will.’ Give ye good evening, my son! Set down that lantern and embrace me, like a good boy: a good boy, albeit a man of fame. Didst not see me, then, in the theatre this afternoon? Yet was I to the fore there, methinks, and proud to be called John Shakespeare.’

‘Nay, I was not there; having other fish to fry.’

‘Shouldst have heard the applause, lad; it warmed your old father’s heart. Yet ’twas no more than the play deserved. A very neat, pretty drollery—upon my faith, no man’s son could have written a neater!’

‘But what hath fetched you to London?’

‘Business, business: a touch, too, maybe, of the old homesickness: but business first. Dick Quiney——But pass me the lantern, my son, that I may take a look at thee. Ay, thou hast sobered, thou hast solidified: thy beard hath ta’en the right citizen’s cut—’twould ha’ been a cordial to thy poor mother to see thee wear so staid a beard. Rest her soul! There’s nothing like property for filling out a man’s frame, firming his eye, his frame, bearing, footstep. Talking of property, I have been none so idle a steward for thee. New Place I have made habitable—the house at least; patched up the roof, taken down and rebuilt the west chimney that was overleaning the road, repaired the launders, enlarged the parlour-window, run out the kitchen passage to a new back-

entrance. The garden I cropped with peas this summer, and have set lettuce and winter-kale between the young apple-trees, whereof the whole are doing well, and the mulberry likewise I look for to thrive. Well, as I was saying, Dick Quiney——'

'—Is in trouble again, you need not tell.'

'None so bad but it could be mended by the thirty pounds whereof I wrote. Mytton will be security with him, now that Bushell draws back. He offers better than those few acres at Shottery you dealt upon in January.'

'Land is land.'

'And ale is ale: you may take up a mortgage on the brewhouse. Hast ever heard, Mr. Burbage'—John Shakespeare swung about—'of a proverb we have down in our Warwickshire? It goes:

'Who buys land buys stones,
Who buys meat buys bones,
Who buys eggs buys shells,
But who buys ale buys nothing else.

And that sets me in mind, Will, that these friends of yours have bidden me to supper: and their throats will be dry an we keep 'em gaping at our country discourse. Here come I with Thespis, riding on a wagon: but where tarries the vintage feast? Where be the spigots? Where be the roasted geese, capons, sucking-pigs? Where the hogs-puddings, the trifles, the custards, the frumenties? Where the minstrels? Where the dancing girls? I have in these three hours swallowed as many pecks of dust. I am for the bucket before the manger and for good talk after both—high, brave translunary talk with wine in the veins of it—Hippocras with hippocrene: with music too—some little kickshaw whatnots of the theorbo or viol da gamba pleasantly thrown in for interludes. 'Tis a fog-pated land I come from, with a pestilent rheumy drip from the trees and the country scarce recovered from last year's dearth——'

'Dick Quiney should have made the better prices for that dearth,' put in his son, knitting his great brow thoughtfully. 'With wheat at fifty shillings, and oats——'

'The malt, lad, the malt! His brewhouse swallowed malt at twenty-eight or -nine which a short two years before had cost him twelve-and-threepence the quarter. A year of dearth, I say. It took poor Dick at unawares. But give him time: he will pull round. Sure, we be slow in the country, but you have some in this town that will beat us. How many years, lad, have I been battering the doors of Heralds' College for that grant of arms, promised ere my beard was grey and yours fully grown?'

'Malt at twenty-eight, you say?'

'Last year, lad—a year of dearth. Call it a good twenty in these bettering times, and wheat anything under forty-five shillings.'

‘Well, we will talk it over.’ His son seemed to come out of a brown study. ‘We will talk it over,’ he repeated briskly, and added: ‘How? The chimney overleaning the road? ’Twas a stout enough chimney, as I remember, and might have lasted another twenty years. Where did you draw the bricks?’

Nashe glanced at his friend with a puzzled smile. Burbage—better used, no doubt, to the businesslike ways of authors—betrayed no surprise. The apprentice stared, scarcely believing his ears. Was this the talk of Shakespeare? Nay, rather the talk of Justice Shallow himself—‘How a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford Fair?’ ‘How a score of ewes now?’

A heavy tread approached from the gateway.

‘Are we to bide here all night, and on Christmas morn, too?’ a gruff voice demanded. ‘Unpack, and pay us our wage, or we tip the whole load of it into Thames.’ Here the wagoner’s shin encountered in the darkness with a plank, and he cursed violently.

‘Go you back to your horses, my friend,’ answered Burbage. ‘The unloading shall begin anon. As for your wage, your master will tell you I settled it at the time I bargained for his wagons—ay, and paid. I hold his receipt.’

‘For tenpence a man—mowers’ wages,’ growled the wagoner.

‘I asked him his price and he fixed it. ’Tis the current rate, I understand, and a trifle over.’

‘Depends on the job. I’ve been talkin’ with my mates, and we don’t like it. We’re decent labouring men, and shifting a lot of play-actors’ baggage don’t come in our day’s work. I’d as lief wash dirty linen for my part. Therefore,’ the fellow wound up lucidly, ‘you’ll make it twelvepence a head, master. We don’t rake a groat less.’

‘I see,’ said Burbage blandly: ‘twopence for salving your conscience, hey? And so, being a decent man, you don’t stomach players?’

‘No, nor the Bankside at this hour o’ night. I live clean, I tell you.’

‘ ’Tis a godless neighbourhood and a violent.’ Burbage drew a silver whistle from his doublet and eyed it. ‘Listen a moment, master wagoner, and tell me what you hear.’

‘I hear music o’ sorts. No Christmas carols, I warrant.’

‘Aught else?’

‘Ay: a sound like a noise of dogs baying over yonder.’

‘Right again: it comes from the kennels by the Bear-Pit. Have you a wish, my friend, to make nearer acquaintance with these dogs? No? With the bears, then? Say the word, and inside of a minute I can whistle up your two-pennyworth.’

The wagoner with a dropping jaw stared from one to another of the ring of faces in the lantern-light. They were quiet, determined. Only the apprentice

stood with ears pricked, as it were, and shivered at the distant baying.

'No offence, sir; I meant no offence, you'll understand,' the wagoner stammered.

'Nay, call your mates, man!' spoke up William Shakespeare, sudden and sharp, and with a scornful ring in his voice which caused our apprentice to jump. 'Call them in and let us hear you expound Master Burbage's proposal. I am curious to see how they treat you—having an opinion of my own on crowds and their leaders.'

But the wagoner had swung about surlily on his heel.

'I'll not risk disputing it,' he growled. ' 'Tis your own dunghill, and I must e'en take your word that 'tis worse than e'er a man thought. But one thing I'll not take back. You're a muck of play-actors, and a man that touches ye should charge for his washing. Gr-r!' he spat—'ye're worse than Patty Ward's sow, and *she* was no lavender!'

IV

The Bankside was demure. But for the distant baying of dogs which kept him shivering, our apprentice had been disappointed in the wickedness of it.

He had looked to meet with roisterers, to pass amid a riot of taverns, to happen, belike, upon a street scuffle, to see swords drawn or perchance to come upon a body stretched across the roadway and hear the murderers' footsteps in the darkness, running. These were the pictures his imagination had drawn and shuddered at: for he was a youth of small courage.

But the Bankside was demure; demure as Chepe. The waterside lanes leading to Mistress Witwold's at the corner of Paris Gardens differed only from Chepe in this—that though the hour was past midnight, every other door stood open or at least ajar, showing a light through the fog. Through some of these doorways came the buzz and murmur of voices, the tinkling of stringed instruments. Others seemed to await their guests. But the lanes themselves were deserted.

From the overhanging upper storeys light showed here and there through the chinks of louvers or curtains. Once or twice in the shadows beneath our apprentice saw, or thought he saw, darker shadows draw back and disappear: and gradually a feeling grew upon him that all these shadows, all these lidded upper windows, were watching, following him with curious eyes. Again, though the open doorways were bright as for a fête, a something seemed to subdue the voices within—a constraint, perhaps an expectancy—as though the inmates whispered together in the pauses of their talk and between the soft thrumming of strings. He took note, too, that his companions had fallen silent.

Mother Witwold's door, when they reached it, stood open like the rest. Her

house overhung a corner where from the main street a short alley ran down to Paris Garden stairs. Nashe, who had been leading along the narrow pavement, halted outside the threshold to extinguish his lantern; and at the same moment jerked his face upward. Aloft, in one of the houses across the way, a lattice had flown open with a crash of glass.

'Jesu! help!'

The cry ended in a strangling sob. The hands that had thrust the lattice open projected over the sill. By the faint foggy light of Mother Witwold's doorway our apprentice saw them outstretched for a moment; saw them disappear, the wrists still rigid, as someone drew them back into the room. But what sent the horror crawling through the roots of his hair was the shape of these hands.

'You there!' called Nashe, snatching the second lantern from Burbage's hand and holding it aloft towards the dim house-front. 'What's wrong within?'

A woman's hand came around the curtain and felt for the lattice stealthily, to close it. There was no other answer.

'What's wrong there?' demanded Nashe again.

'Go your ways!' The voice was a woman's, hoarse and angry, yet frightened withal. The curtain still hid her. 'Haven't I trouble enough with these tetchy dwarfs, but you must add to it by waking the streets?'

'Dwarfs?' Nashe swung the lantern so that its rays fell on the house-door below: a closed door and stout, studded with iron nails. 'Dwarfs?' he repeated.

'Let her be,' said Burbage, taking his arm. 'I know the woman. She keeps a brace of misbegotten monsters she picked up at Wapping off a ship's captain. He brought 'em home from the Isle of Serendib, or Cathay, or some such outlandish coast, or so she swears his word was.'

'Swears, doth she? Didst hear the poor thing cry out?'

'Ay, like any Christian; as, for aught I know, it may be. There's another tale that she found 'em down in Gloucestershire, at a country fair, and keeps 'em pickled in walnut juice. But monsters they be, whether of Gloucester or Cathay, for I have seen 'em; and so hath the Queen, who sent for them the other day to be brought to Westminster, and there took much delight in their oddity.'

While the others hesitated, William Shakespeare turned on his heel and walked past them into Mother Witwold's lighted doorway.

His father glanced after him. 'Well, to be sure, the poor thing cried out like a Christian,' he said. 'But dwarfs and monsters be kittle cattle to handle, I am told.' As the lattice closed on their debate he linked his arm in the apprentice's, and they too passed in at the doorway.

From it a narrow passage led straight to a narrow staircase; and at the stairs' foot the apprentice had another glimpse into the life of this Bankside. A

door stood wide there upon an ill-lighted room, and close within the door sat two men—foreigners by their black-avised faces—casting dice upon a drumhead. In a chair, beyond, a girl, low-bodiced, with naked gleaming shoulders, leaned back half asleep; and yet she did not seem to sleep, but to regard the gamesters with a lazy scorn from under her dropped lashes. A tambourine tied with bright ribbons rested in the lap of her striped petticoat, kept from sliding to the floor by the careless crook—you could see it was habitual—of her jewelled fingers. The two men looked up sharply, almost furtively, at the company mounting the stairs. The girl scarcely lifted her eyes. Scornful she looked, and sullen and infinitely weary, yet beautiful nevertheless. The apprentice wondered while he climbed.

'Yes,' his patron was saying, ' 'tis the very mart and factory of pleasure. Ne'er a want hath London in that way but the Bankside can supply it, from immortal poetry down to—to——'

'—Down to misshapen children. Need'st try no lower, my master.'

'There be abuses, my son: and there be degrees of pleasure, the lowest of which (I grant you) be vile, sensual, devilish. Marry, I defend not such. But what I say is that a great city should have delights proportionate to her greatness; rich shows and pageants and processions by land and water; plays and masques and banquets with music; and the men who cater for these are citizens as worthy as the rest. Take away Bankside, and London would be the cleaner of much wickedness: yet by how much the duller of cheer, the poorer in all that colour, that movement which together be to cities the spirit of life! Where would be gone that glee of her that lifts a man's lungs and swells his port when his feet feel London stones? Is't of her money the country nurses think when to wondering children they fable of streets all paved with gold? Nay, lad: and this your decent, virtuous folk know well enough—your clergy, your aldermen—and use the poor players while abusing them. Doth the parish priest need a miracle-play for his church? Doth my Lord Mayor intend a show? To the Bankside they hie with money in their purses: and if his purse be long enough, my Lord Mayor shall have a fountain running with real wine, and Mass Thomas a Hell with flames of real cloth-in-grain, or at least a Lazarus with real sores. Doth the Court require a masque, the Queen a bull-baiting, the City a good roaring tragedy, full of blood and impugned innocence——Will! Will, I say! Tarry a moment!'

They had reached the landing, and looked down a corridor at the end of which, where a lamp hung, Shakespeare waited with his hand on a door-latch. From behind the door came a buzz of many voices.

'Lad, lad, let us go in together! Though the world's applause weary thee, 'tis sweet to thine old father.'

As he pressed down the latch the great man turned for an instant with a

quick smile, marvellously tender.

'He *can* smile, then?' thought the apprentice to himself. 'And I was doubting that he kept it for his writing!'

Within the room, as it were with one shout, a great company leapt to its feet, cheering and lifting glasses. Shakespeare, pausing on the threshold, smiled again, but more reservedly, bowing to the homage as might a king.

V

Three hours the feast had lasted: and the apprentice had listened to many songs, many speeches, but scarcely to the promised talk of gods. The poets, maybe, reserved such talk for the Mermaid. Here they were outnumbered by the players and by such ladies as the Bankside (which provided everything) furnished to grace the entertainment; and doubtless they subdued their discourse to the company. The Burbages, Dick and Cuthbert, John Heminge, Will Kempe—some half a dozen of the crew perhaps—might love good literature: but even these were pardonably more elate over the epilogue than over the play. For months they, the Lord Chamberlain's servants, had felt the eyes of London upon them: to-night they had triumphed, and to-morrow London would ring with appreciative laughter. It is not every day that your child of pleasure outwits your man of business at his own game: it is not once in a generation that he scores such a hit as had been scored to-night. The ladies, indeed, yawned without dissembling, while Master Jonson—an ungainly youth with a pimply face, a rasping accent, and a hard pedantic manner—proposed success to the new comedy and long life to its author; which he did at interminable length; spicing his discourse with quotations from Aristotle, Longinus, Quintilian, the *Ars Poetica*, Persius, and Seneca, authors less studied than the Aretine along Bankside. 'He loved Will Shakespeare. . . . A comedy of his own (as the company might remember) owed not a little to his friend Will Shakespeare's acting. . . . Here was a case in which love and esteem—yes, and worship—might hardly be dissociated. . . . In short, speaking as modestly as a young man might of his senior, Will Shakespeare was the age's ornament and, but for lack of an early gruelling in the classics, might easily have been an ornament for any age.' Cuthbert Burbage—it is always your quiet man who first succumbs on these occasions—slid beneath the table with a vacuous laugh and lay in slumber. Dick Burbage sat and drummed his toes impatiently. Nashe puffed at a pipe of tobacco. Kempe, his elbows on the board, his chin resting on his palms, watched the orator with amused interest, mischief lurking in every crease of his wrinkled face. Will Shakespeare leaned back in his chair and scanned the rafters, smiling gently the while. His speech, when his turn came to respond, was brief, almost curt. He would pass by (he

said) his young friend's learned encomiums, and come to that which lay nearer to their thoughts than either the new play or the new play's author. Let them fill and drink in silence to the demise of an old friend, the vanished theatre, the first ever built in London. Then, happening to glance at Heminge as he poured out the wine—'Tut, Jack!' he spoke up sharply: 'keep that easy rheum for the boards. Brush thine eyes, lad: we be all players here—or women—and know the trade.'

It hurt. If Heminge's eyes had begun to water sentimentally, they flinched now with real pain. This man loved Shakespeare with a dog's love. He blinked, and a drop fell and rested on the back of his hand as it fingered the base of his wine-glass. The apprentice saw and noted it.

'And another glass, lads, to the Phœnix that shall arise! A toast, and this time not in silence!' shouted John Shakespeare, springing up, flask in one hand and glass in the other. Meat or wine, jest or sally of man or woman, dull speech or brisk—all came alike to him. His doublet was unbuttoned; he had smoked three pipes, drunk a quart of sack, and never once yawned. He was enjoying himself to the top of his bent. 'Music, I say! Music!' A thought seemed to strike him; his eyes filled with happy inspiration. Still gripping his flask, he rolled to the door, flung it open, and bawled down the stairway:

'Ahoy! Below, there!'

'Ahoy, then, with all my heart!' answered a voice, gay and youthful, pat on the summons. 'What is't ye lack, my master?'

'Music, an thou canst give it. If not——'

'My singing voice broke these four years past, I fear me.'

'Your name, then, at least, young man, or ever you thrust yourself upon private company.'

'William Herbert, at your service.' A handsome lad—a boy, almost—stood in the doorway, having slipped past John Shakespeare's guard: a laughing, frank-faced boy, in a cloak slashed with orange-tawny satin. So much the apprentice noted before he heard a second voice, as jaunty and even more youthfully shrill, raised in protest upon the stairhead outside.

'And where the master goes,' it demanded, 'may not his page follow?'

John Shakespeare seemingly gave way to this second challenge as to the first. 'Be these friends of thine, Will?' he called past them as a second youth appeared in the doorway, a pretty, dark-complexioned lad, cloaked in white, who stood a pace behind his companion's elbow and gazed into the supper-room with eyes at once mischievous and timid.

'Good evening, gentles!' The taller lad comprehended the feasters and the disordered table in a roguish bow. 'Good evening, Will!' He singled out Shakespeare, and nodded.

'My Lord Herbert!'

The apprentice's eye, cast towards Shakespeare at the salutation given, marked a dark flush rise to the great man's temples as he answered the nod.

'I called thee "Will," ' answered Herbert lightly.

'You called us "gentles," ' Shakespeare replied, the dark flush yet lingering on either cheek. 'A word signifying bait for gudgeons, bred in carrion.'

'Yet I called thee Will,' insisted Herbert more gently. ' 'Tis my name as well as thine, and we have lovingly exchanged it before now, or my memory cheats me.'

' 'Tis a name lightly exchanged in love.' With a glance at the white-cloaked page Shakespeare turned on his heel.

'La, Will, where be thy manners?' cried one of the women. 'Welcome, my young Lord; and welcome the boy beside thee for his pretty face! Step in, child, that I may pass thee round to be kissed.'

The page laughed and stepped forward with his chin defiantly tilted. His eyes examined the women curiously and yet with a touch of fear.

'Nay, never flinch, lad! I'll do thee no harm,' chuckled the one who had invited him. 'Mass o' me, how I love modesty in these days of scandal!'

'Music? Who called for music?' a foreign voice demanded: and now in the doorway appeared three newcomers, two men and a woman—the same three of whom the apprentice had caught a glimpse within the room at the stairs' foot. The spokesman, a heavily built fellow with a short bull-neck and small cunning eyes, carried a drum slung about his shoulders and beat a rub-a-dub on it by way of flourish. 'Take thy tambourine and dance, Julitta—

'Julie, prends ton tambourin;
Toi, prends ta flute, Robin,'

he hummed, tapping his drum again.

'So? So? What foreign gabble is this?' demanded John Shakespeare, following and laying a hand on his shoulder.

'A pretty little carol for Christmas, Signor, that we picked up on our way through Burgundy, where they sing it to a jargon I cannot emulate. But the tune is as it likes you:

'Au son de ces instruments—
Turelurelu, patapatapan—
Nous dirons Noël gaîment!

Goes it not trippingly, Signor? You will say so when you see my Julitta dance to it.'

'Eh—eh? Dance to a carol?' a woman protested. ' 'Tis inviting the earth to open and swallow us.'

'Why, where's the harm on't?' John Shakespeare demanded. 'A pretty little concomitant, and anciently proper to all religions, nor among the heathen only, but in England and all parts of Christendom:

‘In manger wrapped it was—
So poorly happ’d my chance—
Between an ox and a silly poor ass
To call my true love to the dance!
Sing, O my love, my love, my love. . . .

There’s precedent for ye, Ma’am—good English precedent. Zooks! I’m a devout man, I hope; but I bear a liberal mind and condemn no form of mirth, so it be honest. The earth swallow us? Ay, soon or late it will, not being squeamish. Meantime, dance, I say! Clear back the tables there, and let the girl show her paces!’

Young Herbert glanced at Burbage with lifted eyebrow, as if to demand: ‘Who is this madman?’ Burbage laughed, throwing out both hands.

‘But he is gigantic!’ lisped the page, as with a wave of his two great arms John Shakespeare seemed to catch up the company and fling them to work pell-mell, thrusting back tables, piling chairs, clearing the floor of its rushes. ‘He is a whirlwind of a man!’

‘Come, Julitta!’ called the man with the drum. ‘Francisco, take thy pipe, man!—

‘Au son de ces instruments—
Turelurelu, patapatapan—’

As the music struck up, the girl, still with her scornful, impassive face, leapt like a panther from the doorway into the space cleared for her, and whirled down the room in a dance the like of which our apprentice had never seen nor dreamed of. And yet his gaze at first was not for her, but for the younger foreigner, the one with the pipe. For if ever horror took visible form, it stood and stared from the windows of that man’s eyes. They were handsome eyes, too, large and dark and passionate: but just now they stared blindly as though a hot iron had seared them. Twice they had turned to the girl, who answered by not so much as a glance; and twice with a shudder upon the man with the drum, who caught the look and blinked wickedly. Worst of all was it when the music began, to see that horror fixed and staring over a pair of cheeks ludicrously puffing at a flageolet. A face for a gargoyle! The apprentice shivered, and glanced from one to other of the company: but they, one and all, were watching the dancer.

It was a marvellous dance truly. The girl, her tambourine lifted high, and clashing softly to the beat of the music, whirled down the length of the room, while above the pipe’s falsetto and rumble of the drum the burly man lifted his voice and trolled:

‘Turelurelu, patapatapan—
Au son de ces instruments
Faisons la nique à Satan!’

By the barricade of chairs and tables, under which lay Cuthbert Burbage in peaceful stupor, she checked her onward rush, whirling yet, but so lazily that she seemed for the moment to stand poised, her scarf outspread like the wings of a butterfly: and so, slowly, very slowly, she came floating back. Twice she repeated this, each time narrowing her circuit, until she reached the middle of the floor, and there began to spin on her toes as a top spins when (as children say) it goes to sleep. The tambourine no longer clashed. Balanced high on the point of her uplifted forefinger, it too began to spin, and span until its outline became a blur. Still, as the music rose shriller and wilder, she revolved more and more rapidly, yet apparently with less and less of effort. Her scarf had become a mere filmy disk rotating around a whorl of gleaming flesh and glancing jewels.

A roar of delight from John Shakespeare broke the spell. The company echoed it with round upon round of hand-clapping. The music ceased suddenly, and the dancer, dipping low until her knees brushed the floor, stood erect again, dropped her arms, and turned carelessly to the nearest table.

‘Bravo! bravissimo!’ thundered John Shakespeare. ‘A cup of wine for her, there!’

The girl had snatched up a crust of bread and was gnawing it ravenously. He thrust his way through the guests and poured out wine for her. She took the glass with a steady hand, scarcely pausing in her meal to thank him.

‘But who is your master of ceremonies?’ demanded the page’s piping voice.

William Shakespeare heard it and turned. ‘He is my father,’ said he quietly.

But John Shakespeare had heard also. Wheeling about, wine-flask in hand, he faced the lad with a large and mock-elaborate bow. ‘That, young sir, must be my chief title to your notice. For the rest, I am a plain gentleman of Warwickshire of impaired but (I thank God) bettering fortune; my name John Shakespeare; my coat, or, a bend sable, charged with a lance proper. One of these fine days I may bring it to Court for you to recognize: but, alas! says Skelton:

‘Age is a page
For the Court full unmeet,
For age cannot rage
Nor buss her sweet sweet.

I shall bide at home and kiss the Queen’s hand through my son, more like.’

‘Indeed,’ said the page, ‘I hear reports that Her Majesty hath already a mind to send for him.’

‘Is that so, Will?’ His father beamed, delighted.

‘In some sort it is,’ answered Herbert, ‘and in some sort I am her messenger’s forerunner. She will have a play of thee, Will.’

‘The Queen?’ Shakespeare turned on him sharply. ‘This is a fool’s trick you play on me, my Lord.’ Yet his face flushed in spite of himself.

‘I tell thee, straight brow and true man, I heard the words fall from her very lips. “He shall write us a play,” she said; “and this Falstaff shall be the hero on’t, with no foolish royalties to overlay and clog his mirth.” ’

‘And, you see,’ put in the page maliciously, ‘we have come express to the Boar’s Head to seek him out.’

‘That,’ Herbert added, ‘is our suit to-night.’

‘Will, lad, thy fortune’s made!’ John Shakespeare clapped a hand on his son’s shoulder. ‘I shall see thee Sir William yet afore I die!’

If amid the general laughter two lines of vexation wrote themselves for a moment on Shakespeare’s brow they died out swiftly. He stood back a pace, eyed his father awhile with grave and tender humour, and answered the pair of courtiers with a bow.

‘Her Majesty’s gracious notion of a play,’ said he, ‘must needs be her poor subject’s pattern. If then I come to Court in motley, you, sirs, at least will be indulgent, knowing how much a suit may disguise.’ The page, meeting his eye, laughed uneasily. ‘ ’Tis but a frolic——’ he began.

‘Ay, there’s the pity o’t,’ interrupted a deep voice—Kempe’s.

The page laughed again, yet more nervously. ‘I should have said the Queen—God bless her!—desires but a frolic. And I had thought’—here he lifted his chin saucily and looked Kempe in the face—‘that on Bankside they took a frolic less seriously.’

‘Why, no,’ answered Kempe: ‘they have to take it seriously, and the cost too,—that being their business.’

‘ ’Tis but a frolic, at any rate, that her Majesty proposes, with a trifling pageant or dance to conclude, in which certain of the Court may join.’

A harsh laugh capped this explanation. It came from the dancing-girl, who, seated at the disordered table, had been eating like a hungry beast. She laid down her knife, rested her chin on her clasped hands, and, munching slowly, stared at the page from under her sullen, scornful brows.

‘Wouldst learn to dance, child?’ she demanded.

‘With thee for teacher,’ the page answered modestly. ‘I have no skill, but a light foot only.’

‘A light foot!’ the woman mimicked, and broke into a laugh horrible to hear. ‘Wouldst achieve such art as mine with a light foot? I tell thee that to dance as I dance thy feet must go deep as hell!’ She pushed back her plate, and, rising, nodded to the musicians. ‘Play, you!’ she commanded.

This time she used no wild whirl down the room to give her impetus. She stood in the cleared space of floor, her arms hanging limp, and at the first shrill note of the pipe began to revolve on the points of her toes, her eyes, each time

as they came full circle, meeting the gaze of the page, and slowly fascinating, freezing it. As slowly, deliberately, her hand went up, curved itself to the armpit of her bodice; and lo! as she straightened it aloft, a snake writhed itself around her upper arm, lifting its head to reach the shining bracelets, the jewelled fingers. A curving lift of the left arm, and on that too a snake began to coil and climb. Effortless, rigid as a revolving statue, she brought her finger-tips together overhead and dipped them to her bosom.

A shriek rang out, piercing high above the music.

'Catch her! She faints!' shouted Kempe, darting forward. But it was Shakespeare who caught the page's limp body as it dropped back on his arm. Bearing it to the window, he tore aside the curtain and thrust open a lattice to the dawn. The unconscious head dropped against his shoulder.

'My Lord'—he turned on Herbert as though the touch maddened him —'you are a young fool! God forgive me that I ever took you for better! Go, call a boat and take her out of this.'

'Nay, but she revives,' stammered Herbert, as the page's lips parted in a long, shuddering sigh.

'Go, fetch a boat, I say.'—and make way there, all you by the door!'

VI

'Tut! tut!—the wench will come to fast enough in the fresh air. A dare-devil jade, too, to be sparking it on Bankside at this hour! But it takes more than a woman, they say, to kill a mouse, and with serpents her sex hath an ancient feud. What's her name, I wonder?'

The candles, burning low and guttering in the draught of the open window, showed a banquet-hall deserted, or all but deserted. A small crowd of the guests—our apprentice among them—had trooped downstairs after Shakespeare and his burden. Others, reminded by the grey dawn, had slipped away on their own account to hire a passage home from the sleepy watermen before Paris Garden Stairs.

'Can any one tell me her name, now?' repeated John Shakespeare, rolling to the table and pouring himself yet another glass of wine. But no one answered him. The snake-woman had folded back her pets within her bodice and resumed her meal as though nothing had happened. The burly drummer had chosen a chair beside her and fallen to on the remains of a pasty. Both were eating voraciously. Francisco, the pipe-player, sat sidesaddle-wise on a form at a little distance and drank and watched them, still with the horror in his eyes. One or two women lingered, and searched the tables, pocketing crusts—searched with faces such as on battlefields, at dawn, go peering among the dead and wounded.

‘But hallo!’ John Shakespeare swung round, glass in hand, as the apprentice stood panting in the doorway. ‘Faith, you return before I had well missed you.’

The lad’s eyes twinkled with mischief.

‘An thou hasten not, master, I fear me we may easily miss higher game; with our hosts—your son amongst ’em—even now departing by boat and, for aught I know, leaving thee to pay the shot.’

‘Michael and all his angels preserve us! I had forgot——’

John Shakespeare clapped a hand on his empty pocket, and ran for the stairhead. ‘Will!’ he bawled. ‘Will! My son Will!’

The apprentice laughed and stepped toward the window, tittuping slightly; for (to tell the truth) he had drunk more wine than agreed with him. Standing by the window, he laughed again vacuously, drew a long breath, and so spun round on his heels at the sound of a choking cry and a rush of feet. With that he saw, as in a haze—his head being yet dizzy—the heavy man catch up his drum by its strap and, using it as a shield, with a backward sweep of the arm hurl off the youth Francisco, who had leapt on him knife in hand. Clutching the curtain, he heard the knife rip through the drum’s parchment and saw the young man’s face of hate as the swift parry flung him back staggering, upsetting a form, against the table’s edge. He saw the glasses there leap and totter from the shock, heard their rims jar and ring together like a peal of bells.

The sound seemed to clear his brain. He could not guess what had provoked the brawl; but in one and the same instant he saw the drummer reach back an arm as if to draw the dancing woman on his knee; heard his jeering laugh as he slipped a hand down past her bare shoulder; saw her unmoved face, sullenly watching; saw Francisco, still clutching his knife, gather himself up for another spring. As he sprang the drummer’s hand slid round from behind the woman’s back, and it too grasped a knife. An overturned chair lay between the two, and the rail of it as Francisco leapt caught his foot, so that with a clutch he fell sideways against the table. Again the glasses jarred and rang, and yet again and more loudly as the drummer’s hand went up and drove the dagger through the neck, pinning it to the board. The youth’s legs contracted in a horrible kick, contracted again and fell limp. There was a gush of blood across the cloth, a sound of breath escaping and choked in its escape: and as the killer wrenched out his knife for a second stroke, the body slid with a thud to the floor.

The apprentice had feasted, and feasted well; yet throughout the feast (he bethought himself of this later), no serving-man and but one serving-maid had entered the room. Wines and dishes had come at call to a hatch in the wall at the far end of the room. One serving-maid had done all the rest, moving behind the guests’ chairs with a face and mien which reminded him of a tall angel he

had seen once borne in a car of triumph at a City show. But now as he left his curtain, twittering, crazed with fear, spreading out both hands toward the stain on the table-cloth, a door beside the hatch opened noiselessly, and swift and prompt as though they had been watching, two men entered, flung a dark coverlet over the body, lifted and bore it off, closing the door behind them. They went as they had come, swiftly, without a word. He had seen it as plainly as he saw now the murderer sheathing his knife, the woman sullenly watching him. The other women, too, had vanished—they that had been gleaning among the broken crusts. Had they decamped, scurrying, at the first hint of the brawl? He could not tell; they had been, and were not.

He stretched out both hands towards the man, the woman—would they, too, vanish?—and the damning stain? A cry worked in his throat, but would not come.

'Gone!' a voice called, hearty at once and disconsolate, from the doorway behind him. 'Gone—given me the slip, as I am a Christian sinner! What? You three left alone here? But where is our friend the piper?'

The apprentice made a snatch at a flask of wine, and, turning, let its contents spill wildly over the bloodied table-cloth.

'Art drunk, lad—shamefully drunk,' said John Shakespeare, lurching forward. 'They have given me the slip, I say, and ne'er a groat have I to redeem my promises.'

'They paid the score below—I saw them; and this thy son charged me to hand to thee.' The apprentice drew a full purse from his pocket and flung it on the table. 'I—I played thee a trick, master: but let me forth into fresh air. This room dazzles me. . . .'

'Go thy ways—go thy ways, child. For my part, I was ever last at a feast to leave it, and would crack one more cup with these good folk. To your health, Madam!' He reached a hand for the wine-flask as the apprentice set it down and went forth, tottering yet.

VII

Dawn was breaking down the river; a grey dawn as yet, albeit above the mists rolling low upon the tideway a clear sky promised gold to come—a golden Christmas Day. The mist, however, had a chill which searched the bones. The red-eyed waterman pulled as though his arms were numb. Tom Nashe coughed and huddled his cloak about him, as he turned for a last backward glance on Bankside, where a few lights yet gleamed, and the notes of a belated guitar tinkled on, dulled by the vapours, calling like a far thin ghost above the deeper baying of the hounds.

'Take care of thyself, lad,' said Shakespeare kindly, stretching out a hand

to help his friend draw the cloak closer.

‘Behoved me think of that sooner, I doubt,’ Nashe answered, glancing up with a wry, pathetic smile, yet gratefully. He dropped his eyes to the cloak and quoted:

‘Sometime it was of cloth-in-grain,
’Tis now but a sigh-clout, as you may see;
It will hold out neither wind nor rain—

and—and—I thank thee, Will——

‘But I’ll take my old cloak about me.

There’s salt in the very warp of it, good Yarmouth salt. Will?’

‘Ay, lad?’

‘Is’t true thou’rt become a landowner, down in thy native shire?’

‘In a small way, Tom.’

‘A man of estate? with coat-of-arms and all?’

‘Even that too, with your leave.’

‘I know—I know. *Nescio qua natale solum*—those others did not understand: but I understand. Yes, and now I understand that fifth act of thine, which puzzled me afore, and yet had not puzzled me; but I fancied—poor fool!—that the feeling was singular in me. ’Twas a vile life, Will.’ He jerked a thumb back at Bankside. ‘The God, I think, hardly meant it.’

‘Ay, ’tis vile.’

‘My cough translates it into the past tense; but—then, or now, or hereafter—’tis vile. Count them up, Will—the lads we have drunk with aforetime. There was Greene, now——’

Shakespeare bent his head for tally.

‘—I can see his poor corse staring up at the rafters: there on the shoemaker’s bed, with a chaplet of laurel askew on the brow. The woman meant it kindly, poor thing! . . . She forgot to close his eyes, though. With my own fingers I closed ’em, and borrowed two penny-pieces of her for weights. ’Twas the first dead flesh I had touched, and I feel it now. . . . But George Peele was worse, ten times worse. I forget if you saw him?’

Again Shakespeare bent his head.

‘And poor Kit? You saw Kit, I know . . . with a hole below the eye, they told me, where the dagger went through. And that was our Kit, our hope, pride, paragon, our Daphnis. Damnation, and this is art! Didst hear that blotch-faced youngster, that Scotchman, how he prated of it, laying down the law?’

‘That Jonson, Tom, is a tall poet, or will be.’

‘The devil care I! Tall poet or not, he is no Englishman and understands not the race. Art is not for us. We have dreamed dreams, thou and I: and thy dreams are coming to glory. But the last dream of a true Englishman is to own

a few good English acres and die respected in a dear, if narrow, ground. Dear Will, there is more in this than greed. There is the call of the land, which is home. For me—thou knowest—I had ne'er the gift of saving. My bolt is shot, or almost: two years at farthest must see the end of me. But when thou rememberest, bethink thee that I understood the call. Wilt guess what I am writing, now at the last? A great book—a sound book—and all of the red-herring! Ay, the red-herring, staple of my own Yarmouth. Canst never, as an inland man, rise to the virtues of that fish, nor to the merit of my handling. But I have read some pages of it to my neighbours there, and I learn from their approving looks that I shall die respected. Yet I, too, forgot—and dreamed of art—damn the thing.'

. . . . .

On the Bankside at the foot of Paris Garden Stairs, deserted now of watermen, a youth sat with his teeth chattering.

Above, while he tried to clench his teeth, a window opened stealthily. There was a heavy splash on the tideway, and the window shut to, softly as it had opened. He watched. He was past fear. The body bobbed once to the surface, half a furlong below the spreading, fading circles thrown to the foot of Paris Garden Stairs. It did not rise again. The Bankside knew its business.

A heavy footfall came down the steps to the landing-stage.

'A glorious night!'

The apprentice watched the river.

'A glorious night! A night to remember! Tell me lad, have I made good my promises, or have I not?'

'They rise thrice before sinking, I have always heard,' twittered the lad.

'What the devil art talking of? Here, take my cloak, if thou feelest the chill. The watermen here ply by shifts, and we shall hail a boat anon to take us over. Meanwhile, if thou hast eyes, boy, look on the river—see the masts there, below bridge, the sun touching them!—see the towers yonder, in the gold of it!

'London, thou art the flower of cities all!

—Eh, lad?'

The sun's gold, drifted through the fog, touched the side of a small row-boat nearing the farther shore. Behind; and to right and left along Bankside, a few guitars yet tinkled. Across the tide came wafted the voices of London's Christmas bells.

MUTUAL EXCHANGE, LIMITED

I

MILLIONAIRE though he was, Mr. Markham (*né* Markheim) never let a small opportunity slip. To be sure the enforced idleness of the Atlantic crossing bored him and kept him restless; it affected him with malaise to think that for these five days, while the solitude of ocean swallowed him, men on either shore, with cables at their command, were using them to get rich on their own account—it might even be at his expense. The first day out from New York he had spent in his cabin, immersed in correspondence. Having dealt with this and exhausted it, on the second, third, and fourth days he found nothing to do. He never played cards; he eschewed all acquaintance with his fellow-men except in the way of business; he had no vanity, and to be stared at on the promenade deck because of the fame of his wealth merely annoyed him. On the other hand, he had not the smallest excuse to lock himself up in his stuffy state-room. He enjoyed fresh air, and had never been sea-sick in his life.

It was just habit—the habit of never letting a chance go, or the detail of a chance—that on the fourth morning carried him the length of the liner, to engage in talk with the fresh-coloured young third officer busy on the high deck forward.

‘A young man, exposed as you are, ought to insure himself,’ said Mr. Markham.

The third officer—by name Dick Rendal—knew something of the inquisitiveness and idle ways of passengers. This was his fifth trip on the *Carnatic*. He took no truck in passengers beyond showing them the patient politeness enjoined by the Company’s rules. He knew nothing of Mr. Markham, who dispensed with the services of a valet and dressed with a shabbiness only pardonable in the extremely rich. Mr. Markham, ‘The Insurance King,’ had arrayed himself this morning in grey flannel, with a reach-me-down overcoat, cloth cap, and carpet slippers that betrayed his flat, oriental instep. Dick Rendal sized him up for an insurance tout; but behaved precisely as he would have behaved on better information. He refrained from ordering the intruder aft; but eyed him less than amiably—being young, keen on his ship, and just now keen on his job.

‘I saw you yesterday,’ said Mr. Markham. (It had blown more than half a gale, and late in the afternoon three heavy seas had come aboard. The third

officer at that moment was employed with half a dozen seamen in repairing damages.) ‘I was watching. As I judged, it was the nicest miss you weren’t overboard. Over and above employers’ liability you should insure. The Hands Across Mutual Exchange—that’s your office.’

Mr. Markham leaned back, and put a hand up to his inner breast-pocket—it is uncertain whether for his cigar-case, or for some leaflet relating to the Hands Across.

‘Take care, sir!’ said the third officer sharply. ‘That stanchion——’

He called too late. The hand as it touched the breast-pocket, shot up and clawed at the air. With a voice that was less a cry than a startled grunt, Mr. Markham pitched backwards off the fore-deck into the sea.

The third officer stared for just a fraction of a second; ran, seized a life-belt as the liner’s length went shooting past; and hurled it—with pretty good aim, too—almost before a man of his working party had time to raise the cry of ‘Man Overboard!’ Before the alarm reached the bridge, he had kicked off his shoes; and the last sound in his ears as he dived was the ping of the bell ringing down to the engine-room—a thin note, infinitely distant, speaking out of an immense silence.

II

It was a beautifully clean dive; but in the flurry of the plunge the third officer forgot for an instant the right upward slant of the palms, and went a great way deeper than he had intended. By the time he rose to the surface the liner had slid by, and for a moment or two he saw nothing; for instinctively he came up facing aft, towards the spot where Mr. Markham had fallen, and the long sea running after yesterday’s gale threw up a ridge that seemed to take minutes—though in fact it took but a few seconds—to sink and heave up the trough beyond. By and by a life-belt swam up into sight; then another—at least a dozen had been flung; and beyond these at length, on the climbing crest of the swell two hundred yards away, the head and shoulders of Mr. Markham. By great good luck the first life-belt had fallen within a few feet of him, and Mr. Markham had somehow managed to get within reach and clutch it—a highly creditable feat when it is considered that he was at best a poor swimmer, that the fall had knocked more than half the breath out of his body, that he had swallowed close on a pint of salt water, and that a heavy overcoat impeded his movements. But after this fair first effort Mr. Markham, as his clothes weighed him down, began—as the phrase is—to make very bad weather of it. He made worse and worse weather of it as Dick Rendal covered the distance between them with a superlatively fine side-stroke, once or twice singing out to him to hold on, and keep a good heart. Mr. Markham, whether

he heard or no, held on with great courage, and even coolness—up to a point. Then of a sudden his nerve deserted him. He loosed his hold of the life-belt, and struck out for his rescuer. Worse, as he sank in the effort and Dick gripped him, he closed and struggled. For half a minute Dick, shaking free of the embrace—and this only by striking him on the jaw and half stunning him as they rose on the crest of a swell—was able to grip him by the collar and drag him within reach of the life-belt. But here the demented man managed to wreath his legs and arms in another and more terrible hold. The pair of them were now cursing horribly, cursing whenever a wave desisted from choking them and allowed them to cough and sputter for breath. They fought as two men whose lives had pent up an unmitigable hate for this moment. They fought, neither losing his hold, as their strength ebbed, and the weight of their clothes dragged them lower. Dick Rendal's hand still clutched the cord of the life-belt, but both bodies were under water, fast locked, when the liner's boat at length reached the spot. They were hauled on board, as on a long-line you haul a fish with a crab fastened upon him; and were laid in the stern-sheets, where their grip was with some difficulty loosened.

It may have happened in the struggle. Or again it may have happened when they were hoisted aboard and lay, for a minute or so, side by side on the deck. Both men were insensible; so far gone indeed that the doctor looked serious as he and his helpers set to work inducing artificial respiration.

The young third officer came round after five or ten minutes of this; but, strangely enough, in the end he was found to be suffering from a severer shock than Mr. Markham, on whom the doctor had operated for a full thirty-five minutes before a flutter of the eyelids rewarded him. They were carried away—the third officer, in a state of collapse, to his modest berth; Mr. Markham to his white-and-gold deck-cabin. On his way thither Mr. Markham protested cheerily that he saw no reason for all this fuss; he was as right now, or nearly as right, as the Bank.

III

'How's Rendal getting on?'

Captain Holditch, skipper of the *Carnatic*, put this question next morning to the doctor, and was somewhat surprised by the answer.

'Oh, Rendal's all right. That is to say, he will be all right. Just now he's suffering from shock. My advice—supposing, of course, you can spare him—is to pack him straightaway off to his people on a month's leave. In less than a month he'll be fit as a fiddle.' The doctor paused and added: 'Wish I could feel as easy about the millionaire.'

'Why, what's the matter with *him*? Struck me he pulled round wonderfully,

once you'd brought him to. He talked as cheery as a grig.'

'H'm—yes,' said the doctor; 'he has been talking like that ever since; only he hasn't been talking sense. Calls me names for keeping him in bed, and wants to get out and repair that stanchion. I told him it was mended. "Nothing on earth is the matter with me," he insisted, till I had to quiet him down with bromide. By the way, did you send off any account of the accident?'

'By wireless? No; I took rather particular pains to stop that—gets into the papers, only frightens the family and friends, who conclude things to be ten times worse than they are. Plenty of time at Southampton. Boat-express'll take him home ahead of the scare.'

'Lives in Park Lane, doesn't he?—that big corner house like a game-pie? . . . Ye-es, you were thoughtful, as usual . . . Only someone might have been down to the docks to meet him. Wish I knew his doctor's address. Well, never mind—I'll fix him up so that he reaches Park Lane, anyway.'

'He ought to do something for Rendal,' mused Captain Holditch.

'He will, you bet, when his head is right—that's if a millionaire's head is ever right,' added the doctor, who held radical opinions on the distribution of wealth.

The captain ignored this. He never talked politics even when ashore.

'As plucky a rescue as ever I witnessed,' he answered the doctor. 'Yes, of course I'll spare the lad. Slip a few clothes into his bag, and tell him he can get off by the first train. Oh, and by the way, you might ask him if he's all right for money; say he can draw on me if he wants any.'

The doctor took his message down to Dick Rendal. 'We're this moment passing Hurst Castle,' he announced cheerfully, 'and you may tumble out if you like. But first I'm to pack a few clothes for you; if you'll let me, I'll do it better than the steward.'

'I suppose I ought to come the handsome out of this.' Dick passed a hand over his forehead as he spoke slowly and, as it were, grudgingly. 'But somehow I—I hate—yes, *hate*—wish I knew how to clear the whole damn score—handsomely of course.' His voice trailed off.

'What you want,' said the doctor, vaguely disappointed in the lad, 'is ten grains of bromide.' He spoke sharply, and continued: 'The Old Man says you may get off as soon as we're docked, and stay home till you've recovered. I'll allow you the inside of a week before you're fit as ever,' he wound up.

'The Old Man? Yes—yes—Captain Holditch, of course,' muttered Dick from his berth.

The doctor looked at him narrowly for a moment; but, when he spoke again, kept by intention the same easy rattling tone.

'Decent of him, eh?—Yes, and by the way, he asked me to tell you that, if you shouldn't happen to be flush of money just now, that needn't hinder you

five minutes. He'll be your banker, and make it right with the Board.'

Dick lay still for half a dozen seconds, as though the words took that time in reaching him. Then he let out a short laugh from somewhere high in his nose.

'Be my banker? Will he? Good Lord!'

'May be,' said the doctor, drily; laying out a suit of mufti at the foot of the bed, 'the Old Man and I belong to the same date. I've heard that youngsters save money nowadays. But when I was your age that sort of offer would have hit the mark nine times out of ten.'

He delivered this as a parting shot. Dick, lying on his back and staring up at a knot in the woodwork over his bunk, received it placidly. Probably he did not hear. His brow was corrugated in a frown, as though he were working out a sum or puzzling over some problem. The doctor closed the door softly, and some minutes later paid a visit to Mr. Markham, whom he found stretched on the couch of the white-and-gold deck-cabin, attired in a grey flannel sleeping-suit, and wrapped around the legs with a travelling rug of dubious hue.

'That's a good deal better,' he said cheerfully, after an examination, in which, while seeming to be occupied with pulses and temperature, he paid particular attention to the pupils of Mr. Markham's eyes. 'We are nosing up the Solent fast—did you know it? Ten minutes ought to see us in Southampton Water; and I suppose you will be wanting to catch the first train.'

'I wonder,' said Mr. Markham, vaguely, 'if the Old Man will mind.'

The doctor stared for a moment. 'I think we may risk it,' he said, after a pause; 'though I confess, that last night, I was doubtful. Of course, if you're going to be met, it's right enough.'

'Why should I be met?'

'Well, you see—I couldn't know, could I? Anyway, you ought to see your own doctor as soon as you get home. Perhaps, if you gave me his name, I might scribble a note to him, just to say what has happened. Even big-wigs, you know, don't resent being helped with a little information.'

Mr. Markham stared. 'Lord!' said he, 'you're talking as if I kept a tame doctor! Why, man, I've never been sick nor sorry since I went to school?'

'That's not hard to believe. I've ausculted you—sound as a bell, you are: constitution strong as a horse's. Still, a shock is a shock. You've a family doctor, I expect—someone you ring up when your liver goes wrong, and you want to be advised to go to Marienbad or some such place—I'd feel easier if I could shift the responsibility on to him.'

Still Mr. Markham stared. 'I've heard about enough of this shock to my system,' said he at length. 'But have it your own way. If you want me to recommend a doctor, my mother swears by an old boy in Craven Street, Strand. I don't know the number, but his name's Leadbetter, and he's death on

croup.’

‘Craven Street? That’s a trifle off Park Lane, isn’t it?—Still, Leadbetter, you say? I’ll get hold of the directory, look up his address, and drop him a note or two on the case by this evening’s post.’

. . . . .

A couple of hours later Mr. Markham and Dick Rendal almost rubbed shoulders in the crowd of passengers shaking hands with the ever polite Captain Holditch, and bidding the *Carnatic* good-bye with the usual parting compliments; but in the hurry and bustle no one noted that the pair exchanged neither word nor look of recognition. The skipper gave Dick an honest clap on the shoulder. ‘Doctor’s fixed you up, then? That’s right. Make the best of your holiday, and I’ll see that the Board does you justice,’ and with that, turned away for more handshaking. One small thing he did remark. When it came to Mr. Markham’s turn, that gentleman, before extending a hand, lifted it to his forehead and gravely saluted. But great men—as Captain Holditch knew—have their eccentric ways.

Nor was it remarked, when the luggage came to be sorted out and put on board the boat express, that Dick’s porter under his direction collected and wheeled off Mr. Markham’s; while Mr. Markham picked up Dick’s suit-case, walked away with it unchallenged to a third-class smoking compartment and deposited it on the rack. There were three other passengers in the compartment. ‘Good Lord!’ ejaculated one, as the millionaire stepped out to purchase an evening paper. ‘Isn’t that Markham? Well!—and travelling third!’ ‘Saving habit—second nature,’ said another. ‘That’s the way to get rich, my boy.’

Meanwhile Dick, having paid for four places, and thereby secured a first-class solitude, visited the telegraph office, and shrank the few pounds in his pocket by sending a number of cablegrams.

On the journey up Mr. Markham took some annoyance from the glances of his fellow-passengers. They were furtive, almost reverential, and this could only be set down to his exploit of yesterday. He thanked Heaven they forbore to talk of it.

IV

In the back-parlour of a bookseller’s shop, between the Strand and the Embankment, three persons sat at tea; the proprietor of the shop, a grey little man with round spectacles and bushy eyebrows, his wife, and a pretty girl of twenty or twenty-one. The girl apparently was a visitor, for she wore her hat, and her jacket lay across the arm of an old horsehair sofa that stood against the wall in the lamp’s half shadow; and yet the grey little bookseller and his little

Dresden-china wife very evidently made no stranger of her. They talked, all three, as members of a family talk, when contented and affectionate; at haphazard, taking one another for granted, not raising their voices.

The table was laid for a fourth; and by and by they heard him coming through the shop—in a hurry too. The old lady, always sensitive to the sound of her boy's footsteps, looked up almost in alarm, but the girl half rose from her chair, her eyes eager.

'I know,' she said breathlessly. 'Jim has heard——'

'Chrissy here? That's right.' A young man broke into the room, and stood waving a newspaper. 'The *Carnatic*'s arrived—here it is under "Stop Press"—I bought the paper as I came by Somerset House—"*Carnatic* arrived at Southampton 3.45 this afternoon. Her time from Sandy Hook, 5 days 6 hours, 45 minutes." '

'Then she hasn't broken the record this time, though Dick was positive she would,' put in the old lady. During the last six months she had developed a craze for Atlantic records, and knew the performances of all the great liners by heart.

'You bad little mother!'—Jim wagged a forefinger at her. 'You don't deserve to hear another word.'

'Is there any more?'

'More? Just you listen to this: "Reports heroic rescue. Yesterday afternoon Mr. Markham, the famous Insurance King, accidentally fell overboard from fore-deck, and was gallantly rescued by a young officer named Kendal"—you bet that's a misprint for Rendal—error in the wire, perhaps—we'll get a later edition after tea—"who leapt into the sea and swam to the sinking millionaire, supporting him until assistance arrived. Mr. Markham had by this afternoon recovered sufficiently to travel home by the Boat Express." There, see for yourselves!'

Jim spread the newspaper on the table.

'But don't they say anything about Dick?' quavered the mother, fumbling with her glasses, while Miss Chrissy stared at the print with shining eyes.

'Dick's not a millionaire, mother—though it seems he had been supporting one—for a few minutes anyway. Well, Chrissy! how does that make you feel?'

'You see, my dear,' said the little bookseller softly, addressing his wife, 'if any harm had come to the boy, they would have reported it for certain.'

They talked over the news while Jim ate his tea, and now and again interrupted with his mouth full; talked over it and speculated upon it in low, excited tones, which grew calmer by degrees. But still a warm flush showed on the cheeks of both the women, and the little bookseller found it necessary to take out his handkerchief at intervals and wipe his round spectacles.

He was wiping them perhaps for the twentieth time, and announcing that

he must go and relieve his assistant in the shop, when the assistant's voice was heard uplifted close outside—as it seemed, in remonstrance with a customer.

'Hallo!' said the little bookseller, and was rising from his chair, when the door opened. A middle-aged, Jewish-looking man, wrapped to the chin in a shabby ulster and carrying a suit-case, stood on the threshold, and regarded the little party.

'Mother!' cried Mr. Markham. 'Chrissy!'

He set down the suit-case, and took two eager strides. Old Mrs. Rendal, the one immediately menaced, shrank back into Jim's arms as he started up with his throat working to bolt a mouthful of cake. Chrissy caught her breath.

'Who in thunder are you, sir?' demanded Jim. 'Get out of this, unless you want to be thrown out!'

'Chrissy!' again appealed Mr. Markham, but in a fainter voice. He had come to a standstill, and his hand went slowly up to his forehead.

Chrissy pointed to the suit-case. 'It's—it's Dick's!' she gasped. Jim did not hear.

'Mr. Wenham,' he said to the white-faced assistant in the doorway, 'will you step out, please, and fetch a policeman?'

'Excuse me.' Mr. Markham took his hand slowly from his face, and spread it behind him, groping as he stepped backwards to the door. 'I—I am not well, I think'—he spoke precisely, as though each word as it came had to be held and gripped. 'The address'—here he turned on Chrissy with a vague apologetic smile—'faces—clear in my head. Mistake—I really beg your pardon.'

'Get him some brandy, Jim,' said the little bookseller. 'The gentleman is ill, whoever he is.'

But Mr. Markham turned without another word, and lurched past the assistant, who flattened himself against a bookshelf to give him room. Jim followed him through the shop; saw him cross the doorstep and turn away down the pavement to the left; stared in his wake until the darkness and the traffic swallowed him; and returned, softly whistling, to the little parlour.

'Drunk's the simplest explanation,' he announced.

'But how did he know my name?' demanded Chrissy. 'And the suit-case!'

'Eh? He's left it—well, if this doesn't beat the band! Here, Wenham—nip after the man and tell him he left his luggage behind!' Jim stooped to lift the case by the handle.

'But it's Dick's!'

'Dick's?'

'It's the suit-case I gave him—my birthday present last April. See, there are his initials!'

V

Dick Rendal, alighting at Waterloo, collected his luggage—or rather, Mr. Markham's—methodically; saw it hoisted on a four-wheeler; and, handing the cabby two shillings, told him to deliver it at an address in Park Lane, where the butler would pay him his exact fare. This done, he sought the telegraph office and sent three more cablegrams, the concise wording of which he had carefully evolved on the way up from Southampton. These do not come into the story—which may digress, however, so far as to tell that on receipt of one of them, the Vice-President of the Hands Across Central New York Office remarked to his secretary 'that the old warrior was losing no time. Leisure and ozone would appear to have bucked him up.' To which the secretary answered that it was lucky for civilization if Mr. Markham missed suspecting, or he'd infallibly make a corner in both.

Having dispatched his orders, Dick Rendal felt in his pockets for a cigar-case; was annoyed and amused (in a subconscious sort of way) to find only a briar pipe and a pocketful of coarse-cut tobacco; filled and lit his pipe, and started to walk.

His way led him across Westminster Bridge, up through Whitehall, and brought him to the steps of that building which, among all the great London clubs, most exorbitantly resembles a palace. He mounted its perron with the springy confident step of youth; and that same spring and confidence of gait carried him past the usually vigilant porter. A marble staircase led him to the lordliest smoking-room in London. He frowned, perceiving that his favourite arm-chair was occupied by a somnolent Judge of the High Court, and catching up the *Revue des Deux Mondes* settled himself in a window-bay commanding the great twilit square of the Horse Guards and the lamp-lit Mall.

He had entered the smoking-room lightly, almost jauntily; but—not a doubt of it—he was tired—so tired that he shuffled his body twice and thrice in the arm-chair before discovering the precise angle that gave superlative comfort. . . .

'I beg your pardon, sir.'

Dick opened his eyes. A liveried footman stood over his chair, and was addressing him.

'Eh? Did I ring? Yes, you may bring me a glass of liqueur brandy. As quickly as possible, if you please; to tell the truth, George, I'm not feeling very well.'

The man started at hearing his name, but made no motion to obey the order.

'I beg your pardon, sir, but the secretary wishes to see you in his room.'

'The secretary? Mr. Hood? Yes, certainly.' Dick rose. 'I—I am afraid you

must give me your arm, please. A giddiness—the ship's motion, I suppose.'

The secretary was standing at his door in the great vestibule as Dick came down the staircase on the man's arm.

'I beg your pardon,' he said, 'but may I have your name? The porter does not recognize you, and I fear that I am equally at fault.'

'My name?'—with the same gesture that Mr. Markham had used in the little back-parlour, Dick passed a hand over his eyes. He laughed, and even to his own ears the laugh sounded vacant, foolish.

'Are you a member of the club, sir?'

'I—I thought I was.' The marble pillars of the atrium were swaying about him like painted cloths, the tessellated pavement heaving and rocking at his feet. 'Abominably stupid of me,' he muttered, 'unpardonable, you must think.'

The secretary looked at him narrowly, and decided that he was really ill; that there was nothing in his face to suggest the impostor.

'Come into my room for a moment,' he said, and sent the footman upstairs to make sure that no small property of the Club was missing. 'Here, drink down the brandy. . . . Feeling better? You are aware, no doubt, that I might call in the police and have you arrested?'

For a moment Dick did not answer, but stood staring with rigid eyes. At length:

'They—won't—find—what—I—want,' he said slowly, dropping out the words one by one. The secretary now felt certain that here was a genuine case of mental derangement. With such he had no desire to be troubled; and so, the footman bringing word that nothing had been stolen, he dismissed Dick to the street.

VI

The brandy steadying him, Dick went down the steps with a fairly firm tread. But he went down into a world that for him was all darkness—darkness of chaos—carrying an entity that was not his, but belonged Heaven knew to whom.

The streets, the traffic, meant nothing to him. Their roar was within his head; and on his ears, nostrils, chest, lay a pressure as of mighty waters. Rapidly as he walked, he felt himself all the while to be lying fathoms deep in those waters, face downwards, with drooped head, held motionless there while something within him struggled impotently to rise to the surface. The weight that held him down, almost to bursting, was as the weight of tons.

The houses, the shop-fronts, the street-lamps, the throng of dark figures, passed him in unmeaning procession. Yet all the time his feet, by some instinct, were leading him towards the water; and by and by he found himself

staring—still face-downwards—into a black inverted heaven wherein the lights had become stars and swayed only a little.

He had, in fact, halted, and was leaning over the parapet of the Embankment, a few yards from Cleopatra's Needle; and as he passed the plinth some impression of it must have bitten itself on the retina; for coiled among the stars lay two motionless sphinxes, green-eyed, with sheathed claws, watching lazily while the pressure bore him down to them, and down—and still down . . .

Upon this dome of night there broke the echo of a footfall. A thousand footsteps had passed him, and he had heard none of them. But this one, springing out of nowhere, sang and repeated itself and re-echoed across the dome, and from edge to edge. Dick's fingers drew themselves up like the claws of the sphinx. The footsteps drew nearer while he crouched: they were close to him. Dick leapt at them, with murder in his spring.

Where the two men grappled, the parapet of the Embankment opens on a flight of river-stairs. Mr. Markham had uttered no cry; nor did a sound escape either man as, locked in that wrestle, they swayed over the brink.

. . . . .

They were hauled up, unconscious, still locked in each other's arms.

'Queer business,' said one of the rescuers as he helped to loosen their clasp, and lift the bodies on board the Royal Humane Society's float. 'Looks like murderous assault. But which of 'em done it, by the looks, now?'

. . . . .

Five minutes later Dick's eyelids fluttered. For a moment he stared up at the dingy lamp swinging overhead; then his lips parted in a cry, faint, yet sharp:

'Take care, sir! That stanchion——'

But Mr. Markham's first words were: 'Plucky! devilish plucky!—owe you my life, my lad.'

PHOEBUS ON HALZAPHRON

God! of whom music
And song and blood are pure,
The day is never darkened
That had thee here obscure.

EARLY in 1897 a landslip on the tall cliffs of Halzaphron—which face upon Mount's Bay, Cornwall, and the Gulf Stream of the Atlantic—brought to light a curiosity. The slip occurred during the night of 7th to 8th January, breaking through the roof of a cavern at the base of the cliff and carrying many hundreds of tons of rock and earth down into deep water. For some weeks what remained of the cavern was obliterated, and in the rough weather then prevailing no one took the trouble to examine it; since it can only be approached by sea. The tides, however, set to work to sift and clear the detritus, and on Whit-Monday a party of pleasure-seekers from Penzance brought their boat to shore, landed, and discovered a stairway of worked stone leading up from the back of the cavern through solid rock. The steps wound spirally upward, and were cut with great accuracy; but the drippings from the low roof of the stairway had worn every tread into a basin and filled it with water. Green slippery weeds coated the lowest stairs; those immediately above were stained purple and crimson by the growth of some minute fungus; but where darkness began, these colours passed through rose-pink into a delicate ivory-white—a hard crust of lime, crenellated like coral by the ceaseless trickle of water which deposited it.

At first the explorers supposed themselves on the trace of a lost holy well. They had no candles, but by economizing their stock of matches they followed up the mysterious and beautiful staircase until it came to a sudden end, blocked by the fallen mass of cliff. Still in ignorance whither it led or what purpose it had served, they turned back and descended to the sunshine again; when one of the party, scanning the cliff's face, observed a fragment—three steps only—jutting out like a cornice some sixty or seventy feet overhead.

This seemed to dispose of the holy well theory, and suggested that the stairway had reached to the summit, where perhaps an entrance might be found. The party returned to Penzance, and their report at once engaged the attention of the local Antiquarian Society. A small subscription list was opened, permission obtained from the owner of the property, and within a week a gang of labourers began to excavate on the cliff-top directly above the jutting cornice. The ground here showed a slight depression, and the soil

proved unexpectedly deep and easy to work. On the second day, at a depth of seven feet, one of the men announced that he had come upon rock. But having spaded away the loose earth, they discovered that his pick had struck upon the edge of an extremely fine tessellated pavement, the remains apparently of a Roman villa.

Yet could this be a Roman villa? That the Romans drove their armies into Cornwall is certain enough; their coins, ornaments, and even pottery, are still found here and there; their camps can be traced. That they conquered and colonized it, however, during any of the four hundred years they occupied Britain has yet to be proved. In other parts of England the plough turns up memorials of that quiet home life with its graces which grew around these settlers and comforted their exile; and the commonest of these is the tessellated pavement with its emblems of the younger gods, the vintage, the warm south. But in the remote west, where the Celts held their savage own, no such traces have ever been found.

Could this at last be one? The pavement, cleared with care, proved of a disappointing size, measuring eight feet by four at the widest. The *tessellae* were exceptionally beautiful and fresh in colour; and each separate design represented some scene in the story of Apollo. No Bacchus with his panther-skin and Maenads, no Triton and Nymphs, no loves of Mars and Venus, no Ganymede with the eagle, no Leda, no Orpheus, no Danaë, no Europa—but always and only Apollo! He was guiding his car; he was singing among the Nine; he was drawing his bow; he was flaying Marsyas; above all—the only repeated picture—he was guiding the oxen of Admetus, goad in hand, with the glory yet vivid about his hair. Could it (someone suggested) be the pavement of a temple? And, if so, how came a temple of the sun-god upon this unhomely coast?

The discovery gave rise to a small sensation and several ingenious theories, one enthusiastic philologer going so far as to derive the name Halzaphron from the Greek, interpreting it as ‘the salt of the west winds’ or ‘Zephyrs’; and to assert roundly that the temple (he assumed it to be a temple) dated far back beyond the Roman Invasion. This contention, though perhaps no more foolish than a dozen others, undoubtedly met with the most ridicule.

And yet in my wanderings along that coast I have come upon broken echoes, whispers, fragments of a tale, which now and again, as I tried to piece them together, wakened a suspicion that the derided philologer, with his false derivation, was yet ‘hot,’ as children say in the game of hide-and-seek.

For the stretch of sea overlooked by Halzaphron covers the lost land of Lyonnesse. Take a boat upon a clear, calm day, and, drifting, peer over the side through its shadow, and you will see the tops of tall forests waving below you. Walk the shore at low water and you may fill your pockets with beech-nuts,

and sometimes—when a violent tide has displaced the sand—stumble on the trunks of large trees. Geologists dispute whether the Lyonnesse disappeared by sudden catastrophe or gradual subsidence, but they agree in condemning the fables of Florence and William of Worcester, that so late as November 1099 the sea broke in and covered the whole tract between Cornwall and the Scillies, overwhelming on its way no less than a hundred and forty churches! They prove that, however it befell, we must date the inundation some centuries earlier. Now if my story be true——But let it be told:

In the year of the great tide, Graul, son of Graul, was King in the Lyonnesse. He lived at peace in his city of Maenseyth, hard by the Sullêh, where the foreign traders brought their ships to anchor—sometimes from Tyre itself, oftener from the Tyrian colonies down the Spanish coast; and he ruled over a peaceful nation of tinners, herdsmen, and charcoal-burners. The charcoal came from the great forest to the eastward where Cara Clowz in Cowz, the grey rock in the wood, overlooked the Cornish frontier; his cattle pastured nearer, in the plains about the foot of the Wolves' Cairn; and his tinners camped and washed the ore in the valley-bottoms—for in those days they had no need to dig into the earth for metal, but found plenty by puddling in the river-beds.

So King Graul ruled happily over a happy people until the dark morning when a horseman came galloping to the palace of Maenseyth with a cry that the tide had broken through Crebawethan and was sweeping north and west upon the land, drowning all in its path. 'Hark!' said he, 'already you may hear the roar of it by Bryher!'

Yann, the King's body-servant, ran at once to the stables and brought three horses—one for Queen Niotte; one for her only child, the Princess Gwennolar; and for King Graul the red stallion, Rubh, swiftest and strongest in the royal stalls, one of the Five Wonders of Lyonnesse. More than six leagues lay between them and the Wolves' Cairn, which surely the waters could never cover; and toward it the three rode at a stretch gallop, King Graul only tightening his hand on the bridle as Rubh strained to outpace the others. As he rode he called warnings to the herdsmen and tinners who already had heard the far roar of waters and were fleeing to the hills. The cattle raced ahead of him, around him, beside him; he passed troop after troop; and among them, in fellowship, galloped foxes, badgers, hares, rabbits, weasels; even small field-mice were skurrying and entangling themselves in the long grasses, and toppling head over heels in their frenzy to escape.

But before they reached the Wolves' Cairn the three riders were alone again. Rubh alone carried his master lightly, and poised his head to sniff the

wind. The other two leaned on their bridles and lagged after him, and even Rubh bore against the left-hand rein until it wearied the King's wrist. He wondered at this; but at the base of the Cairn he wondered no longer, for the old grey wolf, for whose head Graul had offered a talent of silver, was loping down the hillside in full view, with her long family at her heels. She passed within a stone's throw of the King and gave him one quiet disdainful look out of her green eyes as she headed her pack to the southward.

Then the King understood. He looked southward and saw the plain full of moving beasts. He looked northward, and two miles away the rolling downs were not, but in their place a bright line stretched taut as a string, and the string roared as if a great finger were twanging it.

Queen Niotte's horse had come to a standstill. Graul lifted and set her before him on Rubh's crupper, and called to Gwennolar to follow him. But Gwennolar's horse, too, was spent, and in a little while he drew rein and lifted her, too, and set her on the stallion's broad back behind him. Then forward he spurred again and southward after the wolves—with a pack fiercer than wolves shouting at Rubh's heels, nearer and yet nearer.

And Rubh galloped, yet not as before; for this Gwennolar was a witch—a child of sixteen, golden-tressed, innocent to look upon as a bird of the air. Her parents found no fault in her, for she was their only one. None but the Devil, whom she had bound to serve her for a year and a day, knew of her lovers—the dark young sailors from the ships of Tyre, who came ashore and never sailed again nor were seen—or beneath what beach their bodies lay in a row. To-day his date was up, and in this flood he was taking his wages.

Gwennolar wreathed her white arms around her father and clung to him, while her blown hair streamed like gold over his beard. And King Graul set his teeth and rode to save the pair whom he knew to be dearest and believed to be best. But if Niotte weighed like a feather, Gwennolar with her wickedness began to weigh like lead—and more heavily yet, until the stallion could scarcely heave his strong loins forward, as now the earth grew moist about his hoofs. For far ahead of the white surge-line the land was melting and losing its features; trickles of water threaded the green pastures, channelling the ditches, widening out into pools among the hollows—traps and pitfalls to be skirted, increasing in number while the sun sank behind and still the great rock of Cara Clowz showed far away above the green forest.

Rubh's head was leaning and his lungs throbbed against the King's heels. Yet he held on. He had overtaken the wolves; and Graul, thinking no longer of deliverance, watched the pack streaming beside him but always falling back and a little back until even the great dam dropped behind. A minute later a scream rang close to his ear; the stallion leaped as if at a water-brook, and as suddenly sank backward with a dozen wolves on his haunches.

‘Father!’ shrieked Gwennolar. ‘Father!’

He felt her arms dragged from around his neck. With an arm over his wife Niotte he crouched, waiting for the fangs to pierce his neck. And while he waited, to his amazement the horse staggered up, shook himself, and was off with a bound, fleet as an arrow, fleeter than ever before, yet not fleeter than the pack now running again and fresh beside him. He looked back. Gwennolar rose to her knees on the turf where the wolves had pulled her down and left her unhurt; she stretched out both arms to him, and called once. The sun dipped behind her, and between her and the sun the tide—a long bright-edged knife—came sweeping and cut her down. Then it seemed as if the wolves had relinquished to the waters not their prey only but their own fierce instinct; for the waves paused at the body and played with it, nosing and tumbling it over and over, lifting it curiously, laying it down again on the green knoll, and then withdrawing in a circle while they took heart to rush upon it all together and toss it high, exultant and shouting. And during that pause the fugitives gained many priceless furlongs.

They reached the skirts of the great forest and dashed into its twilight, crouching low while Rubh tore his way between the grey beech-trunks and leaped the tangles of brier, but startled no life from bough or undergrowth. Beast and reptile had fled inland; and the birds hung and circled over the tree-tops without thought of roosting. Graul’s right arm tightened about his wife’s waist, but his left hand did no more than grasp the rein. He trusted to the stallion, and through twilight and darkness alike Rubh held his course.

When at length he slackened speed and came to a halt with a shudder, Graul looked up and saw the stars overhead and a glimmering scarp of granite, and knew it for the grey rock, Cara Clowz. By the base of it he lowered Niotte to the ground, dismounted, and began to climb, leading Rubh by the bridle and seeking for a pathway. Behind him the voices of crashing trees filled the windless night. He found a ledge at length, and there the three huddled together—Niotte between swooning and sleep, Graul seated beside her, and Rubh standing patient, waiting for the day. When the crashing ceased around them, the King could hear the soft flakes of sweat dripping from the stallion’s belly, and saw the stars reflected now from the floor where his forest had stood. Day broke, and the Lyonnesse had vanished. Forest and pasture, city, mart and haven—away to the horizon a heaving sea covered all. Of his kingdom there remained only a thin strip of coast, marching beside the Cornish border, and this sentinel rock, standing as it stands to-day, then called Cara Clowz, and now St. Michael’s Mount.

If you have visited it, you will know that the Mount stands about half a mile from the mainland; an island except at low water, when you reach it by a stone causeway. Here, on the summit, Graul and Niotte built themselves a

house, asking no more of life than a roof to shelter them; for they had no child to build for, and their spirit was broken. The little remnant of their nation settled in Marazion on the mainland, or southward along the strip of coast, and set themselves to learn a new calling. As the sea cast up the bodies of their drowned cattle and the trunks of uprooted trees, they took hides and timber and fashioned boats and launched forth to win their food. They lowered nets and wicker pots through the heaving floor deep into the twilight, and, groping across their remembered fields, drew pollack and conger, shellfish and whiting from rocks where shepherds had sat to watch their sheep, or tinners gathered at noonday for talk and dinner. At first it was as if a man returning at night to his house and, finding it unlit, should feel in the familiar cupboard for food and start back from touch of a monstrous body, cold and unknown. Time and use deadened the shock. They were not happy, for they remembered days of old; but they endured, they fought off hunger, they earned sleep; and their King, as he watched from Cara Clowz their dark sails moving out against the sunset, could give thanks that the last misery had been spared his people.

But there were dawns which discovered one or two missing from the tale of boats, home-comings with heavy news for freight, knots of women and children with blown wet hair awaiting it, white faces and the wails of widow and orphan. The days drew in and this began to happen often—so often that a tale grew with it and spread, until it had reached all ears but those of King Graul and Queen Niotte.

One black noon in November a company of men crossed the sands at low-water and demanded to speak with the King.

‘Speak, my children,’ said Graul. He knew that they loved him and might count on his sharing the last crust with them.

‘We are come,’ said the spokesman, ‘not for ourselves, but for our wives and children. For us life is none too pleasant; but they need men’s hands to find food for them, and at this rate there will soon be no men of our nation left.’

‘But how can I help you?’ asked the King.

‘That we know not; but it is your daughter Gwennolar who undoes us. She lies out yonder beneath the waters, and through the night she calls to men, luring them down to their death. I myself—all of us here—have heard her; and the younger men it maddens. With singing and witch fires she lures our boats to the reefs and takes toll of us, lulling even the elders to dream, cheating them with the firelight and voices of their homes.’

Now the thoughts of Graul and Niotte were with their daughter continually. That she should have been lost and they saved, who cared so little for life and nothing for life without her—that was their abiding sorrow and wonder and self-reproach. Why had Graul not turned Rubh’s head perforce and ridden

back to die with her, since help her he could not? Many times a day he asked himself this; and though Niotte's lips had never spoken it, her eyes asked it too. At night he would hear her breath pause at his side, and knew she was thinking of their child out yonder in the cold waters.

'She calls to us also,' he answered, and checked himself.

'So it is plain her spirit is alive yet, and she must be a witch,' said the spokesman, readily.

The King rent his clothes. 'My daughter is no witch!' he cried. 'But I left her to die, and she suffers.'

'Our lads follow her. She calls to them and they perish.'

'It is not Gwennolar who calls, but some evil thing which counterfeits her. She was innocent as the day. Nevertheless your sons shall not perish, nor you accuse her. From this day your boats shall have a lantern on this rock to guide them, and I and my wife will tend it with our own hands.'

Thenceforward at sunset with their own hands Graul and Niotte lit and hung out a lantern from the niche which stands to this day and is known as St. Michael's Chair; and trimmed it, and tended it the night through, taking turns to watch. Niotte, doited with years and sorrow, believed that it shone to signal her lost child home. Her hands trembled every night as Graul lit the wick and she arched her palms above to shield it from the wind. She was happier than her husband.

Gwennolar's spell defied the lantern and their tottering pains. Boats were lost, men perished as before. The people tried a new appeal. It was the women's turn to lay their grief at the King's door. They crossed the sands by ones and twos—widows, childless mothers, maids betrothed and bereaved—and spread their dark skirts and sat before the gateway. Niotte brought them food with her own hands; they took it without thanks. All the day they sat silent, and Graul felt their silence to be heavier than curses—nay, that their eyes did indeed curse as they sat around and watched the lighting of the lantern, and Niotte, nodding innocently at her arched hands, told them: 'See, I pray. Cannot you pray too?'

But the King's prayer was spoken in the morning, when the flame and the stars grew pale together and the smoke of the extinguished lamp sickened his soul in the clean air. His gods were gone with the oaks under which he had worshipped; but he stood on a rock apart from the women and, lifting both hands, cried aloud: 'If there be any gods above the tree-tops, or any in the far seas whither the old fame of King Graul has reached; if ever I did kindness to a stranger or wayfarer, and he, returning to his own altars, remembered to speak of Graul of Lyonnesse: may I, who ever sought to give help, receive help now! From my youth I have believed that around me, beyond sight as surely as within it, stretched goodness answering the goodness in my own heart; yea,

though I should never travel and find it, I trusted it was there. O trust, betray me not! O kindness, how far soever dwelling, speak comfort and help! For I am afflicted because of my people.'

Seven mornings he prayed thus on his rock: and on the seventh, his prayer ended, he stood watching while the sunrays, like dogs shepherding a flock, searched in the mists westward and gathered up the tale of boats one by one. While he counted them, the shoreward breeze twanged once like a harp, and he heard a fresh young voice singing from the base of the cliff at his feet:

There lived a king in Argos,—
A merchantman in Tyre
Would sell the King his cargoes,
But stole his heart's desire:
Sing Io, Io, Io!—

Graul looked toward his wife. 'That will be the boy Laian,' said Niotte; 'he sits on the rock below and sings at his fishing.'

'The song is a strange one,' said Graul; 'and never had Laian voice like that.'

The singer mounted the cliff:

The father of that merry may
A thousand towns he made to pay,
And lapp'd the world in fire!

He stood before them—a handsome, smiling youth, with a crust of brine on his blue sea-cloak, and the light of the morning in his hair. 'Salutation, O Graul!' said he, and looked so cordial and well-willing that the King turned to him from the dead lamp and the hooded women as one turns to daylight from an evil dream.

'Salutation, O Stranger!' he answered. 'You come to a poor man, but are welcome—you and your shipmates.'

'I travel alone,' said the youth; 'and my business——'

But the King put up his hand. 'We ask no man his business until he has feasted.'

'I feast not in a house of mourning; and my business is better spoken soon than late, seeing that I heal griefs.'

'If that be so,' answered Graul, 'you come to those who are fain of you.' And then and there he told of Gwennolar. 'The blessing of blessings rest on him who can still my child's voice and deliver her from my people's curse!'

The Stranger listened, and threw back his head. 'I said I could heal griefs. But I cannot cure fate; nor will a wise man ask it. Pain you must suffer, but I can soothe it; sorrow, but I can help you to forget; death, but I can brace you for it.'

'Can death be welcomed,' asked Graul, 'save by those who find life

worse?'

'You shall see.' He stepped to the mourning women, and took the eldest by the hand. At first he whispered to her—in a voice so low that Graul heard nothing, but saw her brow relax, and that she listened while the blood came slowly back to her cheeks.

'Of what are you telling her?' the King demanded.

'Hush!' said the Stranger. 'Go, fetch me a harp.'

Graul brought a harp. It was mute and dusty, with a tangle of strings; but the Stranger set it against his knee, and began to mend it deftly, talking the while in murmurs as a brook talks in a covert of cresses. By and by as he fitted a string he would touch and make it hum on a word—softly at first, and with long intervals—as though all its music lay dark and tangled in chaos, and he were exploring and picking out a note here and a note there to fit his song. There was trouble in his voice, and restlessness, and a low eager striving, and a hope which grew as the notes came oftener, and lingered and thrilled on them. Then his fingers caught the strings together, and pulled the first chord: it came out of the depths with a great sob—a soul set free. Other souls behind it rose to his fingers, and he plucked them forth, faster and faster—some wailing, some laughing fiercely, but each with the echo of a great pit, the clang of doors, and the mutter of an army pressing at its heels. And now the mourners leaned forward, and forgot all except to listen, for he was singing the Creation. He sang up the stars and set them in procession; he sang forth the sun from his chamber; he lifted the heads of the mountains and hitched on their mantles of green forest; he scattered the uplands with sheep, and the upper air with clouds; he called the west wind, and it came with a rustle of wings; he broke the rock into water, and led it dancing down the cliffs, and spread it in marshes, and sent it spouting and hurrying in channels. Flowers trooped to the lip of it, wild beasts slunk down to drink; armies of corn spread in rank along it, and men followed with sickles, chanting the hymn of Linus; and after them, with children at the breast, women stooped to glean, or strode upright bearing baskets of food. Over their heads days and nights hurried in short flashes, and the seasons overtook them while they rested, and drowned them in showers of bloom, and overtopped their bodies with fresh corn: but the children caught up the sickles and ran on. To some—shining figures in the host—he gave names; and they shone because they moved in the separate light of divine eyes watching them, rays breaking the thickets or hovering down from heights where the gods sat at their ease.

But before this the men had brought their boats to shore, and hurried to the Mount, drawn by his harping. They pressed around him in a ring; and at first they were sad, since of what he sang they remembered the like in Lyonnesse—plough and sickle and flail, nesting birds and harvest, flakes of ore in the river-

beds, dinner in the shade, and the plain winking beyond in the noonday heat. They had come too late for the throes of his music, when the freed spirit trembled for a little on the threshold, fronting the dawn, but with the fire of the pit behind it and red on its trailing skirt. The song rolled forward now like a river, sweeping them past shores where they desired to linger. But the Stranger fastened his eyes on them, and sang them out to broad bars and sounding tumbling seas, where the wind piped, and the breeze came salt, and the spray slapped over the prow, hardening men to heroes. Then the days of their regret seemed to them good only for children, and the life they had loathed took a new face; their eyes opened upon it, and they saw it whole, and loved it for its largeness. 'Beyond! beyond! beyond!'—they stared down on the fingers plucking the chords, but the voice of the harp sounded far up and along the horizon.

And with that quite suddenly it came back, and was speaking close at hand, as a friend telling them a simple tale; a tale which all could understand, though of a country unknown to them. Thus it ran:

'*In Hellas, in the kingdom of Argos, there lived two brothers, Cleobis and Biton—young men, well-to-do, and of great strength of body, so that each had won a crown in the public games. Now once, when the Argives were keeping a festival of the goddess Hera, their mother had need to be driven to the temple in her chariot, but the oxen did not return from the field in time. The young men, therefore, seeing that the hour was late, put the yoke on their own necks, and drew the car in which their mother sat, and brought her to the temple, which was forty-five stades away. This they did in sight of the multitude assembled; and the men commended their strength, while the women called her blessed to be the mother of such sons. But she, overjoyed at the deed and its renown, entered the temple and, standing before the image of Hera, prayed the goddess to grant to her two sons, Cleobis and Biton, the greatest boon which could fall to man. After she had prayed, and they had sacrificed and eaten of the feast, the young men sat down in the temple and fell asleep, and never awoke again, but so made an end with life. In this wise the blessing of Hera came to them; and the men of Argos caused statues to be made of them and set up at Delphi, for a memorial of their piety and its reward.*'

Thus quietly the great song ended, and Graul, looking around on his people, saw on their faces a cheerfulness they had not known since the day of flood.

'Sir,' said he, 'yours is the half of my poor kingdom and yours the inheritance, if you will abide with us and sing us more of these songs.'

'For that service,' answered the Stranger, 'I am come; but not for the reward. Give me only a hide of land somewhere upon your cliffs, and there will I build a house and sing to all who have need of me.'

So he did; and the fable goes on to say that never were known in the remnant of Lyonnesse such seasons as followed, nor ever will be. The fish crowded to the nets, the cliffs waved with harvest. Heavy were the nets to haul and laborious was the reaping, but the people forgot their aches when the hour came to sit at the Stranger's feet and listen, and drink of the vines which he taught them to plant. For his part he toiled not at all, but descended at daybreak and nightfall to bathe in the sea, and returned with the brine on his curls and his youth renewed upon him. He never slept; and they, too, felt little need of sleep, but drank and sang the night away, refreshed by the sacred dews, watching for the moon to rise over the rounded cornfields, or for her feet to touch the sea and shed silver about the boats in the offing. Out yonder Gwennolar sang and took her toll of life as before; but the people heeded less, and soon forgot even when their dearest perished. Other things than sorrow they began to unlearn. They had been a shamefaced race; the men shy and the women chaste. But the Stranger knew nothing of shame; nor was it possible to think harm where he, their leader, so plainly saw none. Naked he led them from the drinking-bout down the west stairway to the bathing-pool, and naked they plunged in and splashed around him and laughed as the cool shock scattered the night's languor and the wine-fumes. What mattered anything?—what they did, or what they suffered, or what news the home-coming boats might bring? They were blithe for the moment and lusty for the day's work, and with night again would come drink and song of the amorous gods; or if by chance the Singer should choose another note and tell of Procris or of Philomela they could weep softly for others' woes and, so weeping, quite forget their own.

And the fable goes on to say that for three years by these means the Stranger healed the griefs of the people of Lyonnesse, until one night when they sat around he told them the story of Ion; and if the Stranger were indeed Phoebus Apollo himself, shameless was the telling. But while they listened, wrapped in the story, a cry broke on the night above the murmur of the beaches—a voice from the cliff below them, calling 'Repent! Repent!'

They leaped to their feet at once, and hurried down the stairway. But the beach was empty; and though they hunted for an hour, they found no one. Yet the next night and every night after the same voice called 'Repent! Repent!' They hurled down stones upon it and threatened it with vengeance; but it was not to be scared. And by and by the Stranger missed a face from his circle, then another. At length came a night when he counted but half of his company.

He said no word of the missing ones; but early next morning, when the folk had set out to their labours in the fields, he took a staff and walked along the

shore toward the Mount. A little beyond Parc-an-als, where a spring gushes from the face of the cliff, he came upon a man who stood under it catching the trickle in a stone basin, and halted a few paces off to watch him. The man's hair and beard were long and unkempt, his legs bare, and he wore a tattered tunic which reached below the knees and was caught about his waist with a thong girdle. For some minutes he did not perceive the Singer; but turned at length, and the two eyed each other awhile.

Then the Singer advanced smiling, while the other frowned.

'Thou hast followed me,' he said.

'I have followed and found thee,' the other answered.

'Thy name?'

'Leven,' said the man. 'I come out of Ireland.'

'The Nazarite travels far; but this spot He overlooked on his travels, and the people had need. I brought them help; but they desert me now—for thee doubtless?'

The Saint bent his head. The Singer laughed.

'He is strong, but the old gods bear no malice. I go to-night to join their sleep, but I have loved this folk in a fashion. I pitied their woes and brought them solace: I taught them to forget—and in the forgetting maybe they have learned much that thou wilt have to unteach. Yet deal gently with them. They are children, and too often you holy men come with bands of iron. Shall we sit and talk awhile together, for their sakes?'

And the fable says that for a long day St. Leven sat on the sands of the Porth which now bears his name, and talked with the Singer; and, that in consequence, to this day the descendants of the people of Lyonnesse praise God in cheerfuller hymns than the rest of the world uses.

Twilight had fallen before the Stranger rose and took his farewell. On his way back he spied a company approaching along the dusky shore, and drew aside behind a rock while they passed toward the Saint's dwelling. He found his own deserted. Of his old friends either none had come or none had waited; and away on a distant beach rose the faint chant of St. Patrick's Hymn of the Guardsman:

Christ the eye, the ear, the heart,
Christ above, before, behind me;
From the snare, the sword, the dart,
On the Trinity I bind me—
Christi est salus,
Christi est salus,
Salus tua, Domine, sit semper nobiscum!

STEP O' ONE SIDE

The Story is told by James Pascoe of Menadarva, in the Clay District of Cornwall

I

I WAS a small boy when Joseph Pooke laid a sort of spell on our parish; and as the beginnings of it happened in the bar-kitchen of 'Step o' One Side' (which is our local name for the Wesley Arms, by reason of its standing, respectable yet in some ways convenient, a short step off the main street), I can only report of them by hearsay; my chief witness being Sam Trudgian, a clay-worker and a moderately sober man all his days.

This Joseph Pooke, then, came on a Friday night in December and out of a tearing sou'westerly gale, to the astonishment of the company seated around on bench and settle and all the cosier for the squalls of rain bursting against the windows. For you must know that the little off-parlour beyond the bar-kitchen served, in those days on Friday nights, for a sort of counting-house, where the three Clay-lords (as we called them), who owned the great One-and-All Pit, paid out the men's wages; which done, they would light their long pipes and linger for a couple of hours over two goes apiece of brandy-hot and discuss the news of the day.

Old Zebedee and Cornelius Bunt, brothers and twins at that, were the two seniors, both equally rich by repute; with William Pendrea, their sister's son—they being unmarried—for junior partner and manager. Lawyer Simmons of St. Austell regularly made up the fourth; and there they would sit content with the world, a door and a curtain only dividing them off from the big kitchen-bar where the men handselled their pay—thirty it might be and more, thinning down to a dozen as the staider ones sloped away home to their wives.

Well, there the place was full—Renatus Lowry, the landlord, stirring the great fire and taking orders; his wife behind the bar mixing 'Schenacrum' (which is ale and rum with ingredients); and their daughter Annie, a slip of a girl all but husband-high, slicing lemons or running to and from the back-kitchen with the kettle. And in the midst of this busy-all the front door banged to, and close on the sound of it the foreigner walked in. I should explain perhaps that any with a face unknown or a stranger in any way from outside the parish is a 'foreigner' to us in Menadarva. But this man had the look of a far-travelled man as he stood a moment framed in the kitchen doorway, the

lamplight glistering on the wet that poured off the rim of his sou'wester and down his yellow oilskin. Also when he pulled off his headpiece and the company caught sight that a pair of earrings glinted behind the draggle of his side locks, it took them aback to hear him speak good Cornish.

'Evenin', neighbours all!' says he, taking in the room with a smile and a bit of a laugh. 'A red light at times may be a warnin', but ashore and through red curtains it spells good entertainment—or should, eh, missus?' He turned to Mrs. Lowry.

'For them as can pay and behave themselves,' answered that cautious woman. Her husband just at that moment came from the inner room, a tray of empty glasses in hand. Belike the bang of the door had fetched him forth of a sudden.

'Hullo!' says he with a stare, handing the tray to the woman; and then: 'What's this?—a wreck ashore?'

'Timbers sound, I hope,' says the stranger, tapping a longish bundle wrapped in tarpaulin that he carried under his left arm. With no more ado he stepped across to the fire-place, unslung a haversack from his shoulder, set down the bundle, and slowly stripped himself of his oilskins—a well-set fellow, broad of shoulder, and cased in good sea-cloth. His boots, too, though mired, were stout and serviceable.

'You're kindly welcome anyways, my son,' said Renatus, perhaps noting this. 'A seaman, I reckon?'

'Miner. And my name's Pooke—Joseph Pooke—St. Joseph was in the tin trade once, as maybe you've heard tell. But you've made no bad cast at it, either: seein' that I've come here by way of The Horn.'

This made all stare, respectfully.

'Plymouth bound?'

'Not to-night, anyway. And I've not broke ship, if that's what you're hintin'.'

'For shame, Renatus!' put in the wife across the counter. 'Cattychisin' like this, and him just in from the weather.' The sight of the man's good clothes had reassured her, no doubt.

He stepped to the bar. 'Thank 'ee, ma'am. And as for your husband's name I can read it from the notice above the dresser: RENATUS LOWRY, LICENSED TO SELL BEER, SPIRITUOUS LIQUORS AND TOBACCO. Well, that's a suggestion. What about drinks all round, if the company will name their fancy?' He pulled out a fistful of silver and slid a couple of half-crowns across. 'That's a pretty piece, too, you keep here.'

'I'll trouble you to speak respectful of my daughter,' Mrs. Lowry fired up.

'Certainly, ma'am. But I was speakin' of your counter. A prettier piece of copper, nor a brighter kept as proud to image two handsome faces, hasn'

delighted the eye this long while. I'm a miner, ma'am, as I said just now; and by haveage—my father and mother having broken up home under Carn Brea and gone out to the States with a cousin or two in the 'forty-nine when the mines closed, down-along. In Nevada I was born and reared. Underground mostly. . . . Drinks around, landlord, if you please! . . . And what might be *your* name, my dear?' he asks the girl. 'N, or M? as the book says.'

'Annie, sir,' answers she, bending low, and her hand shaking a bit as she pushed his drink towards him so that it spilt a drop.

'Careless, Annie!' says the mother.

'Annie?—Annie Lowry? Eh now—"Maxwellton braes are bonny." . . . No, ma'am, I'm not teasin' your daughter. 'Tis the name of an old song, and the world-widest on earth I reckon.'

'Is it out of Wesley?' she asked.

' 'Tis a tune two innocents have sung together often enough, each holding a corner of Wesley's hymn-book. And you shall hear it, with the company's leave.'

He went over to the corner, unwrapped a long box from the tarpaulin, drew from it fiddle and bow. Now I should tell you we have a great ear for music in Menadarva. So all waited agog while he resined and tuned, and it didn't need a scrape of his foot when ready, nor the flourish he gave to his bow, to call for silence.

First he played the air of the old song in single notes, very quiet and true: next he repeated it, holding the fiddle to his ear and plucking the strings: then it went under his chin again and fetched out the thing in great chords 'so as (I am quoting Sam) you didn't scarcely know the fiddle's inside from your own.' And with that he started off on variations faster and faster till the tune mazed itself in a kind of devil's jig. In the whirl of it (says Sam) you couldn't tell man from music, nor the music from the play of his wrists and the glint of his earrings; till sudden with a stamp of his foot he broke off, waited whilst you might count five and then, soft as before, plucked out the tune, note by note.

With that it was over. In the middle of the clapping Sam turned—he didn't know why—towards the girl Annie, and her face was white as a peeled hazel. Belike, though, he was the only one to mark this, the others slewing about at the moment towards the inner doorway, where stood the Clay-lords themselves, fetched forth by the music.

'Brayvo! Brayvo!' cackled the twins together. 'But who the devil is it?' asked Lawyer Simmons.

Pendrea, as manager, took charge. 'That's a rare gift of yours, my man,' says he. 'Travellin' in music, eh?'

'Travellin' *to* music,' the stranger corrected him. 'Joseph Pooke's my name, at your service; mining's my occupation—metalliferous; and the jig I

played just now is the tune I travel to, mostly. You may call it “Over the Hills and Far Away.” ’

Pendrea stood and eyed him a bit, finger on chin. He was a leading Methodist and took a great interest in his choir, so that all guessed what worked in his mind.

‘Know anything about clay?’

‘Adam was made of it, I’ve heard tell.’

‘China-clay, I mean.’

‘—and the sons of Adam hereabouts dig it for the making of things to be broken, like their father and other vessels of promise.’

‘Well, if you’re minded for a job’—Pendrea flushed a trifle as he said it, being a masterful man and not caring to be answered thus before company —‘come to my office to-morrow, at ten sharp.’

‘Likely I may, when I’ve slept upon it’—with a side glance at the landlady.

‘Annie, girl, fit and heat the warming-pan,’ commanded she.

II

In this way Joseph Pooke came to us, to take charge, as you might say, of the parish. Next morning he signed on at the Great Goonburrow Pit, under the ‘One and All,’ and moved in his traps to Aunt Sandercock’s, over her General Store; and—it being Saturday—took a longish walk over the moors. Sunday morning he attended Church, and the Methodists reckoned they had lost him. But evening found him seated in Chapel, just as attentive as to the parson’s sermon; and singing, when the hymn came, in a clear light tenor.

Pendrea got hold of him afterwards. ‘Glad to see you’re one of the Connexion.’

‘It’s news to me,’ answered Pooke. ‘But there’s a wheeze in that harmonium of yours that I could cure, if you gave me leave to try.’

Within a week, having fitted up a bench and conjured some tools out of goodness knows where, he had the instrument to pieces and refitted, bit by bit.

‘You’ve made it speak like an angel,’ said Miss Lasky, the choir leader, with a blush for her forwardness.

‘Well,’ said he, ‘God Almighty *might* make an angel speak like a harmonium; but He’s merciful. A harmonium’s the devil at the best, if you’ll excuse me. Your choir, now; a better set of natural voices you couldn’t get together, not if you combed the Pacific slope; and yet all singing *tremolo* and because of *this*.’ He banged his palm on the lid.

‘But, but, Mr. Pooke—I *like* to hear them sing *tremolo*! It shows that their feelings are moved.’

She remembered his answer to this and told it to me years after. ‘Music

don't wobble, miss, any more than the stars singing their Maker's name.'

'Oh!' said Miss Lasky, puzzled. 'I didn't know you were religious—in that sense,' she went on, recovering herself and being (as I can guess now) not more averse than most spinsters of her age from discussing religion with a man.

He made no answer then; but later, being called in to train the choir, with no help but his fiddle he taught them how to hit their notes clean every time, till they chorused away like larks, unaccompanied, and the fame of it drew folks of a Sunday from miles around to hear.

Before this, though, he had a wood shed built at the back of Aunt Sandercock's, with a whole gamut of tools and gadgets. And by degrees it came about that if you wanted watch or clock put to rights, or your pump wouldn't work, or your chimney smoked, or you had a tooth to be pulled, or a child with the croup, or a swarm of bees to be hived, Pooke was your man.

With all this he never again played the fiddle in public, save to give the note at choir practices. 'This clay-heaving deadens the touch,' he explained one night to the company in 'Step o' One Side.' 'Metal and clay be two different things. Fire made 'em both; but in metal—gold, silver, tin, copper, call it what you will—fire's in the veins working, and you follow it like a lover—eh, Miss Annie? While, with clay, what is it but ashes, burnt out and dead.'

None the less he did his job at the works well enough, and specially in packing a truck. Only one day, happening to cross the pit with Pendrea, says he with a jerk of his thumb back towards where a two-three men were shovelling. 'There's a cornice of overhang yonder. None too safe as I reckon.'

Now it may be that Pendrea had started to envy the man's popularity. At any rate he answered stiff and in the hearing of several: 'Your job's over there with the loading, I believe.'

'Sorry,' said Pooke polite. 'But my father was killed by a fall of rock; and the shock so told on my mother that my brother Noah was born a week later, before his time. Whereby, being his older by nine years, I had to look after him as he grew up. She being weak of health, her terror day and night was of earth or rock giving way and smothering him. Woman's foolishness, no doubt; but that's how I grew up nervous about overhang.'

Two days later, as fate would have it, nine or ten tons of that very cornice came down and crushed a couple of workers. Reuben Oates and Jim Narcarrow by name. Pooke, as one of the foremost on the spot, to dig out the bodies, had to give evidence at the inquest, but not a word did he speak to cast any blame on Pendrea, and the other witnesses took their cue from him. So the verdict was 'Accidental death' and no more, though whisperings went around.

He never took advantage of the Manager over this, unless you count a day when he walked into the office and asked for a week off.

‘It’s like this,’ he answered Pendrea—‘I was in that Church of yours, on hands and knees, after hours, rubbing at a couple of brasses, when old Parson Vine came stumbling in, blind as a bat, and fairly pitched over me. Like leap-frog it was. And so, one thing leading to another, I told him that two of his organ-pipes were rotten as touch and proved it by poking a hole in ’em with my finger. And I want the hire of a lorry, too, if you’ll oblige.’

‘You’re not joining our friends the Anglicans, I hope?’

‘Nothing worse than helping brotherly love,’ said Pooke. So off he drove next day, and came back inside a week with four brand-new organ-pipes, and in ten days had all the rest gilded to correspond.

But his last feat was with the Parish Band, which included Church and Chapel alike, but had been going to pieces ever since the death of old ‘Waxy’ Cann, their bandmaster. He spent three weeks going around collecting the old instruments and refitting them; and then turned to the piles of old music scores. ‘B flat, B flat—the whole dam lot!’

‘ ’Tis the easiest key to play,’ explained Archie Govett, leader and first cornet.

‘Yes, and like kissing your sister.’

With that he set to work again, transposing the better pieces back into their proper keys. Hours it must have cost him and reams of music sheets; but by August he had Menadarva Band fit to enter for the County Competition at Redruth, and that albeit he never put lip to the brass or the reeds himself. ‘I was brought up on strings,’ he’d say. ‘If you want to know what brass can do, or a silver cornet, you should hear my brother Noah.’

It was during these practices that he started—and, once started, kept on going—with talk about this wonderful brother of his. ‘He’s a masterpiece, is Noah! Built for the brass, as you might say: six foot two, forty-eight round the chest at nineteen, and yet will fetch forth a note like a maid’s whisper and not a slur in it.’ Seemingly, too, this nonesuch had other accomplishments—‘could sing a high tenor, most pleasing, and shift a ton of broken rock against any two men of near his size,’ and so on, and so on.

Well, the explanation came before we wanted; and with it the blow fell.

In mid-August the band, with Pooke as conductor, fared down to Redruth in a four-horse brake. They didn’t carry off the Cup; but they brought home second prize, with a special for the ‘Self-Chosen Item,’ which was no less a teaser than the overture to *Semiramide*; which again made excuse for a grand supper in ‘Step o’ One Side.’ Having, of course, to speak to the toast of his health: ‘You’ll do better next time,’ he said, ‘and why? Because I’m leaving you, and by the five-forty to-morrow. . . . Passage booked back to the States on the *Dalmatic*, sailing Southampton, Tuesday. But ’tis no losers you’ll be. You’ve heard me tell, often enough, of my brother Noah? Well, among his

other merits he always does as I tell him. We've arranged to exchange jobs, and he'll be arriving, as we've planned, towards the end of March next. And so I thank you, friends all!' He lifted his glass and sat down of a sudden, the company left to stare as though they'd seen a ghost through the tobacco-smoke.

Next morning there was some talk of a testimonial, but no time for it. The band assembled in the afternoon and played him down to the station: and the last we saw of him was a hand waving from the carriage window at the bend of the curve.

III

It is here that, in a small way, I happen into the story, and with a confession. The train gone, and the crowd trooping back to the village to drink to the hero's health, it came into my unregenerate head (such temptations do assail a boy rising ten) that the coast lay clear for a raid on Mr. Rosveare's summer orchard of quarendens and ribstones on the hither side of the railway line.

It was latish, and the young moon already clear between the apple-branches, when I started to fetch a circuit for home, first across a net-work of sidings, and then in cover of a line of clay-trucks anchored and waiting delivery at Tray jetties. Here, to the right of my path, ran a stream that came down past the end of our garden, where was a plank for crossing.

But before I came to this a sound fetched me up short. Queer it was, and human, sobbing between the noises of the running water; and for the instant—there being no other cottage nigh—I could think of nothing but that it must be mother out in the garden and in some terrible distress. Heart in mouth I ran towards the plank, but was fetched up again in my stride.

Years ago, in the days before the railway reclaimed the marsh, and when barges plied high up our stream until the clay-washings choked it, someone had planted an old iron cannon for a bollard. Time had sunk it to half its height and plugged up the mouth with driftings of sand and clay-dust. . . . And there on it a girl was seated, rocking herself and sobbing.

'Twas the maid Annie Lowry. But what with the slip of the moon slanting down an angle of light through a break in the double line of trucks on the clay-dust spread everywhere white as snow, and here in a black shawl half covering her white frock, like a ghost she frighted me, and as like a ghost I must have come upon her, the clay muffling my tread.

'What are you doing here, boy?' she gasped out, jumping to her feet. 'Go away!'

Well, as for the question I reckoned it belonged to me, and I put it back on

her. ‘But if you’re in trouble, Miss Annie,’ I said, ‘there’s my mother handy, and you know her.’

She cut me short. ‘I don’t want your mother, Jim Pascoe’—she wiped her eyes bravely—‘and I want nothing of you but to go away. There’s nothing the matter with me, either.’

‘If that’s so,’ I stammered, taken aback by the flat lie, ‘won’t you have an apple?’

Upon this she broke into a high laugh. But it ended quick, overtaken by a sort of guggle in her throat.

‘You funny boy! . . . Yes, I’ll take your apple. . . . And I’ll give you something in change for it—and a promise.’

‘What’s that?’ I asked.

She put down her head close and whispered. ‘I’ll give you a kiss, Jim, if you promise never—never on your oath—to tell any soul that you saw me here.’

Well, it happened to me so, at that age: and I vow that as she bent and kissed my cheek a glory of heaven broke all about me, and her breath was all flowers and fire. It was over in a moment, and she held out a hand for my apple.

‘Word of honour you won’t tell?’

‘Not for wild horses, Miss Annie!’

Upon that she told me to run, and I ran.

IV

‘*Balearic timed Plymouth Saturday next Brother to wire arrival.*’—So Joseph Pooke was as good as his promise. The cablegram reached the Clay Company’s office on the Wednesday before Easter, and the telegram from Plymouth on the Saturday morning (our post office receiving none on Good Friday). So again there was no time for organizing preparations to welcome the paragon. But Pendrea hurried around to engage the old lodgings at Aunt Sandercock’s, enlisted some women to rig up a public tea in the Wesleyan School Room—it being a holiday, of course—and got together a small reception committee, including the Vicar, to meet the 4.45 train. The Stationmaster, too, was good enough to lay a score of fog-detonators up the line by way of welcome.

The banging of these may have shaken our man a bit. Anyhow, as the train drew in he had his head thrust out as if to inquire about the accident, and heaved forth upon the platform before Pendrea, hurrying up, had time to reach the compartment door.

So there Noah Pooke landed among us, with a kind of wondering smile on

him: a monstrous fine fellow for all to see, strapping in height, with shoulders to match, in noways resembling his light-limbed brother, and least of all in his face, which was fair-complexioned and pinkish, the lower part straggled over by a thin growth of beard, hay-coloured and curly. In his left fist he clenched the brass-handled case, which we guessed to contain the famous cornet; in his right a carpet-bag (or 'grip,' as he called it), which he had to set down for the handshaking. But to the case he stuck until, the School Room reached, he looked around and stowed the thing carefully under his chair. Then with a vague sort of smile he cast a second look over the feast, and the first word he said was 'Fattening.'

One of the helpers pushed a plate of jam and cream splits under his nose. 'Come now, Mr. Noah, make a beginning!'—this with a blush for using his Christian name so forwardly.

'Thank 'ee, miss—a cup of tea and one slice of bread-and-butter. No sugar, if you please. Doctor's orders.'

He retrieved himself, however, at Easter Service in Chapel next morning, with a cornet solo, *O for the Wings of a Dove!* clear as an angel speaking and persuading. There was no question but he must take over his brother's charge of the choir—and of the band, too, next session.

Also when, on Tuesday, he started work at the pits he soon showed that, though no match with his brother at packing, he could heave clay with the best or a trifle better.

But—no one could tell just why or how or when it began—for some reason or other the practices of band and choir fell away by degrees from the standard to which his brother had worked them—that is, unless you accept Sam Trudgian's explanation: 'When the billies slurred up so much as a note, Joseph would hammer the desk and cry "Dammit," no matter how holy the edifice; whereas with this chap 'tis "No, no," or "Shall we try again?" at the strongest.'

Aunt Sandercock, too, had an early word about him. You couldn't say she whispered it, either, that being foreign to the pitch of her voice. She kept Wyandots, and the freshness of their eggs was dear to her as her Bible. 'But every morning, sure as I lays—or sets, if you'll excuse me—his egg afore him, he looks at it, then up at me with "Are you sartin 'tis quite fresh, Mrs. Sandercock?" There's limits to innocence, if you ask me!'

Now I should tell you that from first sight of him I had worshipped the man for his strength and stature; and he clinched it on the day when he promoted me to tap the triangle in the band. Fine and proud my mother was when she buttoned the frogs of my uniform jacket, though she didn't know I'd had to fight two boys for it. The worse shock, therefore, it gave me when she fell to discussing him with Father over our Sunday dinner. At the mention of Noah Pooke I had pricked up my young ears.

Mother was saying '—and one of these days there'll be a scandal. Twice during sermon the Minister faced around, lookin' where the noise came from.'

'Asleep,' suggested Father, 'or wind, maybe. He suffers from it, as the parish knows.'

'He's soft as'—Mother shifted knife to fork hand and pushed finger halfway towards the figgy-duff she was carving—'as *that*. Put in with the bread and took out with the cakes.'

I flared up at this, though it misbecame my years. 'Mr. Pooke is the finest man in Menadarva,' I blurted out; 'and the handsomest, and the kindest.'

'When you've finished your plate,' said Father after a slow stare, 'you just run along to garden and listen if the bees be threat'nin' a second swarm.'

Then, within a month, all of a sudden my hero's stock went up; it being gossiped about that he was courting the Lowry maid. They had been met in the dusk, walking out together. 'A promising match, too,' the parish agreed, while yet some added, 'Likely enough 'twill be the making of him,' Annie being reckoned a girl with a head on her shoulders.

But at the end of five weeks or so another rumour went round that the courtship had been broken off. And one evening in the bar-kitchen—Annie being away at the back somewhere, washing up—Bert Leggo, an impudent chap, tackled her mother for news of it. 'You'd better ask her,' answered Mrs. Lowry short and sharp. 'Some time when you've stopped winkin' and don't mind having an ear boxed.'

Anyway, it told upon Noah, who took to walking by nights, all alone, and going by day (as the word goes), looking a man that had lost sixpence and found a farthing. And the band went down to Redruth and came back without a prize.

But it was not until close on Christmas that the crash came.

V

The Vicar had a niece, or grandniece, down for a visit; an upstanding lady, with a full, deep contralto voice and reputed to be making a fortune at the concerts in London. These artists, I'm told, can never rest on a holiday: and what must she do but get up a concert?—proceeds to be given to an Ambulance Class that had been formed after the accident at the pit and was already short of funds. This was an object for which Church and Chapel could work together, and they made a fine success of it up to a point. The band made up in noise what they'd unlearnt of Joseph Pooke's teaching. The Vicar read out to us how the waters came down in all sorts of way at Lodore, and later quavered out 'O that we two were maying!' with the Postmistress—of all the unlikeliest capers! After that came an item or too, and then, of course, our

visitor bore away the bell with some Italian thing, all runs and shakes. All encored this, as in duty bound, and she gave us *Caller Herrin'*, with wonderful effect from her lower throat, as you might say. Next came Noah's turn; and, pulling himself together, as it were, he rendered *The Lost Chord* and *I Dreamt that I Dwelt* in his best style; so outstanding that when he ended the lady came up in her imperative way, shook him by the hand and almost kissed him. 'Wonderful!' she cried out, turning on the audience. 'This gentleman must really, yes really, try an *obbligato* to me with Miss—I forget your name for the moment—I'm so excited—oh, yes!—with Miss Hender at the piano, of course.' So Noah had to blush and bow.

Well, when the lady's next turn came and she sang *Bid me discourse*, he managed it to admiration, bending over Miss Hender's shoulder and fitting in, soft, on the right notes. And in the storm of applause Miss Hender found herself gently pushed off the music-stool and the lady seated in her place.

'You'll not need any score for this,' says the lady. 'It's the dear old *Annie Laurie*, key of G,' and she struck a couple of chords. Noah's cornet went up to his lips. He kept his smile but both his hands shook.

'Maxwellton braes are bonny.'

—And just then a voice—Bert Leggo's—spoke up from somewhere at the back: 'Damme! the man's blubbing.'

It was true, too! Big tears were running down his cheeks as he puffed them for the next stave. There's no saying whether he heard Leggo or not. Anyway he lowered his cornet, looking about him as one dazed, tucked the thing—quick—under his arm, and fled off at the back of the platform.

VI

That broke him. From that day he went about, eyes down, shunning his fellows, pitiful to see; the worst being that he kept his silly smile, full of pain as his eyes would be when he lifted them. Soon Aunt Sandercock let out that she dusted his tool-bench every morning and 'though he'll sit there half the night, wasting good oil at eleven three-farthings a gallon, there's every tool in its place untouched, same as I left it—and him the untidiest by habit that ever I lodged.' Soon, too, he took to lying a-bed and turning up late at the pit; until there came a Friday when Pendrea very reasonably lost his temper and sacked him on the spot.

Next morning I overtook and ran past him to catch up with a parcel of boys on the road to the moors—a waste of land that stretched for three miles and more at the back of the pits. It was unreclaimed for clay as yet; all peat, heather, and bog-plants, criss-crossed by small brown trickles of streams in

which our game was to hunt for minnows, efts, dragon-flies, anything we could fetch home in pickle-jars.

He was carrying a fishing-rod, jointed up in a bag, and his cornet-case in his right hand. After passing him, something moved me to halt; and as he came up he must have read in my face what I couldn't put into words. For he bade me run after the rest, and then, still with that smile of his, 'Joseph is a fruitful bough,' said he; 'but Issachar a strong ass couching down between two burdens'—words that puzzled me at the time and puzzled me later when I found them in the Scriptures.

There were trout, small but plenty, lower down where the main stream made a long bend by the west; and when we parted he would be after these. But I never heard of his taking any, that day or after. What happened was that he wandered far off, away from sight, and there played tunes to himself on his key-bugle by the water. Times again, while hunting for minnows, we boys would hear the lonesome notes of it floating up, wailing across the moor. Sometimes it might be *Trafalgar's Bay* or *Come, cheer up, my Lads*; but always, and whatever the tune, it put you in mind of a creature lost and in pain.

And there the man died.

They found him stretched out by a small stream, his rod (unspliced) and his key-bugle on the bank beside him. Staring up and smiling he lay: death must have come upon him mercifully. The Vicar pursed out the money to pay all expenses with a balance for the headstone: it appeared that of late he had been getting remittances from the States and paying them out quietly to the poor fellow.

But that doesn't quite end the story. One evening, towards Christmas, Joseph Pooke returned to Menadarva—it turned out, to visit the grave and settle up with the Vicar. One or two put it about they had passed his ghost in the dusk. But it wasn't his ghost, nor his business alone with the Vicar.

For that night the girl Annie ran off with him, to be married in London. . . . Yes, by licence and all in form: for two days later the proper certificate came to 'Step o' One Side,' with word she was off to the States with the best man in the world: and later Mr. Lowry showed around the photographs of two healthy children, twins.

'And a very ordinary pair,' was Sam Trudgian's comments. 'Heavy, like that unfortunate uncle of theirs, if you ask me. But 'tis curious how gifts will skip about in families.'

LIEUTENANT LAPENOTIÈRE

THE night-porter at the Admiralty had been sleeping in his chair. He was red-eyed and wore his livery coat buttoned at random. He grumbled to himself as he opened the great door.

He carried a glass-screened candle, and held it somewhat above the level of his forehead—which was protuberant and heavily pock-marked. Under the light he peered out at the visitor, who stood tall and stiff, with uniform overcoat buttoned to the chin, between the Ionic pillars of the portico.

'Who's there?'

'Lieutenant Lapenotière, of the *Pickle* schooner—with dispatches.'

'Dispatches?' echoed the night-porter. Out beyond the screen of masonry that shut off the Board of Admiralty's fore-court from Whitehall, one of the tired post-horses started blowing through its nostrils on this foggy night.

'From Admiral Collingwood—Mediterranean Fleet off Cadiz—sixteen days,' answered the visitor curtly. 'Is every one abed?'

'Admiral Collingwood? Why Admiral Collingwood?' The night-porter fell back a pace, opening the door a trifle wider. 'Good God, sir! You don't say as how——'

'You can fetch down a Secretary or someone, I hope?' said Lieutenant Lapenotière, quickly stepping past him into the long dim hall. 'My dispatches are of the first importance. I have posted up from Falmouth without halt but for relays.'

As the man closed the door, he heard his post-boy of the last relay slap one of the horses encouragingly before heading home to stable. The chaise wheels began to move on the cobbles.

'His Lordship himself will see you, sir. Of that I make no doubt,' twittered the night-porter, fumbling with the bolt. 'There was a terrible disturbance, back in July, when Captain Bettesworth arrived—not so late as this, to be sure, but towards midnight—and they waited till morning, to carry up the dispatches with his Lordship's chocolate. Thankful was I next day not to have been on duty at the time. . . . If you will follow me, sir——'

Lieutenant Lapenotière had turned instinctively towards a door on the right. It admitted to the Waiting Room, and there were few officers in the service who did not know—and only too well—that Chamber of Hope Deferred.

'No, sir . . . this way, if you please,' the night-porter corrected him, and

opened a door on the left. ‘The Captains’ Room,’ he announced, passing in and steering for the chimney-shelf, on which stood a pair of silver sconces each carrying three wax candles. These he took down, lit and replaced. ‘Ah, sir! Many’s the time I’ve showed Lord Nelson himself into this room, in the days when he was Sir Horatio, and even after. And you were sayin’——’

‘I said nothing.’

The man moved to the door; but halted there and came back, as though in his own despite.

‘I can’t help it, sir. . . . Half a guinea he used to give me, regular. But the last time—and hard to believe ’twas little more than a month ago—he halts on his way out, and says he, searchin’ awkward-like in his breeches’ pocket with his left hand, “Ned,” says he, “my old friend”—aye, sir, his old friend he called me—“Ned,” says he, pulling out a handful o’ gold, “my old friend,” says he, “I’ll compound with you for two guineas, this bein’ the last time you may hold the door open for me, in or out. But you must pick ’em out,” says he, spreadin’ his blessed fingers with the gold in ’em: “for a man can’t count money who’s lost his right flapper.” Those were his words, sir. “Old friend,” he called me, in that way of his.’

Lieutenant Lapenotière pointed to his left arm. Around the sleeve a black scarf was knotted.

‘*Dead*, sir?’ the night-porter hushed his voice.

‘Dead,’ echoed Lieutenant Lapenotière, staring at the Turkey carpet, of which the six candles, gaining strength, barely illumined the pattern. ‘Dead, at the top of victory; a great victory. Go: fetch somebody down.’

The night-porter shuffled off. Lieutenant Lapenotière, erect and sombre, cast a look around the apartment, into which he had never before been admitted. The candles lit up a large painting—a queer bird’s-eye view of Venice. Other pictures, dark and bituminous, decorated the panelled walls—portraits of dead admirals, a sea-piece or two, some charts. . . . This was all he discerned out in the dim light; and in fact he scanned the walls, the furniture of the room, inattentively. His stomach was fasting, his head light with rapid travel; above all, he had a sense of wonder that all this should be happening to *him*. For, albeit a distinguished officer, he was a modest man, and by habit considered himself of no great importance. Albeit a brave man, too, he shrank at the thought of the message he carried—a message to explode and shake millions of men in a confusion of wild joy or grief.

For about the tenth time in those sixteen days it seemed to burst and escape in an actual detonation, splitting his head—there, as he waited in the strange room where never a curtain stirred. . . . It was a trick his brain played him, repeating, echoing the awful explosion of the French seventy-four *Achille*, which had blown up towards the close of the battle. When the ship was ablaze

and sinking, his own crew had put off in boats to rescue the Frenchmen, at close risk of their own lives, for her loaded guns, as they grew red-hot, went off at random among rescuers and rescued. . . .

As had happened before when he felt this queer shock, his mind travelled back and he seemed to hear the series of discharges running up at short intervals to the great catastrophe. . . . To divert his thoughts, he turned to study the view of Venice above the chimney-piece . . . and on a sudden faced about again.

He had a sensation that someone was in the room—someone standing close behind him.

But no. . . . For the briefest instant his eyes rested on an indistinct shadow—his own perhaps, cast by the candle-light? Yet why should it lie lengthwise there, shaped like a coffin, on the dark polished table that occupied the middle of the room?

The answer was that it did not. Before he could rub his eyes it had gone. Moreover, he had turned to recognize a living being . . . and no living person was in the room, unless by chance (absurd supposition) one were hidden behind the dark red window-curtains.

'Recognize' may seem a strange word to use; but here had lain the strangeness of the sensation—that the someone standing there was a friend, waiting to be greeted. It was with eagerness and a curious warmth of the heart that Lieutenant Lapenotière had faced about—upon nothing.

He continued to stare in a puzzled way at the window curtains, when a voice by the door said:

'Good evening!—or perhaps, to be correct, good morning! You are Mr. ____'

'Lapenotière,' answered the Lieutenant, who had turned sharply. The voice—a gentleman's and pleasantly modulated—was not one he knew; nor did he recognize the speaker—a youngish, shrewd-looking man, dressed in civilian black, with knee-breeches. 'Lapenotière—of the *Pickle* schooner.'

'Yes, yes—the porter bungled your name badly, but I guessed. Lord Barham will see you personally. He is, in fact, dressing with all haste at this moment. . . . I am his private secretary,' explained the shrewd-looking gentleman in his quiet, businesslike voice. 'Will you come with me upstairs?'

Lieutenant Lapenotière followed him. At the foot of the great staircase the Secretary turned.

'I may take it, sir, that we are not lightly disturbing his Lordship—who is an old man.'

'The news is of great moment, sir. Greater could scarcely be.'

The Secretary bent his head. As they went up the staircase Lieutenant Lapenotière looked back and caught sight of the night-porter in the middle of

the hall, planted there and gazing up, following their ascent.

On the first-floor landing they were met by a truly ridiculous spectacle. There emerged from a doorway on the left of the wide corridor an old gentleman clad in night-cap, night-shirt, and bedroom slippers, buttoning his breeches and cursing vigorously; while close upon him followed a valet with dressing-gown on one arm, waistcoat and wig on the other, vainly striving to keep pace with his master's impatience.

'The braces, my lord—your Lordship has them fore-part behind, if I may suggest——'

'Damn the braces!' swore the old gentleman. 'Where is he? Hi, Tylney!' as he caught sight of the Secretary. 'Where are we to go? My room, I suppose?'

'The fire is out there, my lord. . . . 'Tis past three in the morning. But after sending word to awake you, I hunted round and by good luck found a plenty of promising embers in the Board Room grate. On top of these I've piled what remained of my own fire, and Dobson has set a lamp there——'

'You've been devilish quick, Tylney. Dressed like a buck you are, too!'

'Your Lordship's wig,' suggested the valet.

'Damn the wig!' Lord Barham snatched it and attempted to stick it on top of his night-cap, damned the night-cap, and, plucking it off, flung it to the man.

'I happened to be sitting up late, my lord, over the *Aeolus* papers,' said Mr. Secretary Tylney.

'Ha?' Then, to the valet: 'The dressing-gown there! Don't fumble! . . . So this is Captain——'

'Lieutenant, sir: Lapenotière, commanding the *Pickle* schooner.'

The Lieutenant saluted.

'From the Fleet, my lord—off Cadiz; or rather, off Cape Trafalgaro.'

He drew the sealed dispatch from an inner breast-pocket and handed it to the First Lord.

'Here, step into the Board Room. . . . Where the devil are my spectacles?' he demanded of the valet, who had sprung forward to hold open the door.

Evidently the Board Room had been but a few hours ago the scene of a large dinner-party. Glasses, dessert-plates, dishes of fruit, decanters empty and half empty, cumbered the great mahogany table as dead and wounded, guns and tumbrils, might a battlefield. Chairs stood askew; crumpled napkins lay as they had been dropped or tossed, some on the floor, others across the table between the dishes.

'Looks cosy, eh?' commented the First Lord. 'Maggs, set a screen around the fire, and look about for a decanter and some clean glasses.'

He drew a chair close to the reviving fire, and glanced at the cover of the dispatch before breaking its seal.

'Nelson's handwriting?' he asked. It was plain that his old eyes, unaided

by spectacles, saw the superscription only as a blur.

‘No, my lord: Admiral Collingwood’s,’ said Lieutenant Lapenotière, inclining his head.

Old Lord Barham looked up sharply. His wig set awry, he made a ridiculous figure in his hastily donned garments. Yet he did not lack dignity.

‘Why Collingwood?’ he asked, his fingers breaking the seal. ‘God! you don’t tell me——’

‘Lord Nelson is dead, sir.’

‘Dead—dead? . . . Here, Tylney—you read what it says. Dead? . . . No, damme, let the captain tell his tale. Briefly, sir.’

‘Briefly, sir—Lord Nelson had word of Admiral Villeneuve coming out of the Straits, and engaged the combined fleets off Cape Trafalgaro. They were in single line, roughly; and he bore down in two columns, and cut off their van under Dumanoir. This was at dawn or thereabouts, and by five o’clock the enemy was destroyed.’

‘How many prizes?’

‘I cannot say precisely, my lord. The word went, when I was signalled aboard the Vice-Admiral’s flag-ship, that either fifteen or sixteen had struck. My own men were engaged, at the time, in rescuing the crew of a French seventy-four that had blown up; and I was too busy to count, had counting been possible. One or two of my officers maintain to me that our gains were higher. But the dispatch will tell, doubtless.’

‘Aye, to be sure. . . . Read, Tylney. Don’t sit there clearing your throat, but read, man alive!’ And yet it appeared that while the Secretary was willing enough to read, the First Lord had no capacity, as yet, to listen. Into the very first sentence he broke with:

‘No, wait a minute. “Dead,” d’ye say? . . . My God! . . . Lieutenant, pour yourself a glass of wine and tell us first how it happened.’

Lieutenant Lapenotière could not tell very clearly. He had twice been summoned to board the *Royal Sovereign*—the first time to receive the command to hold himself ready. It was then that, coming alongside the great ship, he had read in all the officers’ faces an anxiety hard to reconcile with the evident tokens of victory around them. At once it had occurred to him that the Admiral had fallen, and he put the question to one of the lieutenants—to be told that Lord Nelson had indeed been mortally wounded and could not live long; but that he must be alive yet, and conscious, since the *Victory* was still signalling orders to the Fleet.

‘I think, my lord,’ said he, ‘that Admiral Collingwood must have been doubtful, just then, what responsibility had fallen upon him, or how soon it might fall. He had sent for me to “stand by” so to speak. He was good enough to tell me the news as it had reached him——’

Here Lieutenant Lapenotière, obeying the order to fill his glass, let spill some of the wine on the table. The sight of the dark trickle on the mahogany touched some nerve of the brain: he saw it widen into a pool of blood, from which, as they picked up a shattered seaman and bore him below, a lazy stream crept across the deck of the flag-ship towards the scuppers. He moved his feet, as he had moved them then, to be out of the way of it: but recovered himself in another moment and went on:

'He told me, my lord, that the *Victory* after passing under the *Bucentaure's* stern, and so raking her that she was put out of action, or almost, fell alongside the *Redoutable*. There was a long swell running, with next to no wind, and the two ships could hardly have cleared had they tried. At any rate, they hooked, and it was then a question which could hammer the harder. The Frenchman had filled his tops with sharp-shooters, and from one of these—the mizen-top, I believe—a musket-ball struck down the Admiral. He was walking at the time to and fro on a sort of gangway he had caused to be planked over his cabin sky-light, between the wheel and the ladder-way. . . . Admiral Collingwood believed it had happened about half-past one . . .'

'Sit down, man, and drink your wine,' commanded the First Lord as the dispatch-bearer swayed with a sudden faintness.

'It is nothing, my lord——'

But it must have been a real swoon, or something very like it: for he recovered to find himself lying in an arm-chair. He heard the Secretary's voice reading steadily on and on. . . . Also they must have given him wine, for he awoke to feel the warmth of it in his veins and coursing about his heart. But he was weak yet, and for the moment well content to lie still and listen.

Resting there and listening, he was aware of two sensations that alternated within him, chasing each other in and out of his consciousness. He felt all the while that he, John Richards Lapenotière, a junior officer in His Majesty's service, was assisting in one of the most momentous events in his country's history; and alone in the room with these two men, he felt it as he had never begun to feel it amid the smoke and roar of the actual battle. He had seen the dead hero but half a dozen times in his life: he had never been honoured by a word from him: but like every other naval officer, he had come to look up to Nelson as to the splendid particular star among commanders. *There* was greatness: *there* was that which lifted men to such deeds as write man's name across the firmament! And, strange to say, Lieutenant Lapenotière recognized something of it in this queer old man, in dressing-gown and ill-fitting wig, who took snuff and interrupted now with a curse and anon with a 'bravo!' as the Secretary read. He was absurd: but he was no common man, this Lord Barham. He had something of the ineffable aura of greatness.

But in the Lieutenant's brain, across this serious, even awful sense of the

moment and of its meaning, there played a curious secondary sense that the moment was not—that what was happening before his eyes had either happened before or was happening in some vacuum in which past, present, future, and the ordinary divisions of time had lost their bearings. The great twenty-four-hour clock at the end of the Board Room, ticking on and on while the Secretary read, wore an unfamiliar face. . . . Yes, time had gone wrong, somehow: and the events of the passage home to Falmouth, of the journey up to the doors of the Admiralty, though they ran on a chain, had no intervals to be measured by a clock, but followed one another like pictures on a wall. He saw the long, indigo-coloured swell thrusting the broken ships shoreward. He felt the wind freshening as it southered and he left the Fleet behind: he watched their many lanterns as they sank out of sight, then the glow of flares by the light of which dead-tired men were repairing damages, cutting away wreckage. His ship was wallowing heavily now, with the gale after her—and now dawn was breaking clean and glorious on the swell off Lizard Point. A Mount's Bay lugger had spied them, and, lying in wait, had sheered up close alongside, her crew bawling for news. He had not forbidden his men to call it back, and he could see the fellows' faces now, as it reached them from the speaking-trumpet: 'Great victory—twenty taken or sunk—Admiral Nelson killed!' They had guessed something, noting the *Pickle's* ensign at half-mast: yet as they took in the purport of the last three words, these honest fishermen had turned and stared at one another; and without one answering word, the lugger had been headed straight back to the mainland.

So it had been at Falmouth. A ship entering port has a thousand eyes upon her, and the *Pickle's* errand could not be hidden. The news seemed in some mysterious way to have spread even before he stepped ashore there on the Market Strand. A small crowd had collected, and, as he passed through it, many doffed their hats. There was no cheering at all—no, not for this the most glorious victory of the war—outshining even the Nile or Howe's First of June.

He had set his face as he walked to the inn. But the news had flown before him, and fresh crowds gathered to watch him off. The post-boys knew . . . and *they* told the post-boys at the next stage, and the next—Bodmin and Plymouth—not to mention the boatmen at Torpoint Ferry. But the country-side did not know: nor the labourers gathering in cider apples heaped under Devon apple-trees, nor, next day, the sportsmen banging off guns at the partridges around Salisbury. The slow, jolly life of England on either side of the high road turned leisurely as a wagon-wheel on its axle, while between hedgerows, past farm hamlets, church-towers and through the cobbled streets of market towns, he had sped and rattled with Collingwood's dispatch in his sealed case. The news had reached London with him. His last post-boys had carried it to their stables, and from stable to tavern. To-morrow—to-day, rather—in an hour or two—all

the bells of London would be ringing—or tolling! . . .

'He's as tired as a dog,' said the voice of the Secretary. 'Seems almost a shame to waken him.'

The Lieutenant opened his eyes and jumped to his feet with an apology. Lord Barham had gone, and the Secretary hard by was speaking to the night-porter, who bent over the fire, raking it with a poker. The hands of the Queen Anne clock indicated a quarter to six.

'The First Lord would like to talk with you . . . later in the day,' said Mr. Tylney gravely, smiling a little these last words. He himself was white and haggard. 'He suggested the early afternoon, say half-past two. That will give you time for a round sleep. . . . You might leave me the name of your hotel, in case he should wish to send for you before that hour.'

' "The Swan with Two Necks," Lad Lane, Cheapside,' said Lieutenant Lapenotière.

He knew little of London, and gave the name of the hostelry at which, many years ago, he had alighted from a West Country coach with his box and midshipman's kit. . . . A moment later he found himself wondering if it still existed as a house of entertainment. Well, he must go and seek it.

The Secretary shook hands with him, smiling wanly.

'Few men, sir, have been privileged to carry such news as you have brought us to-night.'

'And I went to sleep after delivering it,' said Lieutenant Lapenotière, smiling back.

The night-porter escorted him to the hall, and opened the great door for him. In the portico he bade the honest man good night, and stood for a moment, mapping out in his mind his way to 'The Swan with Two Necks.' He shivered slightly, after his nap, in the chill of the approaching dawn.

As the door dosed behind him he was aware of a light shining, out beyond the screen of the fore-court, and again a horse blew through its nostrils on the raw air.

'Lord!' thought the Lieutenant. 'That fool of a post-boy cannot have mistaken me and waited all this time!'

He hurried out into Whitehall. Sure enough a chaise was drawn up there, and a post-boy stood by the near lamp, conning a scrap of paper by the light of it. No, it was a different chaise, and a different post-boy. He wore the buff and black, whereas the other had worn the blue and white. Yet he stepped forward confidently, and with something of a smile.

'Lieutenant Lapenotière?' he asked, reaching back and holding up his paper to the lamp to make sure of the syllables.

'That is my name,' said the amazed Lieutenant.

'I was ordered here—five-forty-five—to drive you down to Merton.'

‘To Merton?’ echoed Lieutenant Lapenotière, his hand going to his pocket. The post-boy’s smile, or so much as could be seen of it by the edge of the lamp, grew more knowing.

‘I ask no questions, sir.’

‘But—but who ordered you?’

The post-boy did not observe, or disregarded, his bewilderment.

‘A Briton’s a Briton, sir, I hope? I ask no questions, knowing my place. . . . But if so be as you were to tell me there’s been a great victory——’ He paused on this.

‘Well, my man, you’re right so far, and no harm in telling you.’

‘Aye,’ chirruped the post-boy. ‘When the maid called me up with the order, and said as how *he* and no other had called with it——’

‘He?’

The fellow nodded.

‘She knew him at once, from his portraits. Who wouldn’t? With his right sleeve pinned across so. . . . And, said I: “Then there’s been a real victory. Never would you see him back, unless.” And I was right, sir!’ he concluded triumphantly.

‘Let me see that piece of paper.’

‘You’ll let me have it back, sir?—for a memento,’ the post-boy pleaded. Lieutenant Lapenotière took it from him—a plain half-sheet of note-paper roughly folded. On it was scribbled in pencil, back-handwise, ‘Lt. Lapenotière. Admiralty, Whitehall. At 6.30 a.m., not later. For Merton, Surrey.’

He folded the paper very slowly, and handed it back to the post-boy.

‘Very well, then. For Merton.’

. . . . .

The house lay but a very little distance beyond Wimbledon. Its blinds were drawn as Lieutenant Lapenotière alighted from the chaise and went up to the modest porch.

His hand was on the bell-pull. But some pressure checked him as he was on the point of ringing. He determined to wait for a while and turned away towards the garden.

The dawn had just broken; two or three birds were singing. It did not surprise—at any rate, it did not frighten—Lieutenant Lapenotière at all, when, turning into a short pleached alley, he looked along it and saw *him* advancing.

—Yes, *him*, with the pinned sleeve, the noble, seamed, eager face. They met as friends. . . . In later years the lieutenant could never remember a word that passed, if any passed at all. He was inclined to think that they met and walked together in complete silence, for many minutes. Yet he ever maintained that they walked as two friends whose thoughts hold converse without need of

words. He was not terrified at all. He ever insisted, on the contrary, that there, in the cold of the breaking day, his heart was light and warm as though flooded with first love—not troubled by it, as youth in first love is wont to be—but bathed in it; he, the ardent young officer, bathed in a glow of affection, ennobling, exalting him, making him free of a brotherhood he had never guessed.

He used also, in telling the story, to scandalize the clergyman of his parish by quoting the evangelists, and especially St. John's narrative of Mary Magdalen at the sepulchre.

For the door of the house opened at length; and a beautiful woman, scarred by knowledge of the world, came down the alley, slowly, unaware of him. Then (said he), as she approached, his hand went up to his pocket for the private letter he carried, and the shade at his side left him to face her in the daylight.

NOT HERE, O APOLLO!

A CHRISTMAS STORY HEARD AT MIDSUMMER

WE sat and talked in the Vicarage garden overlooking Mount's Bay. The long summer day lingered out its departure, although the full moon was up and already touching with a faint radiance the towers on St. Michael's Mount—'the guarded Mount'—that rested as though at anchor in the silver-grey offing. The land-breeze had died down with sunset; the Atlantic lay smooth as a lake below us, and melted, league upon league, without horizon into the grey of night. Between the Vicar's fuchsia-bushes we looked down on it, we three—the Vicar, the Senior Tutor, and I.

I think the twilit hour exactly accorded with our mood, and it did not need the scent of the Vicar's ten-week stocks, wafted across the garden, to touch a nerve of memory. For it was twenty years since we had last sat in this place and talked, and the summer night seemed to be laden with tranquil thoughts, with friendship and old regard. . . . Twenty years ago I had been an undergraduate, and had made one of a reading-party under the Senior Tutor, who annually in the Long Vacation brought down two or three fourth-year men to bathe and boat and read Plato with him, for no pay but their friendship: and, generation after generation, we young men had been made welcome in this garden by the Vicar, who happened to be an old member of our College and (as in time I came to see) delighted to renew his youth in ours. There had been daughters, too, in the old days. . . . But they had married, and the Vicarage nest was empty long since.

The Senior Tutor, too, had given up work and retired upon his Fellowship. But every summer found him back at his old haunts; and still every summer brought a reading-party to the Cove, in conduct now of a brisk Junior Fellow, who had read with me in our time and achieved a 'first.' In short, things at the Cove were pretty much the same after twenty years, barring that a small colony of painters had descended upon it and made it their home. With them the undergraduates had naturally and quickly made friends, and the result was a cricket match—a grand Two-days' Cricket Match. They were all extremely serious about it, and the Oxford party—at their wits' end, no doubt, to make up a team against the Artists—had bethought themselves of me, who dwelt at the other end of the Duchy. They had written—they had even sent a two-page telegram—to me, who had not handled a bat for more years than I cared to

count. It is delicious to be flattered by youth, especially for gifts you never possessed or possess no longer. I yielded and came. The season was Mid-summer, or a little after; the weather golden and glorious.

We had drawn stumps after the first day's play, and the evening was to be wound up with a sing-song in the great tent erected—a marvel to the 'Covers,' or native fishermen—on the cricket-field. But I no longer take kindly to such entertainments; and so, after a bathe and a quiet dinner at the inn, it came into my mind to take a stroll up the hill and along the cliffs, and pay an evening call on the old Vicar, wondering if he would remember me.

I found him in his garden. The Senior Tutor was there too—'the grave man, nicknamed Adam'—and the Vicar's wife, seated in a bee-hive straw chair, knitting. So we four talked happily for a while, until she left us on pretence that the dew was falling; and with that, as I have said, a wonderful silence possessed the garden fragrant with memories and the night-scent of flowers. . . .

Then I let fall the word that led to the Vicar's story. In old rambles, after long mornings spent with Plato, my eyes (by mirage, no doubt) had always found something Greek in the curves and colour of this coast; or rather, had felt the want of it. What that something was I could hardly have defined: but the feeling was always with me. It was as if at each bend of the shore I expected to find a temple with pillars, or a column crowning the next promontory; or, where the coast-track wound down to the little haven, to happen on a votive tablet erected to Poseidon or to 'Helen's brothers, lucent stars'; nay, to meet with Odysseus' fisherman carrying an oar on his shoulder, or even, in an amphitheatre of the cliffs, to surprise Apollo himself and the Nine seated on a green plat whence a waterfall gushed down the coombe to the sandy beach. . . . This evening on my way along the cliffs—perhaps because I had spent a day bathing in sunshine in the company of white-flannelled youths—the old sensation had returned to haunt me. I spoke of it.

' "Not here, O Apollo——" ' murmured the Senior Tutor.

'You quote against your own scepticism,' said I. 'The coast is right enough; it *is*

> Where Helicon breaks down
> In cliff to the sea.

It was made to invite the authentic gods—only the gods never found it out.'

'Did they not?' asked the Vicar quietly. The question took us a little aback, and after a pause his next words administered another small shock. 'One never knows,' he said, 'when, or how near, the gods have passed. One may be listening to us in this garden, to-night. . . . As for the Greeks——'

'Yes, yes, we were talking of the Greeks,' the Senior Tutor (a convinced agnostic) put in hastily. 'If we leave out Pytheas, no Greeks ever visited

Cornwall. They are as mythical hereabouts as'—he hesitated, seeking a comparison—'as the Cornish wreckers; and *they* never existed outside of pious story-books.'

Said the Vicar, rising from his garden-chair: 'I accept the omen. Wait a moment, you two.' He left us and went across the dim lawn to the house, whence by and by he returned bearing a book under his arm, and in his hand a candle, which he set down unlit upon the wicker table among the coffee-cups.

'I am going,' he said, 'to tell you something which, a few years ago, I should have scrupled to tell. With all deference to your opinions, my dear Dick, I doubt if they quite allow you to understand the clergy's horror of chancing a heresy; indeed, I doubt if either of you quite guess what a bridle a man comes to wear who preaches a hundred sermons or so every year to a rural parish, knowing that nine-tenths of his discourse will assuredly be lost, while at any point in the whole of it he may be fatally misunderstood. . . . Yet as a man nears his end he feels an increasing desire to be honest, neither professing more than he knows, nor hiding any small article of knowledge as inexpedient to the Faith. The Faith, he begins to see, can take care of itself: for him, it is important to await his marching-orders with a clean breast. Eh, Dick?'

The Senior Tutor took his pipe from his mouth and nodded slowly.

'But what is your book?' he asked.

'My Parish Register. Its entries cover the years from 1660 to 1827. Luckily I had borrowed it from the vestry box, and it was safe on my shelf in the Vicarage on the Christmas Eve of 1870, the night when the church took fire. That was in my second year as incumbent, and before ever you knew these parts.'

'By six months,' said the Senior Tutor. 'I first visited the Cove in July 1871, and you were then beginning to clear the ruins. All the village talk still ran on the fire, with speculations on the cause of it.'

'The cause,' said the Vicar, 'will never be known. I may say that pretty confidently, having spent more time in guessing than will ever be spent by another man. . . . But since you never saw the old church as it stood, you never saw the Heathen Lovers in the south aisle.'

'Who were they?'

'They were a group of statuary, and a very strange one: executed, as I first believed, in some kind of wax—but, pushing my researches (for the thing interested me) I found the material to be a white soapstone that crops out here and there in the crevices of our serpentine. Indeed, I know to a foot the spot from which the sculptor took it, close on two hundred years ago.'

'It was of no great age, then?'

'No: and yet it bore all the marks of an immense age. For to begin with, it

had stood five-and-twenty years in this very garden, exposed to all weathers, and the steatite (as they call it) is of all substances the most friable—is, in fact, the stuff used by tailors under the name of French chalk. Again, when, in 1719, my predecessor, old Vicar Hichens, removed it to the church and set it in the south aisle—or, at any rate, when he died and ceased to protect it—the young men of the parish took to using it for a hatstand, and also to carving their own and their sweethearts' names upon it during sermon-time. The figures of the sculpture were two; a youth and a maid, recumbent, and naked but for a web of drapery flung across their middles; and they lay on a roughly carved rock, over which the girl's locks as well as the drapery were made to hang limp, as though dripping with water. . . . One thing more I must tell you, risking derision; that to my ignorance the sculpture proclaimed its age less by these signs of weather and rough usage than by the simplicity of its design, its proportions, the chastity (there's no other word) of the two figures. They were classical, my dear Dick—what was left of them; Greek, and of the best period.'

The Senior Tutor lit a fresh pipe, and by the flare of the match I saw his eyes twinkling.

'Praxiteles,' he jerked out, between the puffs, 'and in the age of Kneller! But proceed, my friend.'

'And do you wait, my scoffer!' The Vicar borrowed the box of matches, lit the candle—which held a steady flame in the still evening air—opened the book, and laid it on his knee while he adjusted his spectacles. 'The story is here, entered on a separate leaf of the Register and signed by Vicar Hichens' own hand. With your leave—for it is brief—I am going to read it through to you. The entry is headed:

'*Concerning a group of Statuary now in the S. aisle of Lezardew Pish Church: set there by me in witness of God's Providence in operation, as of the corruption of man's heart, and for a warning to sinners to amend their ways.*

'In the year 1694, being the first of my vicariate, there lived in this Parish as hind to the farmer of Vellancoose a young man exceeding comely and tall of stature, of whom (when I came to ask) the people could tell me only that his name was Luke, and that as a child he had been cast ashore from a foreign ship; they said, a Portugal ship. [But the Portugals have swart complexions and are less than ordinary tall, whereas this youth was light-coloured and only brown by sunburn.] Nor could he tell me anything when I questioned him concerning his haveage;[2] which I did upon report that he was courting my housemaiden Grace Pascoe, an honest good girl, whom I was loth to see waste herself upon an unworthy husband. Upon inquiry I could not discover this Luke to be any way unworthy, saving that he was a nameless man and a foreigner and a backward church-goer. He told me with much simplicity that he could not remember to have had any parents; that Farmer Lowry had brought him up from the time he was shipwrecked and ever treated him kindly; and that, as for church-going, he had thought little about it, but would amend in this matter if it would give me pleasure. Which I thought a strange answer. When I went on to hint at his inclination for Grace Pascoe, he confused me by asking, with a look very straight and good-natured, if the girl had ever spoken to me on the matter; to which I was forced to answer that she had not. So he smiled, and I could not further press him.

‘Yet in my mind they would have made a good match; for the girl too was passing well-featured, and this Luke had notable gifts. He could read and write. The farmer spoke well of him, saying: “He has rewarded me many times over. Since his coming, thanks to the Lord, my farm prospers: and in particular he has a wonderful way with the beasts. Cattle or sheep, fowls, dogs, the wild things even, come to him almost without a call.” He had also (the farmer told me) a wonderful knack of taking clay or mud and moulding it with his hands to the likeness of living creatures, of all sorts and sizes. In the kitchen by the great fire he would work at these images by hours together, to the marvel of every one: but when the image was made, after a little while he always destroyed it; nor was it ever begged by any one for a gift, there being a belief that, being fashioned by more than a man’s skill, such things could only bring ill-luck to the possessors of them.

‘For months then I heard no more of Grace Pascoe’s lover: nor (though he now came every Sunday to church) did I ever see looks pass between the Vicarage pew (where she sat) and the Vellancoose pew (where he). But at the end of the year she came to me and told me she had given her word to a young farmer of Goldsithney, John Magor by name. In a worldly way this was a far better match for her than to take a nameless and landless man. Nor knew I anything against John Magor beyond some stray wildness natural to youth. He came of clean blood. He was handsome, almost as the other; tall, broad of chest, a prize-winner at wrestling-matches; and of an age when a good wife is usually a man’s salvation.

‘I called their banns, and in due time married them. On the wedding-day, after the ceremony, I returned from church to find the young man Luke awaiting me by my house-door; who very civilly desired me to walk over to Vellancoose with him, which I did. There, taking me aside to an unused linhay, he showed me the sculpture, telling me (who could not conceal my admiration) that he had meant it for John and Grace Magor (as she now was) for a wedding-gift, but that the young woman had cried out against it as immodest and, besides, unlucky. On the first count I could understand her rejecting such a gift; for the folk of these parts know nothing of statuary and count all nakedness immodest. Indeed, I wondered that the bridegroom had not taken Luke’s freedom in ill part, and I said so: to which he answered, smiling, that no man ever quarrelled with him or could quarrel. “And now, sir,” he went on, “my apprenticeship is up, and I am going on a long journey. Since you find my group pleasing I would beg you to accept it, or—if you had liefer—to keep it for me until I come again, as some day I shall.” “I do not wonder,” said I, “at your wish to leave Lezardew Parish for the world where, as I augur, great fortune awaits you.” He smiled again at this and said that, touching his future, he had neither any hope nor any fear: and again he pressed me to accept the statuary. For a time I demurred, and in the end made it a condition that he altered the faces somewhat, concealing the likeness to John and Grace Magor: and to this he consented. “Yet,” said he, “it will be the truer likeness when the time comes.”

‘He was gone on the morrow by daybreak, and late that afternoon the farmer brought me the statuary in his hay-wagon. I had it set in the garden by the great filbert tree, and there it has stood for near five-and-twenty years. (I ought to say that he had kept his promise of altering the faces, and thereby to my thinking had defaced their beauty: but beneath this defacement I still traced their first likeness.)

‘Now to speak of the originals. My way lying seldom by Goldsithney, I saw little of John and Grace Magor during the next few years, and nothing at all of them after they had left Goldsithney (their fortunes not prospering) and rented a smaller farm on the coast southward, below Rosudgeon: but what news came to me was ever of the same tenour. Their marriage had brought neither children nor other blessings. There were frequent quarrels, and the man had yielded to drinking; the woman, too, it was reported. She, that had been so trim a serving-maid, was become a slut with a foul tongue. They were cruelly poor with it all; for money does not always stick to unclean hands. I write all this to my reproach as well as to theirs, for albeit they dwelt in another parish it had been my Christian duty to seek them out. I did not, and I was greatly to blame.

‘To pass over many years and come to the 2nd of December last (1718). That night, about 11 o’clock, I sat in my library reading. It was blowing hard without, the wind W.N.W.; but I had forgotten the gale in my book, when a sound, as it were a distant outcry of many voices, fetched me to unbar the shutters and open the window to listen. The sound, whatever it was, had died away: I heard but the wind roaring and the surf on the beaches along the Bay: and I was closing the window again when, close at hand, a man’s voice called to me to open the front door. I went out to the hall, where a lamp stood, and opened to him. The light showed me the young man Luke, on whom I had not set eyes for these four-and-

twenty years: nor, amazed and perturbed as I was, did it occur to me as marvellous that he had not aged a day. “There is a wreck,” said he, “in the Porth below here; and you, sir, are concerned in it. Will you fetch a lantern and come with me?” He put this as a question, but in his tone was a command: and when I brought the lantern he took it from me and led the way. We struck across the Home Parc southward, thence across Gew Down and the Leazes, and I knew that he was making for the track which leads down to the sea by Prah Sands. At the entry of the track he took off his coat and wrapped the lantern in it, though just there its light would have been most useful, or so I thought. But he led the way easily, and I followed with scarce a stumble. “We shall not need it,” he said; “for see, there they are!” pointing to a small light that moved on the sands below us. “But who are they?” I asked. He strode down ahead of me, making swiftly for the light, and coming upon them in the noise of the gale we surprised a man and a woman, who at first cowered before us and then would have cast down their light and run. But my companion, unwrapping the lantern, held it high and so that the light shone on their faces. They were John Magor and his wife Grace.

‘Then I, remembering what cry of shipwrecked souls had reached to my library in the Vicarage, and well guessing what work these wretches had been at, lifted my voice to accuse them. But the young man Luke stepped between us, and said he to them gently: “Come, and I will show what you seek.” He went before us for maybe two hundred yards to the northern end of the beach, they behind him quaking, and I shepherding them in my righteous wrath. “Behold you,” said he, and again lifted the lantern over a rock dark with seaweed (and yet the weed shone in the light)—“Behold you, what you have wrecked.”

‘On their backs along the flat of the rock lay two naked bodies, of a youth and a maid, half-clasped one to another. He handed me the lantern for a better look, and in the rays of it the two wretches peered forward as if drawn against their will. I cannot well say if they or I first perceived the miracle; that these corpses, as they lay in the posture, so bore the very likeness of the two lovers on my sculptured slab. But I remember that, as John and Grace Magor screamed back and clung to me, and as by the commotion of them clutching at my knees the lantern fell and was extinguished, I heard the young man Luke say: “Yourselves, yourselves!”

‘I called to him to pick up the lantern; but he did not answer, and the two clinging wretches encumbered me. After a long while the clouds broke and the moon shone through them; and where he had stood there was no one. Also the slab of rock was dark, and the two drowned corpses had vanished with him. I pointed to it; but there was no tinder-box at hand to light the lantern again, and in the bitter weather until the dawn the two clung about me, confessing and rehearsing their sins.

‘I have great hopes that they are brought to a better way of life; and because (repent they never so much) no one is any longer likely to recognize in these penitents the originals upon whom it was moulded these many years ago, I am determined to move the statuary to a place in the S. aisle of our parish church, as a memorial, the moral whereof I have leave of John and Grace Magor to declare to all the parish. I choose to defer making it public, in tenderness, while they live: for all things point as yet to the permanent saving of their souls. But, as in the course of nature I shall predecease them, I set the record here in the Parish Register, as its best place.

‘(*Signed*) MALACHI HICHENS, B.D.
‘*21st Jan., 1719.*’

‘And is that all?’ I asked.

‘Yes and no,’ said the Vicar, closing the book. ‘It is all that Mr. Hichens has left to help us: and you may or may not connect with it what I am going to relate of my own experience. . . . The old church, as you know, was destroyed by fire in the morning hours of Christmas Day 1870. Throughout Christmas Eve and for a great part of the night it had been snowing, but the day broke brilliantly, on a sky without wind or cloud; and never have my eyes seen anything so terribly beautiful—ay, so sublime—as the sight which met them at the lych-gate. The old spire—which served as a sea-mark for the fishermen,

and was kept regularly whitewashed that it might be the more conspicuous—glittered in the morning sunshine from base to summit, as though matching its whiteness against that of the snow-laden elms: and in this frame of pure silverwork, burning without noise and with scarcely any smoke—this by reason of the excessive dryness of the woodwork—the church stood one glowing vault of fire. There was indeed so little smoke that at the first alarm, looking from my bedroom window, I had been incredulous; and still I wondered rather than believed, staring into this furnace wherein every pillar, nook, seat, or text on the wall was distinctly visible, the south windows being burnt out and the great door thrown open and on fire.

'There was no entrance possible here, or indeed anywhere: but, being half-distraught, I ran around to the small door of the north aisle. This, too, was on fire—or, rather, was already consumed; and you will say that I must have been wholly distraught when I tell you what I saw, looking in through the aperture through which it would have been death to pass. I saw *him*.'

'You saw the young man Luke?' I asked, as he paused, inviting a word.

'He was standing by the stone figures within the porch. . . . And they crumbled—crumbled before my eyes in the awful heat. But he stood scathless. He was young and comely; the hair of his head was not singed. He was as one of the three that walked in the midst of Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. . . . When the stone slab was crumbled to a handful of dust, he moved up the aisle and was gone. . . . That is all: but, as you accept your friend for a truthful man, explain, O sceptic!'

And again there fell a silence in the garden.

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[2] Lineage, descent.

MY CHRISTMAS BURGLARY

Fantasia

From the Memoirs of a Pierrot

I HAD come with high expectations; for Mr. Felix, a bachelor of sixty-five, was reputed to have made for thirty years this particular cabinet his idol. Any nabob or millionaire can collect. Mr. Felix, being moderately well to do, had selected. He would have none but the best; and the best lay stored delicately on cotton-wool, ticketed with the tiniest handwriting, in a nest of drawers I could have unlocked with a hairpin.

The topmost drawer contained scarabs (of which I am no connoisseur); the second some two dozen intaglios, and of these, by the light of my bull's-eye lantern, I examined five or six before sweeping the lot into my bag—Europa and the Bull, Ganymede in the eagle's claw, Agave carrying the head of Pentheus, Icarus with relaxed wing dropping headlong to a sea represented by one wavy line; each and all priceless. In the third drawer lay an unset emerald, worth a king's ransom, a clasp of two amethysts, and a necklace of black pearls graduated to a hair's breadth. By this time I could see—I read it even in the exquisite parsimony of the collection—that I had to deal with an artist, and sighed that in this world artists should prey upon one another. The fourth drawer was reserved for miniatures, the most of them circleted with diamonds: the fifth for snuff-boxes—gold snuff-boxes bearing royal ciphers, snuff-boxes of tortoise-shell and gold, snuff-boxes of blue enamel set with diamonds. A couple of these chinked together as they dropped into the bag. The sound startled me, and I paused for a moment to look over my shoulder.

The window stood open as I had left it. Outside, in the windless frosty night, the snow on the house-roofs sparkled under a wintering moon now near the close of her first quarter. But though the night was windless, a current of air poured into the room, and had set a little flame dancing in the fire-place where, three minutes ago, the sea-coals had held but a feeble glow, half-sullen. Downstairs, in some distant apartments, fiddles were busy with a waltz tune, and a violoncello kept the beat with a low thudding pizzicato. For Mr. Felix was giving a Christmas party.

I turned from this hasty glance to pick up another snuff-box. As my fingers closed on it the music suddenly grew louder, and I looked up as the door

opened, and a man stood on the threshold—a short, square-set man, dressed in black.

'Eh?' He gave a little start of surprise. 'No, no, excuse me, my friend, but you are seeking in the wrong cabinet.'

Before I could pull myself together, he had stepped to the window and closed it. 'You had best keep quite still,' he said, 'and then we can talk. There are servants on the stairs below, and should you attempt the way you came, there are three constables just around the corner. I hired them to regulate the carriage traffic: but now that the last guest has arrived, they will be cooling their heels for a spell: and I have a whistle. I have also a pistol.' With a turn of his hand he flung open a door in a dark armoire beside the window, dived a hand into its recesses, and produced the weapon. 'And it is loaded,' he added, still in the same businesslike voice, in which, after his first brief exclamation, my ear detected no tremor.

'By all means let us talk,' I said.

He was crossing to the fire-place, but wheeled about sharply at the sound of my voice. 'Eh? An educated man, apparently!' Laying the pistol on the mantel-shelf, he plucked a twisted spill of paper from a vase hard by, stooped, ignited it from the flame dancing in the sea-coals, and proceeded to light the candles in an old-fashioned girandole that overhung the fire-place. There were five candles, and he lit them all.

They revealed him a clean-shaven, white-haired man, meticulously dressed in black—black swallow-tail coat, open waistcoat, and frilled shirt-front, on which his laundress must have spent hours of labour; closely fitting black knee-breeches, black silk stockings, black polished shoes. They silhouetted, too, in the moment before he swung round on me, an enormous nose, like a punchinello's, and the outline of a shapely head, sufficiently massive to counter-balance and save it from caricature. The size of the head again would have suggested deformity, but for the broad shoulders that carried it. As he faced me squarely with his back to the hearth, his chest and shoulders narrowing to the hips of a runner, and still narrowing (though he stood a-straddle) to ankles and feet that would not have disgraced a lady, he put me in mind of a matador I had seen years before, facing his bull in the ring at Seville. The firelight behind them emphasized the neat outline of his legs. He carried a black cloak on his left arm, and in his left hand an opera-hat, pressed flat against his left side. In closing the window, in finding and producing the pistol, and again in lighting the candles, he had used his right hand only.

'A gentleman?' he asked, contracting his brows and eyeing me.

'Well,' said I, with an uncomfortable, nervous laugh, that itself accused my breeding, so inferior it was to the situation, 'possibly you are one of those who mix up the name with moral conduct——'

‘To some extent,’ he answered, without seeming to interrupt. ‘Every one does, I fancy.’

‘At any rate I won’t challenge it,’ said I. ‘But you may, if you will, call me a man of some education. I was at Magdalen once, but left Oxford without taking my degree.’

‘Ah!’ He inclined his head a little to one side. ‘Cards?’

‘Certainly not,’ I answered with heat. ‘I own that appearances are against me, but I was never that kind of man. As a matter of fact, it happened over a horse.’

He nodded. ‘So you, too, though you won’t challenge the name, have to mix up moral conduct with your disposition. We draw the line variously, but every one draws it somewhere. . . . Magdalen, hey? If I mistake not, the foundationers of Magdalen—including, perhaps, some who were undergraduates with you—are assembled in the college hall at this moment to celebrate Christmas, and hear the choir sing Pergolesi’s *Gloria*.’

‘The reminder hurts me,’ said I—‘if that be any gratification to you.’

‘A sentimentalist?’ Mr. Felix’s eyes twinkled. ‘Better and better! I have the very job for you—but we will discuss that by and by. Only let me say that you must have dropped on me, just now, from heaven—you really must. But please don’t make a practice of it! I have invested too much in my curios; and others have invested more. . . . That snuff-box, for instance, which you were handling a moment ago . . . at one time in its history cost—ay, and fetched—close on two hundred millions of money.’

I began to have hopes that I was dealing with a madman.

‘Or rather,’ he corrected himself, ‘the money was paid for a pinch of the snuff it contains. Open it carefully, if you please! and you will behold the genuine rappee, the very particles over which France fought with Austria. What says Virgil? “*Hi motus animorum atque heac certamina tanta Pulveris exigui jactu*”—yes, but in this instance, you see, the pinch of dust was the exciting cause. Sir, the Austrian ambassador, one fatal afternoon, refused to take from the box in your hand that which, three weeks later, and all too late, he would gladly have purchased with many millions. Observe the imperial crown on the lid, with the bees around it, as if to illustrate Virgil’s warning. I bought the thing myself, sir, for six napoleons, off a dealer in the Rue du Fouarre: but the price will rise again. Yes, certainly, I count on it fetching three hundred pounds at least when I have departed this life, and three hundred pounds will go some little way towards my monument.’

‘Your monument?’ I echoed.

He nodded again. ‘In good time, my friend, you shall hear about it; for you make, I perceive, a good listener. You have gifts, though you do less than justice to them. Suffice it to say that I am a sentimentalist, like yourself. I

never married nor begat children; and I have but a shaky belief in the future state; but my sentimentality hankers after—you may even say it postulates—some kind of continuity. I cannot discuss this here and now, for by the sound of the violins, the dance is coming to an end, and my guests will be growing impatient. But you remember Samson's riddle? Well, out of my corpse (I trust) shall come forth honey; whereas out of yours, unless you employ your talents better——' He broke off, and stepped close up to me. 'Ah, but excuse me,' he said, and, reaching out a hand, caught me suddenly by the collar.

The arrest—I made sure it was an arrest—took me unprepared, and threw me off my balance. I broke away a pace, drawing back my fist to strike: and in that moment I felt his hand relax with a curious fluttering movement as though his fingers drummed on the back of my neck. I heard him laugh too: and before I could hit out he sprang back, holding in his hand a white rabbit!

'An old trick—eh?—and a simple one.' He pressed out the spring of his opera-hat, dropped the rabbit inside, dived his hand after it, and drew out two white rabbits by the ears. 'But it will amuse my young friends downstairs, and I practise this kind of thing at odd whiles.'

He set the rabbits on the floor, where they gave themselves a shake, and hopped off towards the shelter of the window-curtains.

Now you are the very man I wanted,' said he, 'and I am going to make you sing for your supper.' He stepped to the armoire, and drew out a long cloak of scarlet, furred with ermine. 'I had meant to wear this myself,' he went on; but stopped all of a sudden at sight of my face, and began to laugh quietly, in a way that made me long to take him by the throat. 'Dear me, dear me! I understand! Association of ideas—Court of Assize, eh? But this is no judicial robe, my friend: it belongs to Father Christmas. Here's his wig now—quite another sort of wig, you perceive—with a holly wreath around it. And here's his beard, beautifully frosted with silver.' He held wig and beard towards the window, and let the moonlight play over them. 'On with them, quick! . . . And the boots.' Again he dived into the armoire, and produced a pair of Blüchers, the long ankle leathers gummed over with cotton-wool, to represent snow. 'It's lucky they reach a good way up the leg, seeing the cloak is a trifle short for a man of your inches.' He stepped back a pace and surveyed me as I fitted on the beard.

'There are punishments and punishments,' said I. 'And I hope, whatever your game may be, you will remember that there's punishment in dressing up like a tom-fool.'

'Ah, but you'll catch the spirit of it!' he assured me: and then, rubbing his hands, he appeared to muse for a moment. 'I ought,' said he, with a glance towards the fire-place, 'I really ought to send Father Christmas down by way of the chimney. The flue opens just above here, and I believe it would

accommodate you; but I am not very sure if my housekeeper had it swept last spring. No,' he decided, 'the music has ceased, and we must lose no time. I will spare you the chimney.'

He called to his rabbits, picked them up as they came hopping from behind the curtains, popped them into his hat, shut it with a snap, and lo! they had vanished.

'You'll excuse me,' I ventured, as he stepped to the door; 'but—but the—the few articles here in the bag——'

'Oh, bring them along with you: bring them along by all means.' We may have a present or two to make, down below.'

From the head of the staircase we looked down into a hall gaily lit with paper lanterns. Holly and ivy wreathed the broad balustrade, and the old pictures around the walls. A bunch of mistletoe hung from a great chandelier that sparkled with hundreds of glass prisms, and under it a couple of footmen in gilt liveries and powder crossed at that moment with trays of jellies and syllabubs.

They were well-trained footmen, too; for at sight of me descending the stairs in my idiotic outfit they betrayed no surprise at all. One of them set his tray down on a table, stepped neatly ahead as Mr. Felix reached the lowest stair, and opened a door for us on the right. I found myself at a stand on the threshold, blinking at a blaze of light, and staring up a perspective of waxed floor at a miniature stage which filled the far end of the room. Light, as every one knows, travels farther than sound: were it not so, I should say that almost ahead of the blaze there broke on us a din of voices—of happy children's voices. Certainly it stunned my ears before I had time to blink.

The room was lined with children—scores of children: and some of them were gathered in little groups, and some of them, panting and laughing from their dance, had dropped into the chairs ranged along the walls. But these were the minority. The most of the guests lay in cots, or sat with crutches beside them, or with hands dropped in their laps. These last were the blind ones. I do not set up to be a lover of children: but the discovery that the most of these small guests were crippled hit me with a kind of pitiful awe; and right on top of it came a second and worse shock, to note how many of them were blind.

To me these blind eyes were the only merciful ones, as Mr. Felix beckoned Father Christmas to follow him up to the stage between the two lines of curious gazers. 'O—oh!' had been their first cry as they caught sight of me in the doorway: and 'O—oh!' I heard them murmuring, child after child, in long-drawn fugue, as we made our way up the long length of the room that winked detection from every candle, every reflector, every foot of its polished floor.

We gained the stage together by a short stairway draped with flags. Mr. Felix with a wave of his opera-hat, called on the orchestra to strike up *A Fine*

Old English Gentleman (meaning me or, if you like it, Father Christmas: and I leave you to picture the fool I looked). Then, stepping to the footlights, he introduced me, explaining that he had met me wandering upstairs, rifling his most secret drawers to fill my bag with seasonable presents for them. Five or six times he interrupted his patter to pluck a cracker or a bon-bon out of my beard, and toss it down to his audience. The children gasped at first, and stared at the magic spoil on the floor. By and by one adventurous little girl crept forward, and picked up a cracker, and her cry of delight as she discovered that it was real, gave the signal for a general scramble. Mr. Felix continued his patter without seeming to heed it: but his hand went up faster and faster to my beard and wig, and soon the crackers were falling in showers. I saw children snatch them off the floor and carry them to their blind brothers and sisters, pressing them between the wondering groping hands with assurance that they were real. . . . Mr. Felix saw it too, and his flow of words ceased with a gulp, as though a flowing spring gurgled suddenly and withdrew itself underground. 'I am a sentimentalist,' he said to me quickly, in a pause which nobody heeded; for by this time crackers were banging to right and left, and the children shouting together. Their shouts rose to one yell of laughter as, recovering himself, he dived at my neck, and produced the two struggling rabbits. His opera-hat opened with a snap, and in they went. A second later it shut flat again, and they were gone, into thin air. He opened the hat with a puzzled frown, plunged a hand, and dragged forth yard upon yard of ribbon—red, green, white, blue, yellow ribbon, mixed up with packs of playing cards that, with a turn of the hand he sent spinning into air, to fall thick as leaves in Vallombrosa.

'Your turn!' he panted as, at the end of the ribbon, he lugged out an enormous cabbage, and trundled it down the room. Catching my bag from me, he shook his cloak over it once, and returned it to my hands, bulging, stuffed full to the brim with toys—dolls, tops, whips, trumpets, boxes of animals, boxes of tin soldiers. . . .

'Father Christmas, now! Make way for Father Christmas!'

The infection took me, and stumbling down from the stage by the stairway, I fell to distributing the largesse left and right. The first bagful carried me less than a third of the way down the room: for I gave with both hands, and, when a blind child fumbled long with a toy, dropped it at his feet, and tried another, and yet another till his smile suited me. The dropped toys lay where they had fallen. The spirit of the game had made me reckless; and I halted with a cold shiver as my fingers touched the gems at the bottom of the bag, and, looking down the room, I was aware that my store was exhausted, and as yet two-thirds of the children had received no gift. I turned—all in a cold shiver—to retrace my steps and pick up the toys at the blind children's feet, and as I did so, felt

myself a bungler past pardon. But in the act of turning, I cast a look back at the stage: and there stood Mr. Felix, nodding approval and beckoning. So, as in a dream, I went back. ‘Capital!’ was his only comment. Taking my bag, he passed his cloak over it again, and again handed it to me, stuffed to the brim.

Thrice I returned to him; but the third refill was a scanty one, since by this time there lacked but half a score of the taller children to be satisfied. To these, too, I distributed their gifts, and when every eager pair of hands had been laden, I wheeled about for the next word of command.

But Mr. Felix had skipped down from the stage, letting the curtain fall behind him. He stood with his back to me, waving both arms to the orchestra; and as the musicians plunged at the opening bars of the Toy Symphony, the curtain rose, almost as soon as it had dropped; and rose upon a scene representing a street with shops decked for Christmas, and snow upon their eaves and window ledges.

Then, still to the strains of the Toy Symphony, a Harlequin ran in, with a Columbine, whom he twisted upon his bent knee, and tossed lightly through the upper window of a baker’s shop, himself diving a moment later, with a slap of his wand, through the flap of the fishmonger’s door, hard by. Next, as on a frozen slide, came the Clown, with red-hot poker, the Pantaloon tripping over his stick, and two Constables wreathed in strings of sausages. The Clown boxed the Pantaloon’s ears; the Pantaloon passed on the buffet to the Constables, and all plunged together into the fishmonger’s. The Clown emerged running with a stolen plaice, passed it into the hands of the Pantaloon, who followed, and was in turn pursued off the scene by the Constables: but the fishmonger, issuing last in chase, ran into the Clown, who caught up a barrel of red herrings and bonnetted him. The fishmonger extricated himself, and the two began to pelt each other with herrings, while the children screamed with laughter. . . .

It was a famous harlequinade; and, as usual, it concluded the entertainment. For after a harlequinade, what can stand between a child and happy dreams?—especially if he go to them with his arms full of Christmas presents. Five minutes after the curtain had fallen I found myself standing beside Mr. Felix in the hall, while he bade good night to his guests. Carriages of his hiring had arrived for them, and the coachmen apparently had received their orders. A dozen well-trained nurses moved about the hall, and, having dressed the little ones—who by this time were almost too drowsy with pleasure to thank their entertainer—carried them out into the portico, where the liveried footmen stood by the carriage doors. Slam! went the doors, and one after another—with scarcely a word of command—the carriages bowled off over the thick snow.

When the last guest had gone, Mr. Felix turned to me.

‘The play is over,’ said he. ‘When I am gone, it will be repeated year after year at Christmas, at the Cripples’ Hospital. My will provides for that, and that will be my monument. But for a few years to come I hope to hold the entertainment here, in my own house. Come, you may take off your robe and wig and go in peace. I would fain have a talk with you, but I am tired, as perhaps you may guess. Go, then—and go in peace!’

Motioning the footman to fall back, he walked out with me and down the steps of the portico; but halted on the lowest step by the edge of the frozen snow, and with a wave of the hand dismissed me into the night.

I had gained the end of the street and the bridge that there spans the river before it occurred to me that I was carrying my bag, and—with a shock—that my bag still held the stolen jewels.

By the second lamp on the bridge I halted, lifted the bag on to the snow-covered parapet, thrust in a hand, and drew forth—a herring!

Herrings—red herrings—filled the bag to the brim. I dragged them forth, and rained handful after handful overboard into the black water. Still, below them, I had hopes to find the jewels. But the jewels were gone. At least, I supposed that all were gone, when—having jettisoned the last herring—I groped around the bottom of the bag.

Something pricked my finger. I drew it out and held it under the lamplight. It was a small turquoise brooch, set around with diamonds.

For at least two minutes I stared at it, there, under the lamp; had slipped it half-way into my waistcoat pocket; but suddenly took a new resolve, and walked back along the street to the house.

Mr. Felix yet stood on the lower step of the portico. Above him, still as a statue, a footman waited at the great house door, until it should please his master to re-enter.

‘Excuse me, sir——’ I began, and held up the brooch.

‘I meant it for you,’ said Mr. Felix, quietly, affably. ‘I gave precisely five pounds for it, at an auction, and I warn you that it is worth just thrice that sum. Still, if you would prefer ready money, as in your circumstances I dare say you do’—he felt in his breeches pocket—‘here are the five sovereigns, and—once more—go in peace.’

OCEANUS

I

MY dear Violet,—So you ‘gather from the tone of two or three recent letters that my spirit is creeping back to light and warmth again’? Well, after a fashion you are right. I shall never laugh again as I used to laugh before Harry’s death. The taste has gone out of that carelessness, and I turn even from the remembrance of it. But I can be cheerful, with a cheerfulness which has found the centre of gravity. I am myself again, as people say. After months of agitation in what seemed to be chaos the lost atom has dropped back to its place in the scheme of things, and even aspires (poor mite!) to do its infinitesimal business intelligently. So might a mote in a sunbeam feel itself at one with God.

But when you assume that my recovery has been a gradual process, you are wrong. You will think me more than ever deranged; but I assure you that it has been brought about, not by long strivings, but suddenly—without preparation of mine—*and by the immediate hand of our dead brother*.

Yes; you shall have the whole tale. The first effect of the news of Harry’s death in October last was simply to stun me. You may remember how once, years ago, when we were children, we rode home together across the old Racecourse after a long day’s skating, our skates swinging at our saddle-bows; how Harry challenged us to a gallop; and how, midway, the roan mare slipped down neck-over-crop on a rabbit-hole in the frozen turf and hurled me clean against the face of a stone dyke. I had been thrown more than once before, but somehow had always found the earth fairly elastic. So I had griefs before Harry died, and took some rebound of hope from each: but that cast repeated in a worse degree the old shock—the springless brutal jar—of the stone dyke. With him the sun went out of my sky.

I understand that this torpor is quite common with men and women suddenly bereaved. I believe that a whole week passed before my brain recovered any really vital motion; and then such feeble thought as I could exert was wholly occupied with the desperate stupidity of the whole affair. If God were indeed shaping the world to any end, if any design of His underlay the activities of men, what insensate waste to quench such a heart and brain as Harry’s!—to nip, as it seemed out of mere blundering wantonness, a bud which had begun to open so generously: to sacrifice that youth and strength,

that comeliness, that enthusiasm, and all for nothing! Had some campaign claimed him, had he been spent to gain a citadel or defend a flag, I had understood. But that he should be killed on a friendly mission; attacked in ignorance by those East Coast savages while bearing gifts to their king; deserted by the porters whose comfort (on their own confession) he had studied throughout the march; left to die, to be tortured, mutilated—and all for no possible good: these things I could not understand. At the end he might have escaped; but as he caught hold of his saddle by the band between the holsters, it parted: it was not leather, but faced paper, the job of some cheating contractor. I thought of this, too. And Harry had been through Chitral!

But though a man may hate, he cannot easily despise God for long. 'He is great—but wasteful,' said the American. We are the dust on His great hands, and fly as He claps them carelessly in the pauses of His work. Yet this theory would not do at all: for the unlucky particles are not dust, not refuse, but exquisite and exquisitely fashioned, designed to *live*, and for every small function of life adapted with the minutest care. There were nights indeed when, walking along the shore where we had walked together on the night before Harry left England, and looking from the dark waters which divided me from his grave up to the nightly moon and to the stars around her, I could well believe God wasteful of little things. Sirius flashing low, Orion's belt with the great nebula swinging like a pendant of diamonds; the ruby stars, Betelgueux and Aldebaran—my eyes went up beyond these to Perseus shepherding the Kids westward along the Milky Way. From the right Andromeda flashed signals to him: and above sat Cassiopeia, her mother, resting her jewelled wrists on the arms of her throne. Low in the east Jupiter trailed his satellites in the old moon's path. As they all moved, silent, looking down on me out of the hollow spaces of the night, I could believe no splendid waste too costly for their perfection: and the Artificer who hung them there after millions of years of patient effort, if more intelligible than a God who produced them suddenly at will, certainly not less divine. But walking the same shore by daylight I recognized that the shells, the mosses, the flowers I trampled on, were, each in its way, as perfect as those great stars: that on these—and on Harry—as surely as on the stars—God had spent, if not infinite pains, then at least so superlative a wisdom that to conceive of them as wastage was to deny the mind which called them forth.

There they were: and that He who had skill to create them could blunder in using them was simply incredible.

But this led to worse: for having to admit the infallible design, I now began to admire it as an exquisite scheme of evil, and to accuse God of employing supreme knowledge and skill to gratify a royal lust of cruelty. For a month and more this horrible theory justified itself in all innocent daily sights.

Throughout my country walks I ‘saw blood.’ I heard the rabbit run squeaking before the weasel; I watched the butcher crow working steadily down the hedge. If I turned seaward I looked beneath the blue and saw the dog-fish gnawing on the whiting. If I walked in the garden I surprised the thrush dragging worms from the turf, the cat slinking on the nest, the spider squatting in ambush. Behind the rosy face of every well-nourished child I saw a lamb gazing up at the butcher’s knife. My dear Violet, that was a hideous time!

And just then by chance a book fell into my hands—Lamartine’s *Chûte d’un Ange*. Do you know the Seventh and Tenth Visions of that poem, which describe the favourite amusements of the Men-gods? Before the Deluge, beyond the rude tents of the nomad shepherds, there rose city upon city of palaces built of jasper and porphyry, splendid and utterly corrupt; inhabited by men who called themselves gods and explored the subtleties of all sciences to minister to their vicious pleasures. At ease on soft couches, in hanging gardens set with fountains, these beings feasted with every refinement of cruelty. Kneeling slaves were living tables; while for their food:

> Tous les oiseaux de l’air, tous les poissons de l’onde,
> Tout ce qui vole ou nage ou rampe dans le monde,
> Mourant pour leur plaisir des plus cruels trépas
> De sanglantes saveurs composent leurs repas. . . .

In these lines I believed that I discerned the very God of the universe, the God whom men worship:

> Dans les infâmes jeux de leur divin loisir
> Le supplice de l’homme est leur premier plaisir
> Pour que leur œil féroce à l’envi s’en repaisse
> Des bourreaux devant eux en immolent sans cesse.
> Tantôt ils font lutter, dans des combats affreux,
> L’homme contre la brute et les hommes entre eux,
> Aux longs ruisseaux de sang qui coulent de la veine,
> Aux palpitations des membres sur l’arène,
> Se levant à demi de leurs lits de repos
> Des frissons de plaisir frémissent sur leurs peaux.
> Le cri de la torture est leur douce harmonie,
> Et leur œil dans son œil boit sa lente agonie.

I charged the Supreme Power with a cruelty deliberate, ruthless, serene. Nero the tyrant once commanded a representation in grim earnest of the Flight of Icarus; and the unhappy boy who took the part, at his first attempt to fly, fell headlong beside the Emperor’s couch and spattered him with blood and brains. For the Emperor, says Suetonius, *perraro praesidere, ceterum accubans, parvis primum foraminibus, deinde toto podio adaperto, spectare consuerat*. So I believed that on the stage of this world men agonized for the delight of one cruel intelligence which watched from behind the curtain of a private box.

II

In this unhappy condition of mind, then, I was lying in my library chair here at Sevenhays, at two o'clock on the morning of 4th January. I had just finished another reading of the Tenth Vision and had tossed my book into the lap of an arm-chair opposite. Fire and lamp were burning brightly. The night outside was still and soundless, with a touch of frost.

I lay there, retracing in thought the circumstances of Harry's last parting from me, and repeating to myself a scrap here and there from the three letters he wrote on his way—the last of them, full of high spirits, received a full three weeks after the telegram which announced his death. There was a passage in this last letter describing a wonderful ride he had taken alone and by moonlight on the desert; a ride (he protested) which wanted nothing of perfect happiness but me, his friend, riding beside him to share his wonder. There was a sentence which I could not recall precisely, and I left my chair and was crossing the room towards the drawer in the writing-table where I kept his letters, when I heard a trampling of hoofs on the gravel outside, and then my Christian name called—with distinctness, but not at all loudly.

I went to the window, which was unshuttered; drew up the blind and flung up the sash. The moon, in its third quarter and about an hour short of its meridian, shone over the deodars upon the white gravel. And there, before the front door, sat Harry on his sorrel mare Vivandière, holding my own Grey Sultan ready bridled and saddled. He was dressed in his old khaki riding-suit, and his face, as he sat askew in his saddle and looked up towards my window, wore its habitual and happy smile.

Now, call this and what follows a dream, vision, hallucination, what you will; but understand, please, that from the first moment, so far as I considered the matter at all, I had never the least illusion that this was Harry in flesh and blood. I knew quite well all the while that Harry was dead and his body in his grave. But, soul or phantom—whatever relation to Harry this might bear—it had come to me, and the great joy of that was enough for the time. There let us leave the question. I closed the window, went upstairs to my dressing-room, drew on my riding-boots and overcoat, found cap, gloves and riding-crop, and descended to the porch.

Harry, as I shall call him, was still waiting there on the off-side of Grey Sultan, the farther side from the door. There could be no doubt, at any rate, that the grey was real horseflesh and blood, though he seemed unusually quiet after two days in stall. Harry freed him as I mounted, and we set off together at a walk, which we kept as far as to the gate.

Outside we took the westward road, and our horses broke into a trot. As yet we had not exchanged a word; but now he asked a question or two about his

people and his friends; kindly, yet most casually, as one might who returns after a week's holidaying. I answered as well as I could, with trivial news of their health. His mother had borne the winter better than usual—to be sure, there had been as yet no cold weather to speak of; but she and Ethel intended, I believed, to start for the south of France early in February. He inquired about you. His comments were such as a man makes on hearing just what he expects to hear, or knows beforehand. And for some time it seemed to be tacitly taken for granted between us that I should ask him no questions.

'As for me——' I began, after a while.

He checked the mare's pace a little. 'I know,' he said, looking straight ahead between her ears; then, after a pause, 'it has been a bad time for you. You are in a bad way altogether. That is why I came.'

'But it was for *you*!' I blurted out. 'Harry, if only I had known why *you* were taken—and what it was to *you*!'

He turned his face to me with the old confident comforting smile.

'Don't you trouble about *that*. *That*'s nothing to make a fuss about. Death?' he went on musing—our horses had fallen to a walk again—'It looks you in the face a moment: you put out your hands: you touch—and so it's gone. My dear boy, it isn't for *us* that you need worry!'

'For whom, then?'

'Come,' said he, and he shook Vivandière into a canter.

III

I cannot remember precisely at what point in our ride the country had ceased to be familiar. But by and by we were climbing the lower slopes of a great down which bore no resemblance to the pastoral country around Sevenhays. We had left the beaten road for short turf—apparently of a copper-brown hue, but this may have been the effect of the moonlight. The ground rose steadily, but with an easy inclination, and we climbed with the wind at our backs; climbed, as it seemed, for an hour, or maybe two, at a footpace, keeping silence. The happiness of having Harry beside me took away all desire for speech.

This at least was my state of mind as we mounted the long lower slopes of the down. But in time the air, hitherto so exhilarating, began to oppress my lungs, and the tranquil happiness to give way to a vague discomfort and apprehension.

'What is this noise of water running?'

I reined up Grey Sultan as I put the question. At the same moment it occurred to me that this sound of water, distant and continuous, had been running in my ear for a long while.

Harry, too, came to a halt. With a sweep of the arm that embraced the dim landscape around and ahead, he quoted softly:

ἐν δ’ ἐτίθει ποταμοῖο μέγα σθένος ’Ωκεανοῖο
ἄντυγα πὰρ πυμάτην σάκεος πύκα ποιητοῖο

and was silent again.

I recalled at once and distinctly the hot summer morning ten years back, when we had prepared that passage of the Eighteenth Book together in our study at Clifton; I at the table, Harry lolling in the cane-seated arm-chair with the Liddell-and-Scott open on his knees; outside, the sunny close and the fresh green of the lime trees.

Now that I looked more attentively the bare down, on which we climbed like flies, did indeed resemble a vast round shield, about the rim of which this unseen water echoed. And the resemblance grew more startling when, a mile or so farther on our way, as the grey dawn overtook us, Harry pointed upwards and ahead to a small boss or excrescence now lifting itself above the long curve of the horizon.

At first I took it for a hummock or tumulus. Then, as the day whitened about us, I saw it to be a building—a tall, circular barrack not unlike the Colosseum. A question shaped itself on my lips, but something in Harry’s manner forbade it. His gaze was bent steadily forward, and I kept my wonder to myself, and also the oppression of spirit which had now grown to something like physical torture.

When first the great barrack broke into sight we must have been at least two miles distant. I kept my eyes fastened on it as we approached, and little by little made out the details of its architecture. From base to summit—which appeared to be roofless—six courses of many hundred arches ran around the building, one above the other; and between each pair a course, as it seemed, of plain worked stone, though I afterwards found it to be sculptured in low relief. The arches were cut in deep relief and backed with undressed stone. The lowest course of all, however, was quite plain, having neither arches nor frieze; but at intervals corresponding to the eight major points of the compass—so far as I who saw but one side of it could judge—pairs of gigantic stone figures supported archways pierced in the wall; or sluices, rather, since from every archway but one a full stream of water issued and poured down the sides of the hill. The one dry archway was that which faced us with open gate; and towards this one Harry led the way; for oppression and terror now weighted my hand as with lead upon Grey Sultan’s rein.

Harry, however, rode forward resolutely, dismounted almost in the very shadow of the great arch, and waited, smoothing his mare’s neck. But for the invitation in his eyes, which were solemn, yet without a trace of fear, I had never dared that last hundred yards. For above the rush of waters I heard now a

confused sound within the building—the thud and clanking of heavy machinery, and at intervals a human groan; and looking up I saw that the long friezes in bas-relief represented men and women tortured and torturing with all conceivable variety of method and circumstance—flayed, racked, burned, torn asunder, loaded with weights, pinched with hot irons, and so on without end. And it added to the horror of these sculptures that while the limbs and even the dress of each figure were carved with elaborate care and nicety of detail, the faces of all—of those who applied the torture and of those who looked on, as well as of the sufferers themselves—were left absolutely blank. On the same plan the two Titans beside the great archway had no faces. The sculptor had traced the muscles of each belly in a constriction of anguish, and had suggested this anguish again in moulding the neck, even in disposing the hair of the head; but the neck supported, and the locks fell around, a space of smooth stone without a feature.

Harry allowed me no time to feed on these horrors. Signing to me to dismount and leave Grey Sultan at the entrance, he led me through the long archway or tunnel. At the end we paused again; he watching, while I drew difficult breath. . . .

I saw a vast amphitheatre of granite, curving away on either hand and reaching up, tier on tier, till the tiers melted in the grey sky overhead. The lowest tier stood twenty feet above my head; yet curved with so lordly a perspective that on the far side of the arena, as I looked across, it seemed almost level with the ground; while the human figures about the great archway yonder were diminished to the size of ants about a hole. . . . For there were human figures busy in the arena, though not a soul sat in any of the granite tiers above. A million eyes had been less awful than those empty benches staring down in the cold dawn; bench after bench repeating the horror of the featureless carvings by the entrance-gate—repeating it in series without end, and unbroken, save at one point midway along the semi-circle on my right, where the imperial seat stood out, crowned like a catafalque with plumes of purple horsehair, and screened close with heavy purple hangings. I saw these curtains shake once or twice in the morning wind.

The floor of this amphitheatre I have spoken of as an arena; but as a matter of fact it was laid with riveted sheets of copper that recalled the dead men's shelves in the Paris *morgue*. The centre had been raised some few feet higher than the circumference, or possibly the whole floor took its shape from the rounded hill of which in was the apex; and from an open sluice immediately beneath the imperial throne a flood of water gushed with a force that carried it straight to this raised centre, over which it ran and rippled, and so drained back into the scuppers at the circumference. Before reaching the centre it broke and swirled around a row of what appeared to be tall iron boxes or cages, set

directly in face of the throne. But for these ugly boxes the whole floor was empty. To and from these the little human figures were hurrying, and from these too proceeded the thuds and panting and the frequent groans that I had heard outside.

While I stood and gazed, Harry stepped forward into the arena. 'This also?' I whispered.

He nodded, and led the way over the copper floor, where the water ran high as our ankles and again was drained off, until little dry spaces grew like maps upon the surface, and in ten seconds were flooded again. He led me straight to the cages; and I saw that, while the roof and three sides of these were of sheet iron, the fourth side, which faced the throne, lay open. And I saw —in the first cage, a man scourged with rods; in the second, a body twisted on the rack; in the third, a woman with a starving babe, and a fellow that held food to them and withdrew it quickly (the torturers wore masks on their faces, and whenever blood flowed some threw handfuls of sawdust, and blood and sawdust together were carried off by the running water); in the fourth cage, a man tied, naked and helpless, whom a masked torturer pelted with disks of gold, heavy and keen-edged; in the fifth a brasier with irons heating, and a girl's body crouched in a corner——

'I will see no more!' I cried, and turned towards the great purple canopy. High over it the sun broke yellow on the climbing tiers of seats. 'Harry! someone is watching behind those curtains! Is it—HE?'

Harry bent his head.

'But this is all that I believed! This is Nero, and ten times worse than Nero! Why did you bring me here?' I flung out my hand towards the purple throne, and finding myself close to a fellow who scattered sawdust with both hands, made a spring to tear his mask away. But Harry stretched out an arm.

'That will not help you,' he said. 'The man has no face.'

'No face!'

'He once had a face, but it has perished. His was the face of these sufferers. Look at them.'

I looked from cage to cage, and now saw that indeed all these sufferers—men and women—had but one face: the same wrung brow, the same wistful eyes, the same lips bitten in anguish. I knew the face. *We all know it.*

'His own Son! O devil rather than God!' I fell on my knees in the gushing water and covered my eyes.

'Stand up, listen and look!' said Harry's voice.

'What can I see? He hides behind that curtain.'

'And the curtain?'

'It shakes continually.'

'*That is with His sobs.* Listen! What of the water?'

‘It runs from the throne and about the floor. It washes off the blood.’

‘*That water is His tears.* It flows hence down the hill, and washes all the shores of earth.’

Then as I stood silent, conning the eddies at my feet, for the first time Harry took my hand.

‘Learn this,’ he said. ‘There is no suffering in the world but ultimately comes to be endured by God.’

Saying this, he drew me from the spot; gently, very gently led me away; but spoke again as we were about to pass into the shadow of the arch:

‘Look once back: for a moment only.’

I looked. The curtains of the imperial seat were still drawn close, but in a flash I saw the tiers beside it, and around, and away up to the sunlit crown of the amphitheatre, thronged with forms in white raiment. And all these forms leaned forward and bowed their faces on their arms and wept.

So we passed out beneath the archway. Grey Sultan stood outside, and as I mounted him the gate clashed behind. . . .

IV

I turned as it clashed. And the gate was just the lodge-gate of Sevenhays. And Grey Sultan was trampling the gravel of our own drive. The morning sun slanted over the laurels on my right, and while I wondered, the stable clock struck eight.

The rest I leave to you; nor shall try to explain. I only know that, vision or no vision, my soul from that hour has gained a calm it never knew before. The sufferings of my fellows still afflict me. But always, if I stand still and listen, in my own room, or in a crowded street, or in a waste spot among the moors, I can hear those waters moving round the world—moving on their ‘priest-like task’—those lustral divine tears which are Oceanus.

WHICH?

THE scene was a street in the West End of London, a little south of Eaton Square: the hour just twenty-five minutes short of midnight.

A wind from the North Sea had been blowing all day across the Thames marshes, and collecting what it could carry; and the shop-keepers had scarcely drawn their iron shutters before a thin fog drifted up from lamp-post to lamp-post and filled the intervals with total darkness—all but one, where, half-way down the street on the left-hand side, an enterprising florist had set up an electric lamp at his private cost, to shine upon his window and attract the attention of rich people as they drove by on their way to the theatres. At nine o'clock he closed his business: but the lamp shone on until midnight, to give the rich people another chance, on their way home, of reading that F. Stillman was prepared to decorate dinner-tables and ball-rooms, and to supply bridal bouquets or mourning wreaths at short notice.

The stream of homeward-bound carriages had come to a sudden lull. The red eyes of a belated four-wheeler vanished in the fog, and the florist's lamp flung down its ugly incandescent stare on an empty pavement. Himself in darkness, a policeman on the other side of the street flashed his lantern twice, closed the slide and halted for a moment to listen by an area railing.

Halting so, he heard a rapid footfall at the upper corner of the street. It drew nearer. A man suddenly stepped into the circle of light on the pavement, as if upon a miniature stage: and as suddenly paused to gaze upward at the big white globe.

He was a middle-aged man, dressed in an ill-fitting suit of broad-cloth, with a shabby silk hat and country-made boots. He stared up at the globe, as if to take his bearings in the fog; then pulled out a watch.

As the light streamed down upon its dial, a woman sidled out from the hollow of a shop-door behind him, and touched his elbow.

'Deary!' she began. 'Going home, deary?'

'Heh? Let me alone, please,' said the man roughly. 'I am not that sort.' She had almost slipped her arm in his before he turned to speak; but now she caught it away, gasping. Mock globes danced before his eyes and for the moment he saw nothing but these: did not see that first she would have run, then moved her hands up to cover her face. Before they could do so he saw it, all white and damned.

'Annie!'

‘Oh, Willy . . .’ She put out a hand as if to ward him off, but dropped both arms before her and stood, swaying them ever so slightly.

‘So this . . . So *this* . . .’ He choked upon the words.

She nodded, hardening her eyes to meet his. ‘He left me. He sent no money ——’

‘I see.’

‘I was afraid.’

‘Afraid?’

‘Afraid to do it . . . suddenly . . . to put an end. . . . It’s not so easy to starve, really. Oh, Willy, can’t you hit me?’

He seemed to be reflecting. ‘I—I say,’ he said abruptly, ‘can’t we talk? Can’t we get away somewhere and talk?’

Her limp arms seemed to answer: they asked, as plainly as words: ‘What is there to say?’

‘I don’t know. . . . Somewhere out of this infernal light. I want to think. There must be somewhere, away from this light. . . .’ He broke off. ‘At home, now, I can think. I am always thinking at home.’

‘At home . . .’ the woman echoed.

‘And you must think too?’

‘Always: everywhere.’

‘Ah!’ he ran on, as one talking against time: ‘but what do you suppose I think about, nine times out of ten? Why’—and he uttered it with an air of foolish triumph—‘of the chances that we might meet . . . and what would happen. Have you ever thought of that?’

‘Always: everywhere . . . of that . . . and the children.’

‘Grace looks after them.’

‘I know. I get word. She is kind.’

‘You think of them?’

‘Don’t, Willy!’

He harked back. ‘Do you know, whenever I’ve thought of it . . . the chance of our meeting . . . I’ve wondered what I should say. Hundreds and hundreds of times I’ve made up my mind what to say. Why, only just now—I’ve come from the theatre: I still go to the theatre sometimes: it’s a splendid thing to distract your thoughts: takes you out of *yourself—Frou-Frou*, it was . . . the finest play in the world . . . next to *East Lynne*. It made me cry, to-night, and the people in the pit stared at me. But one mustn’t be ashamed of a little honest emotion, before strangers. And when a thing comes *home* to a man . . . So you’ve thought of it too—the chance of our running against one another?’

‘Every day and all the day long I’ve gone fearing it: especially in March and September, when I knew you’d be up in town buying for the season. All the day long I’ve gone watching the street ahead of me . . . watching in fear of

you. . . .’

‘But I never guessed it would happen like this.’ He stared up irritably, as though the lamp were to blame for upsetting his calculations. The woman followed his eyes.

‘Yes . . . the lamp,’ she assented. ‘Something held my face up to it, just now, when I wanted to hide. It’s like as if our souls were naked under it, and there is nothing to say.’

‘Eh? but there is. I tell you I’ve thought it out so often! I’ve thought it all out, or almost all; and that can’t mean nothing.’ He cleared his throat. ‘I’ve made allowances, too——’ he began magnanimously.

But for the moment she was not listening. ‘Yes, yes . . .’ She had turned her face aside and was gazing out into the darkness. ‘Look at the gas-jets, Willy—in the fog. What do they remind you of? That Christmas-tree . . . after Dick was born. . . . Don’t you remember how he mistook the oranges on it for lanterns and wanted to blow them out . . . how he kicked to get at them. . . .’

‘It’s odd: I was thinking of Dick, just now, when you—when you spoke to me. The lamp put me in mind of him. I was wondering what it cost. We have nothing like it at home. Of course, if I bought one for the shop, people would talk—“drawing attention,” they’d say, after what has happened. But I thought that Dick, perhaps . . . when he grows up and enters the business . . . perhaps he might propose such a thing, and then I shan’t say no. I should carry it off lightly. . . . After all, it’s the shop it would call attention to . . . not the house. And one must advertise in these days.’

She was looking at him steadily now. ‘Yes,’ she assented, ‘people would talk.’

‘And they pity me. I do hate to be pitied, in that way. Even the people up here, at the old lodgings. . . . I won’t come to them again. If I thought the children. . . . One never can tell how much children know——’

‘Don’t, Willy!’

He plunged a hand into his pocket. ‘I dare say, now, you’re starving?’

Her arms began to sway again, and she laughed quietly, hideously. ‘Don’t—don’t—don’t! I make money. That’s the worst. I make money. Oh, why don’t you hit me? Why was you always a soft man?’

For a moment he stood horribly revolted. But his weakness had a better side, and he showed it now.

‘I say, Annie . . . is it so bad?’

‘It is hell.’

‘ “Soft”?’ he harked back again. ‘It might take some courage to be soft.’

She peered at him eagerly; then sighed. ‘But you haven’t that sort of courage, Willy.’

‘They would say . . .’ he went on musing, ‘I wonder what they would say?

. . . Come back to the lamp,' he cried with sudden peevishness. 'Don't look out there . . . this circle of light on the pavement . . . like a map of the world.'

'With only our two shadows on it.'

'If it were all the world. . . .' He peered around, searching the darkness. 'If there were nothing to concern us beyond, and we could stay always inside it . . .'

'—With the light shining straight down on us, and our shadows close at our feet, and so small! But directly we moved beyond they would lengthen, lengthen. . . .'

' "Forsaking all other"—that's what the Service says. And what does that mean if we cannot stand apart from all and render account to each other only? I tell you I've made allowances. I didn't make any in the old days, being wrapped up in the shop and the chapel, and you not caring for either. There was fault on my side: I've come to see that.'

'I'd liefer you struck me, Willy, instead of making allowances.'

'Oh, come, that's nonsense. It seems to me, Annie, there's nothing we couldn't help to mend together. It would never be the same, of course: but we can understand . . . or at least overlook.' In his magnanimity he caught at high thoughts. 'This light above us—what if it were the Truth?'

'Truth doesn't overlook,' she answered, with a hopeless scorn which puzzled him. 'No, no,' she went on rapidly, yet more gently, 'Truth knows of the world outside, and is wakeful. If we move a step our shadows will lengthen. They will touch all bright things—they will fall across the children. Willy, we cannot move!'

'I see. . . .'

'Ah?' She craned forward and almost touched his arm again.

'Annie, it comes to me now—I see for the first time how happy we might have been. How came we two to kill love?'

The woman gave a cry, almost of joy. Her fingers touched his sleeve now. 'We have not killed love. We—I—had stunned him: but (Oh, I see!) he has picked up his weapons again and is fighting. He is bewildered here, in this great light, and he fights at random . . . fights to make you strong and me weak, you weak and me strong. We can never be one again, never. One of us must fall, must be beaten . . . he does not see this, but oh, Willy, he fights . . . he fights!'

'He shall fight for you. Annie, come home!'

'No, no—for you—and the children!'

'Come!'

'Think of the people!' She held him off, shaking her head, but her eyes were wistful, intent upon his. 'You have lived it down. . . . It would all begin again. Look at me . . . think of the talk. . . .'

‘Let them say what they choose. . . . I wonder what they would say. . . .’

The Policeman stepped forward and across the roadway. He had heard nothing, and completely misunderstood all he had seen.

‘Come, you must move on there, you two!’ he commanded harshly.

Suddenly, as he said it, the light above was extinguished.

‘Hallo!’ He paused, half-way across. ‘Twelve o’clock already! Then what’s taken my watch?’

A pair of feet tiptoed away in the darkness for a few yards, then broke into a nervous run.

As a matter of fact it still wanted five minutes of midnight. And while the Policeman fumbled for his watch and slipped back the slide of his lantern, the white flame leaped back into the blind eye above and blazed down as fiercely as ever.

‘Something wrong with the connection, I suppose,’ said the Policeman, glancing up and then down at the solitary figure left standing under the lamp.

‘Why, hallo! . . .’ said he again.

But which was it?—the man or the woman?

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Q's Mystery Stories* by Arthur Quiller-Couch]