

THEY
WINTER
ABROAD



SARLES
ASTON



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WINTER



ABROAD

CHATTO
&
WINDUS

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They Winter Abroad

A NOVEL

By

JAMES ASTON



1932

Chatto & Windus

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‘What is the difference between lust, passion, and love?’ he suddenly asked.

I tried to think.

‘I asked Major Pomby that,’ he resumed, ‘and he said to me, “Maharajah! you are a very bad man!” Am I a very bad man to ask such a question?’

Hindoo Holiday, J. R. ACKERLEY.

Chapter 1

STATISTICS shew, or they ought to shew, that one out of every four of those young ladies whom you meet in the hunting-field is doomed to die a maiden. That nearly-young person, for instance, who wears a bowler hat and a cigarette drooping beneath her prominent nose, who has just nibbled your horse's tail, bumped you into a ditch, and accused your mount of kicking: her pale viperish eye seems unlikely ever to gleam upon a sweetheart. Her father will die, her elder brother will inherit the estate. Even after he is married that auburn vixen will continue to ride his horses. But she will be so rude to his wife, so unpleasant to his servants, and so bad for his stable, that something will be bound to happen sooner or later. By slow attrition, or by a single downright uproar, she will be ousted from her father's house. She will no longer cram herself in front of you at the gates: her strident vituperation of other people because she cannot hold her own horse will cease to echo round the warm-lying coverts: she will disappear.

You will wonder whether she has died; whether some sagacious creature has had the sense to fall with her into a deep ditch, and there to lie upon her in good holding mud until she suffocated. You will imagine her corpse, with fragments of that hanging cigarette stuffed into the mouth, with the glazed indefatigable eyes staring upwards in a last accusation. You may even be sorry that she died such a pleasant death.

Meanwhile Miss Handsaw will be wintering in Italy. Stouter now, and with a malingering expression, she will be staying at Bordighera with the relic of a papal count. Miss Handsaw will have taken to travel.

There are five reasons for leaving one's native country. One may go on one's honeymoon, in order to have leisure for private debauchery more or less incognito. One may make the Grand Tour from mere juvenile effervescence and secret hopes of vice. One may go to a place with the object of saying that one has been there. One may be a crusader or an expeditionary force. Or one may find oneself not wanted by one's relations, and possibly wanted by the police, at home.

The Continent has done its best to provide for all these wants. The crusaders are accommodated in houses with red lights over the doors. The fugitives from justice can live at the *Ambassadori* in Rome, for five or six pounds a night. The newly-weds and the grand tourists can stay with great discomfort at expensive hotels in Naples. They are in the best of humours, and therefore stomach the expense; they are interested in other matters, and therefore do not feel their privations.

And for the people who visit a place in order to say they have been there—for the people who winter abroad so that they can write home about it—there is the Hotel Santo Biagio in Positano.

The Hotel Santo Biagio was the best hotel on the Sorrentine Peninsula, not as the most expensive or exclusive (the principle of exclusion being expense) but as the most considerate within the means of a normal income. All the guests of the Hotel Santo Biagio

said it was the best hotel on the Sorrentine Peninsula for this reason. Secretly they would have preferred to stay at the Quisisana in Amalfi or the Vittoria Grande in Sorrento or the Cappuccini in Capri. But, since their incomes were not large enough to purchase exclusion as well as consideration, they united in supposing that the one was not compatible with the other. They always came for a week and stayed two months; and they did not forget to record the fact in the hotel album when they left. The hotel album began with:

My husband and I have stayed in the Hotel Santo Biagio for six weeks and we think it is a very comfortable hotel and we shall always recommend this hotel to our friends.—ANGELA HOPWOOD. 18.3.06.

Gathering momentum on its way, it ended with a burst of music:

Oh! when with winter's frozen breeze
In London we coldly freeze,
Sweet Mem'ry will unroll the past
Of Positano's balmy blast.

FRANCIS and MARY PRESTON. 2.2.32.

The hotel itself stood on the eastern side of the valley at Positano. When the sun rose in orange mystery, like the ribbon of a war medal, if not worse, from behind the still slightly snow-capped summits of Monte Capaccio, tinting the plain of Salerno and the exhausted flat miles of sea, the hotel was far from receiving its warmth. Not until midday would the observant deity have noted its three rows of nude middle-aged gentle-people taking a short pre-prandial sunbath behind the three rows of blank semi-curtained windows which formed the frontage.

The guests during the winter were largely English, with a smattering of Swedes and Germans and an occasional Frenchman. The French, however, were birds of passage, generally love-birds, who seldom stayed more than a night. So the real ballast was Anglo-Saxon.

It was a ballast of gold. The proprietor calculated on a fixed population between December and March, from which he derived his security, and a small superficial driftage of Americans to keep his single rooms engaged. The main clientèle were treated with every care, so that they should return next winter and bring their friends. The passing trippers were received with even more attention, in case they might be induced to remain among the fixtures. All the meals, for instance, were as abundant and English as possible, but the fixtures were given *dolci* only for dinner whilst the strangers were so regaled at luncheon as well.

In the summer the English disappeared and the hotel performed a *volte-face*. The English cooking was relinquished, the notices of the Cosulich line and the American Express Company were removed, the box for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was taken down, and the Italian week-enders began to pour in from Naples: eight to a bedroom, singing from four of the morning till two at night.

The proprietor was a small prosperous Italian who looked like a Belge. He had been associated with the profession since he was fourteen, and had learned a large number of

maxims in the course of his career: never to present himself unshaved before his guests, never to speak of politics or religion, never to allow the most sociable of his patrons to become really friendly with him (whilst none would be permitted to be actually formal), and to buy new boots. He had always lived with his mother and sister, latterly he had married a wife, and the guests who usually joked and associated with him, finding his assumed personality quite charming, were maiden ladies. He had a high-pitched giggle, and the more fanciful of his patrons occasionally suspected him of a harder subtlety than might appear. He was supposed to be deeply honest, and a great philanthropist where the affairs of his neighbouring peasantry were concerned. He never grossly overcharged, being wise enough to see that his regular visitors were his greatest asset, and that even a chance visitor might be charmed into regularity.

He insisted that every member of his staff should assume the same hospitable attitude as himself. This foible produced a certain number of catch phrases, which one was constantly hearing, such as *'tutto quello che Lei vuol.'* He kept all rooms scrupulously clean, supervised everything personally, and seldom sat down. The most attractive thing about him, which his friends the maiden ladies never found out, was that in all personal matters he was invincibly stubborn. He would state a fact and hold to it, however unreasonable it was, with the intricate and elusive logic common amongst obstinate people. This was human and therefore a relief in one who was so constantly affable and polished; but he was not often sufficiently interested to be sincere in argument. He would usually defer to his opposite, without in the least changing his own opinion, merely in order to save trouble. He was a smiling man in the early forties, and he had a double chin; but there was nothing soft inside him.

In the mild winter of 1932 the Hotel Santo Biagio gave the proprietor satisfaction by being pleasantly full. Miss Albino had done her work of liaison well, and there had been any number of maiden guests.

Miss Albino herself was a maiden lady. Perhaps, indeed according to scientific law quite certainly, she had once even been a maiden girl. But when one looked at Miss Albino it was difficult to believe in science. It was not possible to understand how this material agglomeration of fatty tissues, this very pronounced mental attitude hidden behind spectacles which looked as though they had come out of a boy's electric torch, had ever been nurtured in the usual way. Miss Albino as a very fat and goggling baby, perhaps. But Miss Albino as a schoolgirl or a *débutante*: no, it was beyond imagination. By all artistic laws she ought to have started from the ground fully armed, or from the brain of an L.C.C. Minerva: parturated immaculately at a mental birth, already middle-aged.

Miss Albino had come to Positano in her twenties. What fabulous urge had brought her there was past conjecture. Perhaps she had wanted to say that she had been to Vesuvius: perhaps she was one of the legion who were not wanted at home. Coming to Positano in the first place may have been like joining the Foreign Legion with Major Wren. The main thing was that she had come. And, having come, she stayed.

Miss Albino was the proprietor's right hand. She had returned so persistently, had so

tirelessly demanded a reduced rate for returning, that she had finally become an institution. The proprietor had become accustomed to her, had found it cheaper to employ her unofficially. Rather than reduce her *pension* to a figure which would show him no profit at all, he had reconciled himself to supporting her gratis, on condition that she dealt with his English correspondence. She had become a liaison officer. She had secured a post.

Miss Albino's *métier* was the securing of posts. Had she been able to afford a life in the suburbs she would undoubtedly have been the secretary of the local golf club. She would also have been on the committee of her club in London. But Miss Albino was poor. Perhaps that was the real reason why she wintered abroad. She could not afford to live in England and interest herself in Women's Suffrage, so she lived in Positano and consoled herself as the proprietor's unofficial secretary. She found time, collaterally, to run the R.S.P.C.A., to organise a dispensary for the D.F.L., and to play the harmonium at the English church.

Miss Albino had made so many acquaintances during her residence at the Santo Biagio that she really was invaluable to the proprietor. She kept her clientèle in correspondence, and attracted the right sort of guests. It was directly owing to the efforts of Miss Albino that the Misses Cowfold had come this year. Indeed, the whole Drawing Room faction had come at one time or another through the instrumentality of Miss Albino. That is to say, half the hotel.

For the Hotel Saint Blase preserved the duality of nature. A microcosm of the world, it was divided against itself. There were two factions: of the Drawing Room, and of the Smoking Room. The Drawing Room faction, recruited from the acquaintances of Miss Albino, was the party of Right, of Decency, of Sabbath Observance. Members of this faction were generally maiden or widowed ladies. They had but one occupation. It was to steal the Continental *Daily Mail*. Hanging about the hall of the hotel with invincible meanness, with the patience conferred by lack of any other interest, they would await delivery of the paper. They would pounce upon it. They would pass it round among themselves. If a member of the Smoking Room ventured to seek it in the stronghold of the enemy, they would conceal it, by sitting on it, till the danger passed.

The Drawing Room faction, as their name implies, lived in the drawing-room. They would sit there, forbidding, solitary, and genteel, exuding an atmosphere of disapproval. Scarcely anybody in the low-class camp of the Smoking Room dared put his nose inside the door.

The Smoking Room faction consisted of the party which, after dinner in the evening, retired to the smoking-room: there it practised vulgarity and gambled at bridge. These people had not been introduced by Miss Albino. They had drifted to Positano on strange errands of their own.

The two parties were fairly divided, so that the internecine war seemed likely to outlast the siege of Troy.

Miss Albino was on the side of the Angels, and with her stood Mrs. Skimlit (the Nestor and Ulysses of the party), Mrs. Prune and her daughter, Frau Kunst, Dr. and Mrs. Arnold-Browne, the Misses Cowfold.

The vulgar section, led by the professor, numbered Mr. McInvert, Mr. and Mrs.

Menzies with their daughter, and the Joneses.

Four ladies from Devonshire patronised the Smoking Room without being definitely of any party. Their hearts were still in Devonshire, prophetically mentioning there the glorious fact that they had wintered in Italy.

Such was the society into which Mr. Pupillary, the hero of this story, was plunged from the University. He had come to Italy some months before, in order to say that he had been there. Mrs. Skimlit, although she was over seventy, came with the same object. So did the whole rank of the Drawing Room; except Frau Kunst, who really appeared to have come because she liked it.

The professor had arrived, as he did everything, out of sheer perversity.

Mr. and Mrs. Menzies had come in order to give their daughter a treat.

The Joneses came because they had seen a picture of Vesuvius in the *Sydney Herald*.

Mr. McInvert had romantic leanings.

Chapter 2

MRS. SKIMLIT, sitting at dinner, reviewed the company. On her right was an empty single table, on her left the German lady who spoke little English and seemed dull. In front sat the family of Scots with their little hussy dressed in next to nothing, and her poor father looking as worried as usual. His wife was evidently a weak creature to allow such behaviour in her daughter: a weak creature, and no helpmate to her husband, as Mrs. Skimlit had once been. Not that Mr. Skimlit had been much of a husband. Weak Mr. Skimlit: so many failures. He had even failed to keep alive.

Next to the Scottish family, on the one side, sat the Australian couple who had made money and come to England, but were vulgar. Their name was Jones; it was a vulgar name and they were vulgar people. Thank Heaven, thought Mrs. Skimlit, one could choose one's own friends and refuse to associate beneath oneself. But how few friends there were for an old woman who had done her duty, and been forgotten, for a lonely old woman however Christian. Not that she wanted friends, oh no! and not that she couldn't have them if she wanted. The fact remained that there were few people left in the world who were worth knowing. They were all vulgar and selfish and wicked and inconsiderate and talked about themselves.

On the other side of the Scottish people sat the Misses Cowfold: a good family mentioned in *Burke's Peerage*. They were worth knowing, and appeared to behave in a God-fearing way. Mrs. Skimlit talked to them in the drawing-room after dinner every day: but they were very disagreeable, and so fat. Mrs. Skimlit was thin and beautifully preserved. Why people should become fleshy, unless they indulged in intemperance or laziness or gluttony, she could not understand. Herself, she ate as much as most men, always enjoying her second helping, but remained slim. She looked at her firm pink arms with an expression as near to complacency as was possible in those hard eyes. Her hair was quite white, her lips invisible. She sat straight in her chair. The Misses Cowfold should go for walks.

Against the right-hand wall of the dining-room were three tables. At the first of them sat the four English ladies, maiden ladies, who lived in Devonshire. They seemed of good family also, but insipid, and played cards too much. Whist one could play, except on Sundays, but Bridge was a Gambling Game and probably unacceptable to the Lord. They talked Italian better than Mrs. Skimlit could pretend to do, and were always shewing off.

At the second table sat Miss Albino, alone. Mrs. Skimlit disliked Miss Albino. She was a fat chicken with watery protruding eyes, almost colourless, which looked for all the world as if they might at any moment well out and roll down her cheeks. And yet she seemed to be virtuous and ran the Society for the Protection of Animals. Mrs. Skimlit could not think why she disliked her. She gave it up.

In the corner sat Miss Prune and her mother. Miss Prune, who had protruding teeth, was only nineteen and quite well-mannered: a contrast to the Scottish hussy. Mrs. Skimlit's heart warmed to Miss Prune if only because she disliked her rival. Perhaps she was inclined to talk about athleticism a little too much, but that was all in the spirit of the

times. Shameless little waitresses running races with their breasts shaking under their tunics: fat greasy women swimming the Channel: even decent society ladies, or so-called ladies, playing golf in short skirts and riding astride. That was what women did to-day, instead of staying at home to keep the house clean. Mrs. Skimlit sighed sharply, and turned to the next table.

To see this one she had to look in the looking-glass. Dr. and Mrs. Arnold-Browne sat there. He was a fine man, thought Mrs. Skimlit, and would make a good husband to a Christian woman. He stood none of this modern nonsense about Art, and laid down his own opinion as good men ought to do. Mrs. Skimlit noticed his strong hairy hands, square face, and yellow hair appreciatively. It was a pity that Mrs. Arnold-Browne was such a failure.

In other parts of the room, seen either directly or through the looking-glass, sat Mr. McInvert, poor fellow, who wandered about looking for birds and flowers; the professor, who was writing a book; and various stray guests who would be gone to-morrow. But not before Mrs. Skimlit had descended upon them and sucked them dry. It was Mrs. Skimlit's habit to catch all newcomers the moment they arrived and to find out their names, occupations, ideals, religion, and social status. Few people seemed to talk to her willingly, and the opportunity of talking with the unwary was not to be overlooked. Her isolation had driven her into curiosity.

As she settled down to another evening of boredom with the German lady, the soup having already been cleared away, the door opened and Mr. Pupillary walked with contemptuous dignity down the aisle. This was his first meal in the hotel. He was shewn by the waiter into the empty seat next Mrs. Skimlit. Whilst he took his soup she studied him askance.

Mr. Pupillary, in the meantime, insolently observed his surroundings. On his right, at the middle one of three tables, sat a fat lady with bulging eyes. He quoted to himself, pleased to feel academic:

Two weeping baths, two fiery motions,
Portable and compendious oceans.

After this he felt satisfied. Now one realised how Crashaw's 'Mary Magdalen' looked.

At another table sat a black-haired girl, under twenty, whose teeth stuck out. The rest of her face was pretty, and she probably had a sweet nature. She smiled. 'Papa, Potatoes, Prunes and Prisms.' Mr. Pupillary turned away, a little depressed, but equally satisfied with the quotation.

In front of him was another back, almost bare, over a green evening-dress. Over all was the back of a round head, bobbing up and down in the brightest animation. Mr. Pupillary felt that he might get on well with this head, or at any rate as well as he ever got on with women. The soup was excellent. Next to him sat an elderly lady with snow-white hair and a skin clearer than the girl's. Their eyes met.

'Good evening,' said Mrs. Skimlit. 'Have you just come?' She spoke like a mouse-trap, with a clear enunciation of every syllable and a close truncation of every word.

Mr. Pupillary felt like a new boy being interrogated by one of the bullies at his preparatory school. The sensation was doubly unpleasant, since the experience had been

recent.

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Pupillary. ‘I’ve just come.’

‘Oh,’ said Mrs. Skimlit. ‘What is your name?’

‘Pupillary.’

‘I am Mrs. Skimlit. Have you been to Positano before?’

‘No.’

This was one up to Mrs. Skimlit. She had been here before and was ready to press home her advantage. After all, this might be the merest tyro, on his first visit to Italy, who could not even say ‘Good morning’ in the native language. Although this was about the extent of Mrs. Skimlit’s vocabulary, she already began to feel superior. She added graciously: ‘It is a beautiful country. Such pretty walks and scenery. You must go to Amalfi and Capri and Salerno and Sorrento and Paestum. Have you been to Paestum?’

‘I have never been south of Amalfi,’ said Mr. Pupillary, much annoyed. People of his age had surely reached the stage when they need not be condescended to by second-rate winter trippers, however venerable. It hurt him very much to admit that he had not been to Paestum.

‘Perhaps you have not been to Italy before,’ said Mrs. Skimlit, with evident gratification. She had been to Italy and to France, and had once passed through Munich.

‘Never,’ said Mr. Pupillary, who had spent some time in that country. He possessed indulgent parents, and had been reading modern languages at the University. But he had now been sufficiently angered by the old lady’s tone, and humiliated by her subject (he prided himself on his Italian), to wish that she might make a fool of herself.

‘Do you speak French?’

‘Very little.’ It was vindictive, but Mr. Pupillary had been injured in his pride.

Mrs. Skimlit had a certain amount of evidence: the boy was evidently a fool and had never travelled, he had never been to Italy before and therefore presumably could not speak Italian, nor could he speak French. Mrs. Skimlit now felt safe in giving an exhibition of her culture.

‘Garçong,’ she addressed the waiter in her precise tones. ‘Je vieux de vino. Vin bianco.’

‘Yes, madam,’ said the waiter, ‘which kind?’

‘Oh, the same. La même.’ Effectually she did not want the same, but she could not remember the name of any other. Besides, she wished to impress her companion with her fluency, and, not being able to ask what kinds there were, felt that it was best to get her conversation over quickly.

‘It is an easy language to speak,’ she added, turning to Mr. Pupillary, ‘once you have been here some time.’

‘So I should imagine,’ said Mr. Pupillary.

‘Where were you born?’ asked Mrs. Skimlit, changing the subject.

‘In China,’ replied Mr. Pupillary, reflecting impiously that this woman ought to teach the Catechism.

‘It must be a beautiful country. I have never been there, but love the East.’ She implied

that Borneo was her footstool—she had, however, happened to miss China. There was a silence. Why didn't he ask where she had been born? Nobody was interested in anything but themselves. Finally, 'I was born in Ireland,' said Mrs. Skimlit.

'Oh yes?'—The black-hearted Irish.

'In Dublin.'

'Oh yes? Dublin must be a fine town.' Was one expected to go on talking like this every meal for a month?

'Yes, it is a fine town. Such a pity about the Law Courts.'

'I am afraid I don't know Dublin.'

Why did he say it in that tone of voice? And why did he keep saying 'Oh yes'? A thoroughly disagreeable young man, and probably a good-for-nothing.

'Do you speak any language besides English?'

'Yes, I speak Spanish,' replied Mr. Pupillary in stilted tones; 'a very rich language, well provided with oaths.' Why should he want to shock her?

'Really,' said Mrs. Skimlit. No doubt he swore disgustingly.

'Yes,' continued Mr. Pupillary, 'mostly connected with the Deity. Only you must be careful how you use them. Now,' fascinatingly, 'if you should ever want to be swearing in Spain, I should advise a compromise. *Miserable Pig* is an exclamation which will give offence to none, whereas if you should happen to use the more direct adjuration before a believing Catholic—"Pig God" of course—you might find yourself with a black eye.' He smiled at the picture. 'I find it rather odd to chance my luck. At the same time, one feels that this simple, almost homely, liaison with the Almighty—which permits one to frankly express one's disapproval in terms of the farmyard—is one of the best flowers of unsophisticated faith. One has to believe in God, and believe him to be very near before one can call him a pig with any hope of shaming him into righteousness.'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Skimlit. So he was an atheist and tried to be clever, did he? 'Do you ever go to church?'

'Why not?' said Mr. Pupillary.

'I believe in God, you see,' replied Mrs. Skimlit crushingly.

'Oh yes.'

Mr. Pupillary at last felt ashamed of himself. One did not bait old ladies who were nearing their seventies merely because they held opposing beliefs. This Mrs. Skimlit was probably impressionable in 1870 and fast set before King Edward. She was evidently alone, in a strange country, and in a no less strange society. It was obvious that if she behaved to the other people in the hotel in the same way as she behaved to him, few would willingly associate with her. One came to Italy for diversion, not to discuss the new Prayer Book. Mr. Pupillary knew that the most deadly torture for a social animal was isolation. It did not matter that Mrs. Skimlit had brought it upon herself, indeed she had probably been unable to help it—one could not escape one's upbringing. Irish Protestantism in 1870, oh Lord!

Mr. Pupillary saw a sentimental picture, in the manner of Hodgson's Bull, of an old snake which would not admit that it was old, lying in a new world of lizards and newts. The latter were kindly creatures, but not fond of the society of vipers. And the old snake

was mateless and shunned, its intelligence still bounded by the perceptions of its kind, bitter and narrow but unbroken. Mrs. Skimlit did not understand, or understood in a different way; it was not his place to hurt her.

He said: 'Do you often come to Italy?'

Mrs. Skimlit did not reply. She pretended to be talking to the German lady who kept saying 'Please?' in an anxious voice.

That was a smack in the face for one's attempt to be philanthropical. The newt had endeavoured to fraternise with the viper, had been ready to listen whilst the viper shewed off about its travels, but vipers are not mollified by the clumsy kindnesses of the lower species. It was to be expected, Mr. Pupillary told himself self-consciously. These meltings of the heart in the Tolstoy manner never came off. Even with lovers, first one would love and the other be proud, then the first sulk and the second melt. The milk of human kindness was not apt to coincide in its discharges.

He finished his *dolci* and began again.

'Paestum would be a good place to go to, I suppose?'

'Yes.'

'Greek temples, are there not?'

'Three.'

'Like Stonehenge?'

'I have never been to Stonehenge.'

'Barbed wire, I mean, and pay at the gate?'

Mrs. Skimlit could never for long resist giving information.

'No, there is no barbed wire, but you have to pay four lire to get in. The temples are very beautiful, the Golden Temple especially,' she said it in capital letters, 'with a yellow kind of stone: I believe it is called the Temple of Neptune. It is very difficult to get there, and one usually has to pay the proprietor six hundred lire for a motor-car. But then it is cheaper if you go in a party.'

Just as things were going nicely towards a reconciliation, Mr. Pupillary made a mistake. When he had originally denied a knowledge of foreign languages, or implied a denial, he had intended to humiliate Mrs. Skimlit by an exhibition of his fluency later on. Now that he had recovered from the humiliation of being condescended to, now that he no longer wished to do Mrs. Skimlit any injury, he forgot the denial. Mr. Pupillary asked the waiter for tangerines in passable Italian.

Mrs. Skimlit experienced the voiding of the nether stomach which goes with a recognition of irrevocable self-betrayal. She knew that her knowledge of languages was lamentable and her accent atrocious. So this impertinent young good-for-nothing had been leading her on, laughing at her up his sleeve. She saw the vistas behind her, peaked with bloomers which grew vaster every moment, over which she had been led. Anxiously she counted them. She could not remember. They were terrible, that was all she knew, and probably much more numerous and expensive than she suspected. Well, that was the end of this acquaintanceship.

To all intents and purposes the two never spoke again. At the next meal Mr. Pupillary said 'Good morning,' but received no reply, and two weeks later Mrs. Skimlit had

occasion to get at him through the German lady. When the waiters brought the plates round the rotation of tables they usually came to Mr. Pupillary first. He took a good plateful. Mrs. Skimlit noticed this, she was greedy herself, and leaning across to Frau Kunst after her own helping, remarked in a loud, sugary voice: 'Won't you have some more? I don't take everything that is on the plate—*like some people do.*' This was the sum total of their intercourse.

Pupillary was a cad, of course, but he had so lately been an undergraduate.



In the smoking-room there were already two bridge tables and a group in the arm-chairs round the fire. Anne Menzies, the Scottish hussy, was shocking her father and mother and entertaining Mr. McInvert and the professor. She was not really a hussy, except through the spectacles of 1870, and she did not really shock her parents. Her father was an elder of his church. But the Free Church of Scotland is not, as we choose in England humorously to suppose, entirely dressed in crape, black gloves, and an umbrella. Nor has it a bottle of whisky in its tail-coat. Mr. Menzies would, no doubt, have referred to his maker as the Almighty, had the conversation been directed towards that subject, and he would probably have defined him as a God of Love. However, he did not wantonly choose this topic for all, or indeed voluntarily any, of his conversations. Nor was he a teetotalter, and if he refused to play cards on Sunday it was for the simple reason that he did not know how to play them. He was, however, a man naturally given to worry. Whilst in Italy, whither he had been dragged by his family, he displayed a more than ever dissatisfied air. He hated to be away from his business, he loved his home, he distrusted foreigners. Their food did not agree with him, and he never knew in a hotel exactly where he stood. This dissatisfaction, combined with the mild disapproval which he felt bound to shew when his daughter took the name of the Lord her God in vain (her sins went no further), had provoked the misplaced sympathy which Mrs. Skimlit extended to him as the father of a hussy. He loved his daughter dearly, worshipped her when she played the piano, and worried about her incessantly, not because she was a nuisance, but because she was the brightest jewel in his crown.

In Mrs. Menzies he had the ideal wife. She believed that God was love without being remotely affected by the fact that this sort of love entailed crucifixions and eternal torments. If Mr. Bernard Shaw had pressed her she would gladly have shewn him that she never really believed in hell, but she would have pointed out to him, without making the quotation, that she had rather believe all the legends of the Koran and the Talmud than that this universal frame was without a mind. She would have added that our clear duty was to love one another because there was such a lot of unhappiness in the world, wasn't there, and that when we died we should go to heaven because God loved us. She had not the faculty of logic and was therefore not impressed by it. She succeeded in deeply respecting and at the same time treating her husband as a child. She loved him both as a mother and as a wife. She condoned her daughter's misdemeanours, which were never in the least serious, and concealed them from her husband. She was the ally of each against the other. When her daughter said 'Good God!' she said 'Hush!' and when her husband disapproved, she said, 'It's all right, dear, it's only a phase. She's only a baby.' A slim, sprightly, white-haired mother, with nothing unbearably maternal about her, she contrived

to make people love her because she seemed to love everybody. She maintained that she was happy.

Husband and wife were sitting in arm-chairs before the fire at the west end of the smoking-room. Mr. Menzies was feeling rather gloomy about his pipe, because English tobacco was so expensive and Italian so dry. Anne sat between them perched on the arm of a chair.

Mr. Jones, the Australian, who was dummy at one of the bridge tables, watched her appreciatively. She was a pretty little lass. Mr. Jones always said Lass or Laddie. He had heard from his wife, who had in turn been confided in by Mrs. Menzies, that her life was a little tragic.

Two years ago she had been engaged to be married to some artistic bounder whom she had loved very much. But their tempers had been too strong for one another, or perhaps their characters too powerful, for one could hardly imagine Anne in a bad temper, and the match had been called off by mutual consent. Mr. Jones gathered that the fiancé had been most to blame and that Anne had still continued to love him. Mr. Jones felt the impression that the poor child had decided to drown her troubles in a life of frivolity, and had vowed never again to think seriously about anything. This explained her penchant for dresses, for ragging on the piano, when she could play Brahms beautifully, and for general effervescence. Whenever she gave a whoop of joy, which she did very frequently and indeed very convincingly, he felt a small pang, because it only covered a broken heart. The charitable quality of Mr. Jones' own heart, which never classed anybody outside the categories of 'good' or 'poor'—every girl to him was either a good little lass or a poor little lass—forbade him to believe that she might perhaps have forgotten her lover. This, however, she had done, and sat on the arm of her mother's chair, a small blonde with skin like ivory, and hair spread like an aureole, entertaining the company.

Mr. Pupillary had already been classed by Mr. Jones as a good-looking laddie and by Mrs. Jones as an artist. Artists were so common in that peninsula, and Mr. Pupillary certainly had a wild appearance. He had by now entered the smoking-room, and, over the question of chairs, fallen into conversation with Anne. They appeared to be getting on well together. Mr. Jones remarked to himself, as he did whenever he saw anything approaching youth, that they made a pretty picture. Mr. Pupillary was sitting on the floor, with a cushion provided by Anne from her mother's chair, while Anne looked down from her perch. They were discussing theatres, which Mr. Pupillary had concluded to be her subject, and, naturally, travel. Mr. Pupillary, who liked to think he had travelled a good deal in Europe, was shewing off. He did it with delicacy, so that possibly Anne did not detect it; but possibly she did. It is impossible to say exactly how far women see through men. The arrival of a new guest at the Hotel Santo Biagio, since all the guests knew each other, and stayed by weeks rather than days, always occasioned a certain amount of speculation. In the smoking-room Anne was ready to receive the newcomer, since she had a charitable heart, at whatever face value he chose to present to her. The professor cautiously reserved his judgment. Mr. McInvert rather thought that Mr. Pupillary was a pathic, Mrs. Menzies regarded him as a nice boy, but felt the jealousy, instantly repressed, common to mothers whose offspring are of marriageable age. The four English maiden ladies from Devonshire, who were among those playing bridge, thought that he was affected, and Mr. Menzies, who was interested in hymns, although suspecting him as he

suspected most of the younger generation, noted that he had a speaking voice. On the whole, therefore, the opinion of the smoking-room, though non-committal, was inclined to be favourable.



On the night of Mr. Pupillary's arrival, the Drawing Room tribunal was assembled as usual over its knitting.

For some reason no stranger suddenly ushered into the room could possibly have mistaken it for a smoking-room. Bridge was played there occasionally, yes, but played round a large writing-table with a cloth on it. There was no small green baize, and the impression was decidedly that of a game of Old Maid. There was never more than one man in the room at once. The hotel album, although it was not bound in red plush, seemed certain to contain a selection of nude babies photographed on astrakhan rugs. It was always in the centre of the table.

Frau Kunst, who ought to have been of the Smoking Room schism, sat reading on the sofa and agreed with everybody. She was kindly and not in the least vindictive. But, with the ideas of her race and period, she considered that drawing-rooms were for ladies and smoking-rooms for men. She therefore remained among what the professor called the poison-pussies, and, with her high grey alpaca dresses, she lent a very successful atmosphere to the party.

Miss Albino sat next to her, looking at photographs. The photographs were shewn to her by Miss Prune, who had taken them. Miss Prune handed one by one with maidenly modesty. Miss Prune's mother, who was as kindly as Frau Kunst, and equally popular with the Smoking Room—for the distinctions between factions are not so strong in life as it is occasionally necessary to draw them in literature—sat knitting before the fire. She crocheted, and gave away, small woollen flowers.

Dr. Thomas Arnold-Browne was seated on the other side of Miss Prune. His wife was playing bridge in the smoking-room, but he preferred to talk to Miss Prune. In fact, he was slightly in love with her. He always was in love with young and innocent girls. He held himself to be, and rejoiced in being recognised as, the typical product of the fine old British Public School System. At any moment of the day, fingering his Hawks tie with a hairy hand, he might have been heard to pronounce, 'As for your Classical Music and High Art, and all that stuff, give me an honest cinema every time. Personally, I always think, though of course I know nothing about it, being a mere ordinary man, that people who say they like Bach and Old Masters and all that sort of thing must be a bit cracked, if it isn't a pose.' He was fond of talking about his journeys round the world and of elaborating his condemnation of anything that was not inculcated in the Public School. Thus he considered Anne Menzies a 'damn fine-looking filly,' but he was not at home with her because she would not listen to his opinion as if it were final. Miss Prune, on the other hand, who had been cut to the same sort of Procrustean bed, or rather had fitted it exactly, made an excellent and sympathetic companion. She had played hockey for her ladies' college and fully understood the value of playing for a side: the side of God and the British Public Schools. She was aware that the doctor's views on religion, like most medicos, were probably a little lax; but this was forgivable, and indeed even to be

condoned in a man for whom Kipling might have written 'If.' She liked him because he was manly and took notice of her. She was ready to acquiesce in most of his pronouncements and receive his advice about photography. Although she played the piano quite efficiently, she was even ready to believe that Classical Music was inessential; that she liked it, as she did, mainly because she was a woman. Some people loathed Miss Prune even more than they loathed Mrs. Skimlit, because she was essentially 'good,' 'innocent,' and 'girlish' in the quite arbitrary sense of these words which is accorded to them by the bed of Procrustes. They loathed her because she had been brought up, and was now unshakably, obstinately imbedded in the foundation of an illogical definition of what was good and what was not. Her glib and unalterable generalisation about Right, combined with her protruding teeth, caused Mr. Pupillary's aesthetic mind to shudder.

The Misses Cowfold, their immense bulk and pasty complexions looming from two chairs in front of the fire, were reading novels with inattention. Mrs. Skimlit, the doyen of the party, was sitting bolt upright in the largest arm-chair before the blaze. She was greedy of food, avaricious of newspapers, and covetous of comfortable chairs. When she failed to secure the chair in which she was sitting, she considered that her age had been discourteously slighted, and sulked for most of the evening.

Mrs. Prune said, looking up from her knitting:

'I see we have a new arrival.'

'Who is that?' asked the fatter Miss Cowfold, who seldom saw anything.

'The young man with curly hair who came to-day.'

'Is he an artist?' inquired Miss Prune.

'Probably thinks he is.'

'One of these Modern Young Men.'

'Did you notice how he wore his tie?'

'So extraordinary.'

'Rather conceited, I should think.'

'Still, did you not think he was good-looking?'

'Do you think so? I thought he was too *pretty*.'

'You were talking to him, Mrs. Skimlit,' said Miss Albino, leaning forward ingratiatingly. 'What was he like?'

In a short silence Mrs. Skimlit accumulated venom.

'He is an atheist,' she replied. Her mouth snapped to like a spectacle case.

This created some stir. 'Really!' exclaimed Miss Albino. 'What did he say?'

'He used foul words about our Lord.'

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'Pig God!' added Mrs. Skimlit.

'Why?' asked Mrs. Prune.

'I do not know why.' Why did the woman ask why? Surely it was bad enough in any circumstance. 'He was extremely disagreeable, most disrespectful, and told lies.'

'You don't seem to have got on very well with him,' remarked Dr. Arnold-Browne heartily. Everybody laughed at this joke.

‘No. One does not get on very well with *that* sort of person.’

All present wondered if they might be classified by Mrs. Skimlit as that sort of person. She had a faculty, in rebuking sin, for making all her hearers find it in their hearts.

‘Doesn’t seem a very nice fellow to know!’ laughed Dr. Arnold-Browne.

‘Please?’ asked Frau Kunst, who had not understood the conversation, but believed herself to have been addressed.

‘The young man who came to-day,’ shouted the doctor, on the principle that foreigners were the same as deaf people.

‘Ah so! A friend for Miss Prune. The young people.’

‘I hope he will not pester Elizabeth with his attentions,’ remarked Mrs. Skimlit.

‘Perhaps he isn’t as black as you have painted him,’ said Miss Prune forgivingly, with Christian spirit; ‘perhaps he did not really mean to swear.’

‘Perhaps you misunderstood him?’ asked the small hope in her mother’s heart. She would have been glad of a nice young man to amuse Elizabeth.

‘I understood him perfectly,’ stated Mrs. Skimlit, ‘and I should strongly advise nobody to have anything to do with him.’

‘Well, we can’t condemn people without speaking to them, or hearing their own defence, can we?’ Miss Prune pointed out.

The almost unbearable fact about Miss Prune was that she really had no desire to make Mr. Pupillary’s acquaintance, had in fact definitely disliked him when he looked away at dinner; and yet she insisted on acting with the highest principles.

Chapter 3

MR. MCINVERT was sitting on one of the small terraces tucked away to the right of the main front on the seaward side of the hotel. On his left the cliff fell abruptly to the sea, on his right was the sunny wall of the main terrace. He was shaded by olive trees. What he believed to be a withered asphodel grew at the top of the cliff, beyond the iron railings. If he were to climb over those railings and scramble a few steps past the asphodel, he would have the opportunity of a clear drop almost into the cobalt sea. He could see right down into the water. It was green or blue, quite beyond the grasp of northern races. The colours varied in patches, so that over certain areas of rock the blue was ultramarine, and over certain other areas the green was viridian. The blood of some gigantic dragon had been spilled long ago over the sea floor. The waves were not appreciable. At the cliff foot, certainly, there was a lazy foam among the jagged rocks, but farther off nothing seemed to move. The sun shone; the cliff road wound statically along the contours of the peninsula; the sea led out and out, vast, beautiful and careless, beyond the farthest islands. Against the blue of the sea the land shewed with a sunny light. The haze of dust over the road, though nobody seemed to move on it, stretched up among the pink and white dice which were the toy houses. It rose in a golden mist, beyond Porgerola and the hill villages, to the baked summits of the mountains. This dust gave a quality of sunlight to the whole scene, washing the vineyards and the stone outcrops impartially, till it rose to tinge the snowy bosoms of the clouds themselves, and finally the blue sky also, which stooped down again on the seaward side, in a full circle, to meet the blue of the sea.

It was an extraordinary landscape. Mr. McInvert attempted to estimate the height of Monte S. Angelo. He was not good at estimating heights. Two, three, four thousand? He wondered. In any case, from that very respectable altitude the coast-line slipped down at a slope which made roads interminably curly and hewn steps necessary for direct descent. It tumbled straight down. The vineyards were themselves stepped, by the hand of man, for there was nothing horizontal anywhere. If you wanted a field you had to build it. Your garden was a staircase, with olives and oranges and nespoli growing on the treads, with a neat drop between them.

All this clove down in little capes and promontories, generally precipitous, like the knuckles of a clutching hand with the fingers submerged in water. The whole thing was a single sweep into the sea, which caught up the motion, carried it out and up into the sky. The sky took it and wheeled it over the zenith, dropping down again in distant august clouds upon the summits of S. Angelo.

Mr. McInvert basked in the full circle of beauty.

He watched a lizard on the wall of the main terrace. It was a big lizard, and its throat throbbed. He watched it freezing in its crack, cold-blooded, antediluvian, stone-motionless except for the beating of its gullet. It sat there, with its wall eyes, absorbing the sun. What a close expression!

Mr. McInvert moved his hand for a stone to throw at it, and the creature was gone. Extraordinary. There was a flick, a distinct click almost, like a tape-measure reeling into

its container, and then there was no lizard. First lizard, and then no lizard. In either case equally enigmatical.

A devil entered into Mr. McInvert, and he searched for the stone all the same. The creature would come out again, and he would throw a stone at it: he would surprise that close expression, bring some feeling to that silurian face. Nothing could be allowed to be so secret.

The lizard reappeared, and Mr. McInvert moved his hand, to accustom it to his movements. He wanted it to stay whilst he took a leisurely shot. The lizard flicked its head towards him at the movement, but did not retreat. It stared at him, without surprise or supposition.

Mr. McInvert stayed his hand. Why should he attempt to kill this living creature? Something superstitious in him urged that a man who might be dying himself ought to prolong his life mimetically, by not taking life. If he killed the lizard, God might kill him.

But no. He would miss it in any case. No harm in throwing the stone. And then, what a complacent creature! What stupidity and assurance lay behind that perfect expressionless expression. It was so perfect that it must be broken. Be shocked, at least.

Mr. McInvert threw the stone quickly. He had never hit anything before in his life; but because he really did not want to, he now realised, he hit this one. It was a perfect shot, and the animal toppled down along with the stone, its head crushed in. It lay at Mr. McInvert's feet, no longer expressionless, but with a distinct expression of defencelessness. It was dead, innocent, and without protection.

Mr. McInvert got out of his deck-chair hurriedly and went to the other end of the garden.

On the side of the garden which Mr. McInvert now visited there was a busy scene. The proprietor of the Santo Biagio was said to be a great philanthropist where the affairs of his neighbouring peasantry were concerned. If it was philanthropy to find them employment, and if the people he employed could be said to be his neighbours though they came from Agerola, then he was.

The proprietor was a man of very penetrating perception, one of the few Italians who were able to make a shrewd guess at the English mentality. He had measured two facts about the English. First, he knew that the maiden ladies who travelled in Italy liked to be English. They enjoyed the foreign sights, and the kudos of travel; but in their hearts they preferred to enjoy these advantages from a comfortable base. Their ideal was to visit cathedrals, and all that sort of thing, and to speak a few words of Italian; but they only really enjoyed it if they could come back in the evenings to a comfortable un-Italian hotel—or rather to a mock-Italian hotel, which gave them the Italian flavour. So more and more English maiden ladies gravitated to the Santo Biagio. They found the Italian atmosphere, the English comforts, and English society.

The proprietor had been wise enough to make no challenge to the great tripper hotels. The Quisisana in Amalfi, for instance, existed precariously by overcharging rich visitors who stayed for a night at most, perhaps only for a meal. The Santo Biagio definitely turned its back on this class. It sought the longer and less expensive sojourners. It was an

hotel for English people to live in.

So the proprietor's main business was to adapt the whole concern to English, though pseudo-Italian, comfort. And here his second flash of inspiration came to work. He guessed that maiden ladies shared God Almighty's passion for a garden.

The garden of the Santo Biagio was small, but it was not neglected. Half the money which the proprietor set aside annually for improvements was devoted to it.

It was a pretty garden.

The paths were always weeded and flowers always bloomed along their borders. Lawns were, of course, impossible on that precipitous shore; but then the foreign atmosphere was an advantage so long as it was kept comfortable and picturesque. The ground was laid out in a succession of terraces and winding walks. There were shady nooks and crazy pavements. Everything was petite and tidy—'So English, after the squalor that one finds elsewhere.' The orange trees were sprayed every morning before the guests were up, so that the round fruit looked spick and span, not dusty as they were beside the roads outside. Mr. Pupillary came to suspect the proprietor of tying on china oranges, which could be washed up overnight, and he had a long talk with him before he left about possible English improvements. He told the proprietor that all English gardens had stone seats with mottoes cut on them. He was good enough to supply him with a favourite English motto:—

A garden is a lovesome thing,
What, what!

But the proprietor consulted Miss Albino about it, who was doubtful: so the motto was never used.



When Mr. McInvert fled from his victim he found himself looking down on a peasant gang who were busy making some improvement on the opposite side. It was an ambitious improvement, which involved blasting, and there were many hands at work.

Mr. McInvert hung over the balustrade above their battle-ground and watched the bodies moving.

What a contrast, he thought, between the English and the Italian workman! Here there were no clay pipes, hobnailed boots, red handkerchiefs. The men had bare feet and singlets. The dust had settled on them like a golden pollen. None of them seemed over thirty. Nor was the work done only by the men. There were girls, mothers and young children. All the arms were brown and muscular, rippling sleekly to the weight of stones. The breasts were round and fruitful. There was nothing crude or hurried. The work proceeded without tempo or visible progress; the workmen laughed or sang. In a corner under an olive tree were three boys, all handsome, but one beautiful as Adonis. Mr. McInvert caught his breath. He actually had a set of reeds, the authentic Pan-pipe, and was going to play on them. He played. It was not an American fox-trot or an English 'Tipperary.' It was the *Torna a Surrient'*, perfectly executed.

The boy's downcast eyes, lowered over the pipes, gave him an expression of perfect

distance: lovely, unattainable. The sweet plaintive notes trickled over the lazy scene with melancholy. The brown bodies moved quietly with their stones. A girl of seventeen, whose face nothing could describe, looked up at Mr. McInvert and smiled. Her teeth burst from her red lips, the melting white pips of some heavenly fruit. Mr. McInvert watched and listened in a trance. He moved once with a sort of nervous start.



Meanwhile Miss Prune had discovered the lizard. She usually went for long walks, often with Mrs. Skimlit, in the mornings and afternoons. It was still rather cold for bathing, or she would have done a good deal of energetic swimming into the bargain. Cold as it was, she might have swum to-day, or any day, except that there was nobody to swim with. Of course this was not a real prohibition, for exercise may be taken alone just as well as in company. Miss Prune, if she had properly lived up to her standards, ought to have swum daily, in one of those flopping costumes. But Miss Prune had some human traits.

The sea really was cold: it really was nicer to stay warm outside it: and since nobody else bathed there was nobody to reproach her for not doing so. And, besides, 'walks' were an almost recognised form of exercise. One did them at school, on Sundays.

To-day Miss Prune had become immoral altogether. She had taken no exercise since breakfast. It was all because of a book. Last night she had found a book by Ruby M. Ayres in the hotel library. (The library numbered forty-eight volumes, all left behind by departing guests.) Doubtless this would not have been sufficient temptation to stay at home, by itself. But the sly devils of temptation had worked against her subtly, here a little and there a little. Nobody, for instance, had actually asked her to go for a walk. Dr. Arnold-Browne was making preparations for a trip to Capri, and was busy in the town. The roads looked dusty, the sun looked hot (this did not prevent the sea from being cold), and Ruby Ayres was all about a dashing officer in the Indian Army.

Miss Prune stayed at home.

She was pleased to find the deck-chair, left by Mr. McInvert, unoccupied—Miss Prune was one of those people who believe that it is possible to read out of doors—and decided to settle down there 'for a good read.' Then she saw the lizard. Poor, poor little fellow! Its jaw was dislocated in the crushed head, so that it protruded sideways, shewing the faint pink inside the mouth.

Miss Prune went down on her knees beside it, though she did not like to touch it with her fingers. She declaimed against the vandal who had brutally shattered this little brother. Her lips trembled with emotion over the salient teeth. Cruelty to animals! Our dumb friends! She saw the lizard as it had been when it was alive: dumb, but ever so anxious to be able to talk (what bad luck on it to be dumb! what an affliction!), friendly, desirous of fraternising with humans, but always driven away, frightened, persecuted: a poor little social pariah, starving for love. Miss Prune saw the lizard peering fearfully out of its crack, wondering whether it would be safe to make advances, wishing that it could have a friend among these human gods: forgiving them their cruelty, believing even that they were perfectly good, wondering what it had done wrong? And then the wanton murder.

Miss Prune knew that she must bury it. She hurried indoors for a receptacle, for a little ribbon, a little funeral finery.



Whilst she was away the professor arrived. He also was delighted to find the deck-chair empty. He liked to rest for half an hour before luncheon. Before he sat down, however, he picked the lizard up by its tail and threw it over the cliff.

When Miss Prune came back he pretended to be asleep, to evade offering her the chair. She hardly liked to wake him.

Chapter 4

IT was the custom, among those of the guests who could afford extras, to take coffee after luncheon on the terrace. The Smoking Room faction had first introduced this habit, and for that reason the Drawing Room adjourned to the garden or to their own bedrooms. The sun shone on the marble pavement, the deck-chairs striped in red or green invited replete humanity, and the islands of Li Galli gave an acceptable break in the flat miles of blue sea.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones read the *Sydney Herald*, now many weeks old, and smoked English cigarettes. The professor and Mr. McInvert discussed secretly in a remote corner. John Pupillary and Anne sat on the parapet eating chocolate. They kicked their legs, making insulting remarks to anybody within hearing, whether they listened or not. Mrs. Menzies sat beside her husband, who was reading a book in Gaelic. Mrs. Menzies was also reading a book, but it was never possible to tell what book she was reading. Other people read books methodically. Her husband, for instance, was always reading his Gaelic volume, and the professor could generally be discovered solacing his soul with Edgar Wallace. They read books which were in the hotel library, and which everybody knew to be there. Mrs. Menzies was always dipping into a different book, and it was always a book which nobody had ever seen before. She it was who discovered a copy of *Barchester Towers*, without a back, standing upside down on the bottom shelf; but the next time one saw her she was deep in Anthony Hope. Whether she ever read her books, or held them in her lap whilst she thought about her husband's comfort and the inevitable marriage of her daughter and the possibility of planting wistaria beside the front porch, remained a moot point. Certainly she seemed to know what was inside them. Perhaps the solution was that she never took up a book, now that she was getting on in life, which she had not read before; she held them in her lap as old friends, merely for the sake of love and companionship. Her thoughts were elsewhere, far too busy in good works.

Mr. Pupillary was eating an orange. As he sat with his long legs dangling over the parapet, spitting pips which fell a hundred and fifty feet to the rocks below, Anne discovered that she liked him immensely. His full lips were unsightly in repose, but when he grinned they redeemed themselves. It was now a week since their first walk together, and three days since they discussed lips in Priano. The conversation had begun with a reference to the prim and girlish pouts of Miss Prune. Mr. Pupillary had told Anne that her own were too fragile, and Anne had retorted that he had no right to discuss a subject of which his own examples were lamentably distorted. 'Full lips for good humour and a little vice,' Mr. Pupillary had said sententiously. 'Vice is only vicious in excess. The real vice is to lack humour and repress oneself.' She began to think that this was true. After all, Homo Sapiens was also manufactured as an animal, and it was absurd to ignore the fact. The perfect man was not the Christian ascetic, who was lop-sided, but the consummation in all directions of all possible powers.

She liked Mr. Pupillary to sit near her, a lazy sort of lizard, spitting pips and behaving as if he cared nothing for the opinion of other people (which indeed he constitutionally did not), because he exuded a species of vitality. Animal magnetism, she thought, and not

only animal but mental: his personality overwhelmed her own, and that was restful. She felt that it was useless to flutter under the weight of his egotism.

Intellectual arrogance may not be oppressive to woman, because she regards her man as a dependent creature, occupied with unimportant questions, and unable to adjust himself to the balance of sense. Her love of protection and motherhood is not disturbed by his sallies into the abstract, which she does not trouble to understand. The consequent returns to her unspeculative comfort—for the adventurer into intelligence must always return broken—give her the chance of maternal assistance which she requires. Jocasta, except for her irrational end, might have been the symbolical prototype of happy wives: and none the less because Ædipus was addicted to puzzles.

‘Where shall I throw this orange peel?’ asked Mr. Pupillary.

‘Put it in your pocket, you untidy boy,’ replied Mrs. Menzies, looking up from her mysterious book.

‘The refined cruelty of the righteous.’

‘Take it indoors,’ advised Mrs. Jones.

‘I can’t take it indoors. I ate too much for lunch. I don’t suppose I could walk a step.’

‘Throw it on the floor,’ said Anne.

‘If you do anything of the kind,’ said Mrs. Jones, ‘I shall stick a pin in you.’

‘We don’t want any of your ill-nature.’

Mrs. Jones said: ‘You should learn to respect your elders.’

‘My elders should first be respectable,’ replied Mr. Pupillary argumentatively. ‘Orange peel also is good for floors, though not so good as banana skins—like cigar ash for carpets, you know.’

‘I don’t see what good orange peel can do.’

‘That’s your limited intelligence. Elderly people slip on bananas in the comic pictures and break their necks. Don’t you think that’s good?’

‘Are you implying that you would like to see me break my neck?’

‘Well, I don’t care about actually seeing you do it.’

Mrs. Jones threw her cigarette at him.

‘I should like to see the bedrooms of elderly people positively paved with orange peel. Then there would be a little more sense in the world.’

Anne pointed out: ‘Mrs. Jones’ bedroom window is the third from the end on the second floor.’

‘I wonder if I could reach it?’

‘That isn’t my window,’ interrupted Mrs. Jones anxiously.

‘Lies,’ said Mr. Pupillary. ‘Lies again, and still they lie.’

Even if it was not her window, he half-thought to himself, it would get the stuff off his hands and save trouble. There would be nobody in the room.

He threw it dexterously and it disappeared.

There was a silence. Mrs. Jones looked at him with horror.

‘Was it really not your window?’

‘No.’

In the room above a chair fell over, the other flap of the window banged open, and the thinner of the Misses Cowfold, though none too thin, appeared like Clytemnestra, sword in hand. She was black with fury.

‘Disgusting!’ hissed Miss Cowfold. ‘Disgusting! Intolerable!’ With short yelps, clenching her fists, gnashing her teeth, and contriving to stamp her feet and kick pieces of orange peel at the same time, she hailed down the intruding abomination. Mr. Pupillary had never seen a woman, even his own mother, who used to spank him, so angry. But he was accustomed on these occasions to rely on his apologetic smile. Standing in a shower of returned orange peel, with his hands spread out, he pleaded for forgiveness.

‘Oh, Miss Cowfold. I’m *dreadfully* sorry. Frightful disturbance. Purely a mistake. I’m really so sorry. I thought it was the Joneses’ window. Next door to you. Mised. Miscounted. Very, very sorry. I had no idea it was your room. I did it to annoy Mrs. Jones ——’ He became incoherently apologetic.

But Miss Cowfold was not to be mollified. She was aware that she was parading her passion before a crowd. The conflict between shame and obstinacy deafened her to his entreaties. It is probable that she did not even realise he was speaking. She kicked the remaining pieces through the bars of her balcony and hit him in the eye. This was the last straw to Mr. Pupillary. He forgot that she was fat and a spinster, that she was probably lonely and liverish, that if she was ill-tempered she was born so, and that to understand everything was to forgive everything. He forgot that she was not accustomed to being bombarded by strangers with orange peel. He merely became angry himself and desired to retaliate. His instinct told him that a quarrel in which the one party was infuriated would be won by the other who laughed.

He turned his back on Miss Cowfold, and said with comic dismay: ‘She’s angry!’

The suppressed laughter of the Smoking Room party followed Miss Cowfold into her room as, with a final ‘Disgusting!’, she slammed the window. It continued to ring in her ears while she lay sobbing on the bed. She had not been getting on very well with her sister, and was a bit hysterical. It was all too bad.

Mrs. Menzies, who, without thinking about it, had long known that there are excuses for everything, reproved Mr. Pupillary. He should not have been rude to Miss Cowfold. He pointed out that he had apologised handsomely for what was, after all, a mistake.

‘It does not matter who was in the right,’ was the reply. ‘She is older than you are, and she has more to bear.’

Very well, he would apologise again this evening.

But he never did apologise. The expressions of both ladies were so forbidding at dinner that his courage failed him, and they never spoke again.

That was his second quarrel.

The point of all this is that, until the southern spring began its disintegrating labours, everybody in the hotel was behaving in a perfectly normal and Anglo-Saxon manner.



In the garden they were blasting to make a new stairway. Mr. Pupillary, feeling shaken

by his brawl, retired there to watch them. Italian males with limbs which really proved the possibility of Michael Angelo sat on heaps of stones, breaking them, or hammered crowbars into the rock, to insert charges. They moved in a leisurely manner, and had the option on sedentary occupations. The women moved backwards and forwards incessantly, carrying rocks upon their shoulders: rocks which the males consented to lift into position, and which Mr. Pupillary, who was able-bodied, probably would not have been able to move. The women in Italy seemed to be regarded among the lower classes as a superior beast of burden. In the piazza of the village the male population might be discovered sitting in the barber's or carousing round the fountain. On the roads which lead outwards from the piazza into the country, the females, aged perhaps eight or perhaps eighty, carried their barrels of wine or their mere bundles of sticks. In mountainous parts, as on the Sorrentine Peninsula, the gradation of the roads and steps, combined with the weight of their burdens, had developed a bounding lope, a *pas de loup*, by which the carrier somehow rhythmically assisted herself to cover long distances between each halt. The men, of course, also carried weights, hoed their precarious terraces, or collected dung, but this was more as a supplement to female labour, when the latter did not suffice to the purpose, or as a farmer might prefer to have rational directors in his fields as well as the oxen which draw the plough. With regard to the position of the peasant women, Mr. Pupillary had made two excursions into enquiry: he had asked whether one still beat one's wife, and had been told indifferently that one's wife would not respect one without it, that she liked it in any case. And, seeing a waggoner beating his horse, which was grossly overloaded, he had stopped and enquired the reason. The waggoner, considerably scared and puzzled, had replied tearfully and somehow *à propos* that his wife was in heaven.

The blasting operations were carried out from the same point of view. The men lounged or hammered, whilst the women staggered with rocks to the nearest dump.

Mr. Pupillary, whose youthful distrust of women had been considerably strengthened by the encounter with Miss Cowfold, smoked a cigarette and watched them reflectively. The average female brain weighed much less than the average male's, little as the latter might be, whilst the average female efficiency for physical labour was necessarily inferior owing to periodicity and such things.

The female, nevertheless, Mr. Pupillary reflected bitterly, was to be acknowledged in legislation as the man's equal. Well, let them be so acknowledged. Finally, they might become equal in some such way as they were in Italy. A peasant woman was intellectually on a par with her husband, since both their intellects were at zero, whilst physically her muscular legs were hardly less sturdy than his own. They would probably last longer, because the male peasant had more opportunity for debauch and the ruination of his constitution with far too much spaghetti. But if woman insisted upon being man's equal, she must take the consequences rationally. She could not eat her cake and have it. When there is no inequality of the sexes, as in Italy, it will not be shameful to beat your wife—she can return the compliment—and it will not be logical to give her seats in omnibuses. The Italian peasant acts consistently on the theory that his wife should have every opportunity of being his equal. He beats her, lets her carry her own parcels (what parcels!), and gives her no comfort or consideration, except as he would accord to, say, his brothers.

But the Englishwoman, thought Mr. Pupillary, is different. She is her husband's equal,

yes, but she must be given seats by tired and returning city workers; she must not be required to walk too far or carry her own handbag; she must be supplied with cigarettes and free dinners by persons who stand whilst addressing her and run for her ashtrays; she must be catered for by a special vocabulary which omits certain words and stories on the principle that nobody has ever heard of them; the hat must be doffed on encountering her. The Englishwoman is intellectually and physically man's equal except in intelligence and physique. Her intelligence is not capable of coping with such ideas as are implied in words like — and —, whilst her body is not sufficiently hardened to carry a reticule.

When the female adult, he concluded, had discovered that she was not man's equal, things would begin to settle down again. And in the meantime, if she really believed in her own sufficiency, she should be compelled to act upon it.

Either she was an inferior, in which case a special treatment was rational, or she was not inferior, in which case she must contribute to the upkeep of the home, sit on hard chairs when her husband happened to have taken the soft one first. The theory of equality was incompatible with the practice of consideration.

Thus Mr. Pupillary attempted to rebuild the self-respect which had been damaged by Miss Cowfold. But he suddenly ceased to cogitate upon the feminist movement and stared. A girl who seemed to be about seventeen years old slipped round a corner and leant her basket of stones against the wall. She was Botticelli's Venus, born among the winds and waves.

Mr. Pupillary was never attracted by mature charms. His desires were moved by an abstraction much more so than they are in most people.

Men fall in love with the same type of beauty, so that their affairs may be attributed to the abstract. Yellow hair, or the platonic idea of yellow hair, may be fatal to such and such, whilst full hips, or the one full hip which billows in heaven, may be unforgettable to such another. The abstraction of colour or contour dictates the concrete attachments into which the man periodically enters with successive incorporations.

The rows of Mr. Pupillary's past flames were not bound together by any such physical link. Some were slim, some plump; their hair was any colour but black. Yet his heart had always been moved by the same abstraction, and always would be. And he of all people would never stand any chance of obtaining it, for it was an abstraction which could never materialise. He was innocently in love with innocence. Youth fled, innocence looked knowing, and the whole illusion was returned to the box-room.

His forgotten loves, then, were of all complexions and outlines, but they were all young, and he had at any rate thought them all innocent. Into every corner of their hearts and bodies he had managed to introduce in fancy the rosy-fingered dawn; their integrity and brave laughter and naked purity had seemed to make them unmistakable; they were all connected by the thread of gold. For this reason nobody could see any connection between them. Like assorted winkles on their invisible hatpin, Mr. Pupillary's Joans and Marys faded and shrivelled into the distance. And now Botticelli's Venus, carrying stones, presented her brown breasts to the pin-point: the newest specimen.

She came to her fate, whatever it might be, with the innocent object of taking an illicit

rest out of sight of the foreman, and in the hopes of extracting a cigarette from the no doubt inexhaustible cornucopia of the English milord.

Without further preamble she said, 'Sigaretta?' put her fingers to her lips, blew an imaginary puff of smoke, and smiled entrancingly. He was a beautiful milord.

Mr. Pupillary gave her a cigarette and lit it for her. It cannot be said that he fell in love with her at first sight: what he did do was to consider her lovely, and wish that he was a sultan or a member of the Russian aristocracy long, long before the revolution. He would have liked to call his guards and send her off to be washed and perfumed. That is to say, he would have liked to have gone to bed with her at first sight.

But the sensation called love, to which even the most intelligent person is apt to be subjected quite fortuitously, comprises other aberrations than those of the bedchamber. Unfortunately so. If one could get over it, and knew that one could get over it, by going to bed, instead of getting over it, without knowing that one was going to get over it, after all the bedroom scenes comprised in, say, two years of married life, there would be a great deal of trouble saved, and perhaps an increase in practical intelligence. Instead, however, of the mere physical union once more liberating the philosopher to his mental pursuits, the soul and a large number of other indefinable things are created and embroiled. In love no decent young man has ever regarded his Cleopatra as a warm, rosy, and flexible statue. That would be far too simple, far too much fun; and would give far too little trouble. Instead he is compelled by the inexorable sadism of the powers to believe implicitly that her soul is a white fire of beauty, her heart a rose of innocence, her honour irreproachable and unattainable, and her ideals a young and splendid pageant of all the glory in the world. Not only this, but he is compelled to believe that such characteristics are desirable. He is temporarily turned into a mad creature, and almost cheerfully supposes that he himself, an ordinary man, would be capable of going to bed with, and not only going to bed with, but eating dinner opposite to, and sitting before fires together with, a fire of beauty, a rose of innocence, an irreproachable honour, and a pageant of glory.

After about two years he may begin to change his mind, but by then the harm is done. Even if he can see reason and realise that the fire of beauty, which he now sees did not exist, would have been uncomfortable and far better done without, he is now debarred from doing without it. One would have thought that after discovering his mistake, it would have been a sufficient compensation to fall back upon the flexible statue which will remain to him. But the flexible statue now objects. Ideas of a pageant of glory, in which she continually wears new frocks, have been introduced. She cannot be blamed for refusing to go without any frocks at all.

The two years of imbecility may be defined as love, and it was into this that Mr. Pupillary did not fall at first sight. One cannot fall into it at first sight, since the ingredients, the rose of innocence, and so forth, have to be built up and thought into the subject. This process must take at least some days.

Leaving the fatality to take its course, as it certainly did, the fates turned to blacker machinations. Whilst Pupillary talked in incomprehensible Neapolitan about the weather, and carrying stones for a profession, encouraged by the becks and wreathed smiles of his rosy Aphrodite, the Drawing Room faction was swarming to his destruction. The fatter Miss Cowfold had returned to her bedroom to find her sister still weeping, half with bile, half with weakness, upon the bed. The small tiff which had estranged them a few hours

ago, over an unfair division of the sugar for breakfast, was instantly forgotten, and the two spinsters sobbed upon each other's breasts. Like all people outside of books, they were lovable, or pitiable—which is not only akin, but the same thing when understood. They were deeply attached to one another, and in their way devoted to any one who would treat them with sympathy, interest, and respect. They were prim, ill-tempered, and narrow-minded, but when it is considered that they were without relations beyond each other, without very much money, without hope of a family old age, and compelled to live together in hotels, year in and year out, one can scarcely blame them for the nervous disorders which started their exhibitions. Since they had been brought up without men and without a family life, they could hardly be blamed for narrow-mindedness.

They sat upon the bed, which was a good one, and did not flinch at thirty-six stone, sampling the joys of reconciliation and remembering the sugar scene with tears and laughter, swearing never to be so mean again. Agatha would never again reproach her sister for inconsideration, Ælfrida would not retort with greed; Agatha would not fling their patrimony in her sister's face, Ælfrida would this time finally resolve never again to mention the abortive affair of Edward Green; Agatha would not scream, Ælfrida would not stamp her foot. Terrible words, terrible culmination. Agatha had cried: 'Ælfy! stop making such a noise. What *will* the people in the next room think!' and Ælfrida, like a little boy recently confirmed awfully deciding to blaspheme against the Holy Ghost, had tossed her head, dilated her eyes to the fullest capacity, and, stamping to keep her courage to the sticking point—it was already tottering with the overwhelming horror of what she was about to say—had shouted, with an involuntary quaver on the critical word, 'I don't care a *Damn* what the people in the next room think!'

Aggie believed she had fainted, and Ælfy had certainly slammed out of the room. But now all that was over. The essential was to refrain in future from such wickedness. They kissed, forgave, and vowed.

Then Aggie, bounding to her feet, remembered the iniquity her sister had suffered from Mr. Pupillary. The proprietor should be told of such an insult, and the violator expelled from the hotel. It was abominable that a lady should not be able to sit in her own room, which she had paid for, in a decent hotel, without being bombarded with orange peel. And then that this mannerless young brute should turn his back on her and make insulting remarks! And all those low people on the terrace had laughed. Impossible that the proprietor should allow such things.

Mrs. Skimlit, added Ælfy, had also been insulted and could testify to irreligion.

'Come,' said Agatha. 'We will go to Mrs. Skimlit.'

Mrs. Skimlit was in the drawing-room, waiting for somebody to go for a walk. She was a passionate walker, who could easily have accomplished her twenty miles a day; but she seldom persuaded anybody to accompany her. The number of people whose knees were newly out of joint when they met Mrs. Skimlit alone in the drawing-room of an afternoon was a source of constant surprise to her. Occasionally she suspected them of not wanting to come. Always she refused to give up the idea of exercise, even alone. Startled peasantry, round charcoal fires in murky interiors, saw her spare black figure, with the hat a little awry because she wore it on the insecure perch of her voluminous and beautiful white hair, stumping up ravines, pricking her way through gullies, or viewing their *belle viste* with a stare apparently of misprision. She never stopped because she was tired, only

to dissect the landscape. Otherwise her banner was *Excelsior*. On a very hot day she once walked straight up the stone steps which are cut in the left-hand side of the watercourse lately built on the site of the great landslide at Vettica Minore, without once stopping for breath, to the very top. Then, almost transfixing a retired barber from Pastena with her parasol, she remarked in a perfectly firm and definitive voice: 'Bella vista.' She instantly walked down again.

Mrs. Skimlit was waiting in the drawing-room, roaring after her prey. She was disappointed to see the Misses Cowfold, since she knew that they would both have strokes if they walked a mile. She had long since given up even asking them to come. When she had heard their embassy, however, she brightened visibly and abandoned the idea of a walk that afternoon.

Miss Agatha Cowfold said: 'Really, Mrs. Skimlit, you were quite right about the rudeness of that man who came a few days ago. Apparently after luncheon to-day he was eating an orange on the terrace and was too idle to take the peel indoors, so he threw it into my sister's window. My sister was inside and naturally threw it out again. Whereupon this fellow started making insulting remarks, until my sister had to shut the window.'

'I always said it of him,' commented Mrs. Skimlit, through her spectacle case. It was a peculiarity of Mrs. Skimlit's comments that they closed the conversation. There was a finality about them which made it necessary to begin again.

Miss Cowfold began again laboriously. She wished that Mrs. Skimlit would contribute to conversations instead of ending them. It was so much easier to draw to a point when one was making a conspiracy. Having to baldly state one's points in the isolation accorded to them by Mrs. Skimlit's parentheses sounded so petty and scheming. One didn't want to say: We have been insulted, you have been insulted, we should like to tell the manager, will you help us? One would prefer to waltz delicately round the question and then say: Oughtn't we to complain to the management? Just as if it were a sudden inspiration, just as if it had arisen out of the discussion. One didn't like people to think that one had come here with that idea in one's head, to make an undignified sort of pact or plot. Still one had to do one's best. Mrs. Skimlit was not exactly an agreeable woman.

'We think,' said Miss Cowfold, 'that what with his discourtesy to you, his blasphemy, and this new outrage, we ought to tell Signor.' The proprietor was known to his maiden ladies, in a petting sort of way, as Signor. An English hotel proprietor would have been surprised at Miss Cowfold if she had said, 'May I have my bill, Mister?' but Signor Ambrogi betrayed no emotion when she addressed him in the same way. One of the most potent reasons for the popularity of the Hotel Santo Biagio was that Signor Ambrogi never spoke to his guests in their own language, which he spoke excellently, if they showed any desire to impress him with another. The virtuosity which he displayed in understanding a mixture of three languages and inferring that the mixture was perfect Italian, brought him in a revenue of about forty thousand lire.

Mrs. Skimlit replied to Miss Cowfold with more enthusiasm than she had ever accorded to that lady. 'I think it would be a very good idea,' she answered.

This again brought the conversation to a period.

Miss Cowfold had to make her appeal for assistance. 'Would it be best for us to complain or for you?' She would much rather that Mrs. Skimlit should do it.

‘I think,’ said Mrs. Skimlit wisely, ‘we should consult Miss Albino.’

The conspirators knew that Miss Albino possessed official influence with the proprietor. They knew that she was a businesslike woman. It was she who ran the Society for the Protection of Animals, and organised guessing games to make up its funds. On her monthly ‘Evenings’ she succeeded in turning the hotel into a suburban boarding-house at Christmas time, by force of will. She invaded the Smoking Room, Christianly supported by Miss Prune and the Drawing Room faction (though the two parties always occupied opposite walls, the Drawing Room sitting bolt upright on chairs remote from the fire), and there held her revels. The happiest bridge players were separated from their tables, and the professor, whose most informative conversation usually attracted an amicable circle round the fire, was dragged from his arm-chair and enforced to jollity. He was given a paper and told to unravel the names of birds written backwards. He usually cheated. Afterwards he was expected to put some money in a box.

The Drawing Room faction knew that Miss Albino’s function was what kept her in the hotel. One endeavoured to overlook it, and probably the fact was never even mentioned outside her hearing—for the cats all belonged to the Drawing Room, and there was honour even among cats. Nevertheless, they knew that Miss Albino, to get it over at once, was *almost employed* by Signor Ambrogi.

It was thus an intelligent suggestion of Mrs. Skimlit’s that Miss Albino should be consulted. Her influence with Signor Ambrogi would be a valuable asset.

As neither of the Miss Cowfolds felt that it would be exactly seemly to walk in procession to Miss Albino’s bedroom, like a deputation, the meeting broke up with the intention of broaching the matter as soon as it was decently possible.

Mr. Pupillary, in the meantime, was wandering about the garden, his nymph having been snatched away by the foreman, wondering whether one really could seduce young girls with impunity. All this Don Juan business, he was thinking, would not wash. One cannot flit from flower to flower, leaving behind a broken heart which will soon mend and a sweet memory of perfect happiness. These vignettes, elegant, lovely, happy love affairs, simply did not occur. If it is not merely dirty, an obscene business consummated with the connivance of a restaurant proprietor, it becomes merely tiresome. The father does not become violent, he employs argument, and threatens blackmail. What a world! No chance for Juan, nor yet for Juanita—or would there be?

Chapter 5

MR. MCINVERT was sitting gloomily in the smoking-room. He had a pleasing physical characteristic. For some reason his hair grew more luxuriously inside his ears than anywhere else. On the theory that fruit was bad for him in the evenings he used to go out of the dining-room before dessert and take a comfortable arm-chair in front of the fire. He had thus ten minutes to himself before the others came in—or fifteen, if he hurried through his pudding—and could sit without turning on the light. He would stay there staring into the red embers—he always made the fire up personally before dinner, so that it would be giving the right light when he returned to it—and puffing at his pipe. One could think much better in comfort.

People, thought Mr. McInvert, are shallow, idle! Asses, fools, dolts. Not only so, but perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame, savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust. Democracy, how he hated it. The official recognition of the herd instinct.

We are forced to live in herds, against our will, because the herds are afraid to let us live outside them.

What is a herd? It is a conglomeration of parts governed by majority, not superiority. Is the majority right? Are there more superior people in the world than there are inferior ones? Manifestly not. One had only to look around oneself. The average man was never in the right. If one wanted milk one went to the milkman, who was not average but developed in the direction of cows; if one was ill one went to a doctor; if one wanted one's portrait painted one went to an artist. The average man did not supply milk or medicine or mezzotints. The average man supplied positively nothing whatever. Even bread was governed by the baker.

This is a world of specialists. Rightly so. And yet we submit to being governed, to having our very lives dictated to us, by the reverse of specialism. By the average man. And what, might one ask, was the average man? He was the man one met in a public convenience. That was his milieu; it was built for him. Was he clever or healthy or beautiful? Mr. McInvert asked himself without prejudice, as a scientific fact, Mr. McInvert put it to himself: was he beautiful? Could any one honestly say that the average person one met in the streets, from the most exquisite prostitute down to the most bung-eyed, wap-nosed, warty beer swizzler in the Underground, was on the whole good-looking? One could not. The average man looked like the pictures of John Bull in the German Press during the war. The Germans were a discerning race.

And as to health and intelligence, one had only to look at the statistics. The average man, excluding the even worse than average who died at birth, lived approximately fifty years. His health, therefore, was in such a low state that it succeeded in diminishing his lifetime, from that which was allotted to him, by twenty years. Regarding intelligence, one supposed the State's statisticians, again excluding the even worse than average who were complete idiots, would set down his mental age at about seven.

By this creature, or his representatives, one consented to be governed. One consented because Might was Right. What did the average man know about coprophilism or

bankruptcy or barratry or the psychology of murder? He knew nothing whatever, and yet the coprophilites and bankrupts were to be governed by his laws. In the ideal world the laws would be made by specialists. Swindling would be regulated by city magnates (poor fellows), and manslaughter by Jack the Ripper.

But in the meantime we must accept the adjudication of the multitude. And why the devil should one accept their adjudication? That was what made it so hard to bear. Not content with saying that such and such things were forbidden between norms, they exercised their accursed numerical superiority in legislation for the abnormal. He was above the normal, and he thanked God for it. He was not one of the water-closet brigade. He was born of a different, and he had the right to think superior, race. He did not wish to have the run of the public latrine, and he did not wish to make laws about their stinking urinals. He wanted to be let alone, in his own world, for the best he could make of it. But he was not to be allowed. The herd was afraid of letting the units be happy: it was afraid of happiness and of things it didn't understand. It came out and caught the units and broke them on its wheel. Those were the principles of justice. Might is Right; here's a stranger, heave a brick at him.

The professor came into the smoking-room and switched on the light. The diners had finished their dessert, and Mr. McInvert's soliloquy was forced to a termination. The rosy tracery of light vanished from the tendrils of his ears. He blinked in the glare, resented the fact that people would not consent to sit in the dark, and felt consoled at any rate that it was the professor who had first arrived. He liked and respected the professor. He considered him a wise and tolerant old gentleman. Also he was attracted by the fact that he had three distinct beards, one on each chin, which wagged in harmony but not in unison.

The professor said: 'How now, my secret black and midnight hag, what is't you do?'

'A thought without a name.'

'And what may this thought be?' asked the professor, choosing his favourite arm-chair. 'Which of the seven deadly sins? Superbia goes with Invidia in the first and second gironi of the Purgatory. I love these maps of the cosmos with heaven and hell all done nicely in circles and a real door to go in at. Though of course Dante was much more thorough than Milton. Just think of it, the most unexcitable commentator can wring three separate maps out of the *Divina Commedia*, including a picture of the *selva oscura*, and God looking for all the world like a triangle with an eye in it.'

'Thank you,' said Mr. McInvert bitterly. 'I am not interested in Dante or Milton or maps or God. Try another subject.'

'Not interested in God!' The professor twinkled at him with benevolent dismay. 'Not even as a Theosophist, or a Theogamyst, or a diabolist? Well, well, one can do without him in that way. But as a hobby, no. No man should willingly do without Theocriticism. Dear Jimmy Fraser devoted his life to it; so did Arthur Cook. Do you suppose they didn't get any fun out of it? Why, my dear boy, you should take up with God immediately. I myself took the veil years ago. You can't imagine what an interest it is. Begin with Odin. So much more subtle than the others. Odin got crucified all right, but *to and for himself*. You catch the refinement? The *épopée*, as one might say, if one knew what the word meant, of philanthropy. His prototype died ostensibly for the sins of others, but really because such a sacrifice pleased himself. He wouldn't have done it if, for example, he had

thought it a bad thing: if, *i.e.*, it had displeased him. He acted thus from selfish reasons. Odin carries the matter to its logical conclusion and dies for himself. The *to himself* is thrown in to make it more amusing. Yes, you should undoubtedly take up with God. But hush, here come the others.'

Mr. Pupillary came in, pretending to search his pockets for matches; Mr. McInvert gave him a light. 'Come and be talked to by the professor. He talks as usual.'

'Splendid,' said Mr. Pupillary. 'What about?'

'I was just saying . . .'

The Menzieses came in, and the Joneses, and the maiden ladies from Devonshire. Two bridge tables were required, and a couple of odd guests who would not be staying longer than a week helped to make them up. Mr. and Mrs. Jones always played together, understood each other, and won. They were excellent players. Half the Devonshire family cut against them, and the other half took the odd guests. The second table were of the family school, who did not rise to Contract, and did not scruple about the Informative No-Bid. On the whole, conversation was not discouraged. The room began to be full of voices.

Mr. and Mrs. Menzies sat side by side on the sofa, the former reading his mysterious book in Gaelic, and the latter listening to the professor. Anne Menzies took Mr. Pupillary's chair, and Mr. Pupillary sat on the floor. He wondered why he had given it to her. He had been reflecting so lately that chairs should not be given to ladies. She, for her part, who had rightly summed him up as a person not given to courtesies, thought that it was pleasant to subdue. She would almost like to have him in love with her. Perhaps he was.

If the Last Judgment had been announced, the Smoking Room would not have fallen more suddenly silent than it did when Mrs. Skimlit stepped firmly in. Never before had Mrs. Skimlit patronised the smoking-room of an evening, not even to protect animals under Miss Albino; nor were her motives even now perfectly obvious. She had not come to denounce Mr. Pupillary, nor to state that a landslide had swept away the rest of the hotel. Everybody waited for some announcement in silence. It became clear that they were to wait in vain. They politely resumed the conversation as if nothing had happened.

Mr. McInvert gave her his chair, for which she thanked him and sat down rigidly, passively, as she always did. When she sat with her hands in her lap, not knitting or reading or appearing to require any diversion, she seemed to await the last tribulation with rectitude and resignation.

Nobody knew why she had come, and nobody was to be able to tell. She herself did not know. She had just thought she would. Her own party, who were now presumably gabbling in the drawing-room, she thoroughly despised at heart. Dr. Arnold-Browne had gone to spend a few days in Capri. Mr. Menzies, who was so worried about his daughter, and the professor, were Men, and therefore better company than the Cowfolds. As to that Mr. Pupillary, she was not going to be frightened away by him. She would go into the smoking-room and talk to the other guests just to shew Mr. Pupillary that he was not the only raisin in the pie: to shew him that she had friends in both parties if she chose, that he was not a leader of a party, but a mere individual with a powerful enemy, who was not afraid of him: to shew him, in fact, that he was her only foe. She would shew that she

could get on excellently with everybody. Thus she would isolate him more pronouncedly for the application of her cold shoulder.

‘But if you love an idea, sacrifice yourself for, say, friendship or beauty in the abstract, surely that can be managed without selfishness?’ Mr. Pupillary thought of youth, carrying stones.

‘That is of course very nice,’ replied the professor amiably, his voice overlapping Mrs. Jones’s bid of Two No Trumps, ‘but pure nonsense. The idea isn’t loved by you, it is *you* that love the idea. You are the apparatus which provides the sensations and you cannot experience sensations without the apparatus. No unselfishness, no self. Altruism is just impossible. Unless your apparatus records for Altruism, and it can’t record for it unless it has first found it acceptable, you can’t be an altruist. But what is acceptable to yourself isn’t altruism. You can’t stop being yourself, however hard you try, short of one thing; and when you are yourself, you can’t be unselfish.

‘As for this friendship business, you’ll find it an instructive commentary on unselfishness to read the three great English poems about dead friends: *Lycidas*, *Adonais*, and *In Memoriam*. Have you noticed how much of those are about King, or Keats, or Hallam? I should be really surprised if you said five per cent.’

Mrs. Skimlit: ‘I think Tennyson was a great poet.’

One of the Devonshire ladies was saying: ‘So beautiful, it does give you such a real idea of greatness. And such a lovely day too. Really, I can’t tell you how much I enjoyed the drive. Having no hearts, partner?’

Mrs. Jones leaned across and asked, ‘Where was this, Miss Couch?’

The Devonshire lady packed a trick. ‘Paestum,’ she informed her, ‘you ought to go there. I haven’t seen anything better in Italy. Greek temples, you know.’

Mrs. Skimlit: ‘They are finely preserved. You go there by automobile. It costs you six hundred lire, and Signor Ambrogi arranges about it for you. You take your luncheon in a bag. As it is a little expensive one usually makes up a party to divide the cost. I went there last year. *You* ought to go, professor.’

The professor: ‘Well, I have been there once or twice when I was writing a thesis on the sixth century, but I’m quite interested enough to go again. I’m not a Hellenist, but the sixth century does just come within my sphere: though late, of course.’

Mr. Pupillary had persuaded Anne Menzies to play the piano, had asked permission from the bridge players, who could not very well refuse it. She finished Debussy’s ‘Soir en Granada’ and sat still. Mr. McInvert said: ‘Lovely, you must play it another day, when they’re not all talking.’ ‘At such a concert I’ll make one,’ added Mr. Pupillary. ‘This piano spoils it,’ said Anne, and struck a note. ‘Listen to that.’

Mrs. Jones: ‘We ought to go, Bob.’

Mr. Jones: ‘We might go to-morrow if it’s a nice day.’

‘Where is this?’ asked Anne.

‘Paestum,’ said Mr. Jones.

‘Let’s all go,’ suggested Anne brightly.

The Joneses, the professor, Mr. Pupillary, and Mr. McInvert consented immediately, thus pledging Anne’s father to expense. He was doubly embroiled when Mrs. Menzies

supposed that she would like to go too. As when dubious, which he usually was, he prefaced his remark by clearing his throat.

‘Rmmm,’ said Mr. Menzies. ‘I think I should rather not go.’

‘But, dear, you ought to go.’

‘After all,’ pointed out his daughter, ‘when you’ve come to Italy you might as well see what you’ve come for.’

‘I think the drive would be too long for me.’

‘Nonsense. In a beautiful closed car?’

‘I am not feeling very well.’ They had dragged him to Italy; into hotels away from the comfort of his home; he was compelled, just when he needed a rest, to live a nomadic life and expend preposterous sums of money. Very well, he would not deny them their pleasures, not interfere with their extravagances. It was useless to do so. If it wasn’t motors it was hats. But he would not abet them. This Paestum. He would stay in the hotel and try to digest their beastly food with a nap after luncheon. He had not had a nap after luncheon since he left England. The idea excited him.

‘No,’ he said firmly, ‘I shall stay here and potter about. I really don’t feel very well.’

‘Dear daddy, you are incorrigible.’

‘That is as it may be. I cannot come, in any case.’

When Mr. Menzies said ‘No’ his family continued to coerce him; when he said ‘In any case’ they gave up the attempt. It was a catchword.

The professor said: ‘We shall need two cars and have one place vacant.’

Mrs. Skimlit: ‘It will be a beautiful day. If I may I will take the place myself.’

Chapter 6

THE two cars rolled away from the hotel at nine o'clock. The professor, who was conversant with the pleasures of an Italian road on a sunny day, had placed himself in the foremost. Anne, Mr. Pupillary, and Mr. McInvert joined him before anybody could make other arrangements, and Mrs. Skimlit reluctantly accommodated herself with Mrs. Menzies and the vulgar Joneses. She looked forward to a dull drive. She was correct in doing so. The Joneses did their best, but could draw her into no conversation. Between Positano and Amalfi they discussed Italy with each other, between Amalfi and Vietri they were silent, between Vietri and Salerno they assessed the price of wistaria and household comforts with Mrs. Menzies; and all the way from Salerno to Pesto they gave ear to Mrs. Skimlit's remarks on the dust—against which the professor had secured himself by taking the first car.

In the meantime the professor was conducting an informative conversation. Before they reached Prajano he had pointed out the natural rock Madonna, which stands out on the seaward side of the road, and, rounding the corner into Amalfi, produced his ultimate natural marvel. On the slopes above Capo d'Orso the imaginative observer can trace out the silhouette of a human face, neck, and breasts, standing out against the sky. By means of some gesticulation, one or two jolted drawings, and a postcard which he luckily happened to have in his pocket, he managed to make his companions understand it.

'How did you first notice?' asked Anne.

'Oh, somebody told me,' said the professor airily.

'I wonder what they call it?'

'Now there you raise an interesting question, began the professor, with a deep breath which shook his three beards in rotation. 'I have heard it called The Turk, owing to the fact that the nose makes it a little unhandsome. There is, so far as I can find out, no legend connected with this cognomen. But the name which pleases me most, and which, if you can slur over the nose, seems to me the more applicable—for the mouth, chin, and breasts (the breasts especially as seen from Maiori) are a woman's—is that of none other than Giovanna, Duchess of Amalfi.

'I see that my words have created less stir than I had expected. Can it be that you have never connected Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* with the countryside through which we are now so pleasantly revolving? Can you have failed to be informed that the ruined palazza on the western hill, which bounds the Valley of the Mills, was none other than her summer residence? That the tower on the eastern eminence, Giovanna's tower, is the very one which covers the two windowless oubliettes in which she and her confidante were barbarously strangled? If this be so, allow me to point out that the silhouette which we have just regarded is that of the Duchess herself, lying throttled and peaceful on the same thalamus which she had shared with Antonio, the rope still faintly discernible about her neck.'

'Bravo!' exclaimed Mr. McInvert, as if at the opera.

'There is more to tell. When I was last in Amalfi I thought it a good opportunity to

search out the true history of the tragedy. After some trouble, through the courtesy of the mayor and the banker, I raked up a volume of Camera, now out of circulation. But the history was almost precisely the same as the one we have from Webster. You may have thought Webster involved and unnecessarily addicted to plot. But he took his stories most precisely as he found them. I can thus give no illuminative contribution to Elizabethan criticism by telling the lady's true story. Webster has already told it. The only thing I found in Camera which was definitely worth repeating was a description of Antonio Bologna. He was *giovane valoroso e molto esperto nel maneggio d'arme e nel cavalcare, ed anche valente nel canto e nel suonare il liuto*. The Duchess, on the point of bearing him a fourth child, publicly acknowledged him her husband—in an extraordinarily dignified speech and scene, which Webster should never have omitted—and resigned her duchy. Daniello di Bozzolo does not come in till the very end, when he betrays Antonio in Padua after the Duchess's death. Apparently he was never employed in her service. These are the only two points which Webster states differently.'

'Can you remember the speech?' asked Mr. Pupillary.

'In Ancona,' said the professor, 'she assembled all her retinue in one room and addressed them thus: *It is at length time, my gentlemen, and you my other servants, that I should make manifest to the whole world what has already been once done before the face of God. To me, being a widow, it seemed right to marry me, and to take such a husband to myself as my judgment should have elected. I therefore say that there are already some years passed since I wedded, in the presence of this my waiting-woman here, il Signor Antonio Bologna, whom you see. He is my legitimate husband, and with him, since his I am, I intend to remain. . . . These my ladies, whose dowries I caused to be deposited in the bank of Paolo Polosa before I left the Duchy, you will accompany to Amalfi—for of other ladies-in-waiting I now want no more with me than my maid. And if of the servants there should perhaps be any who would care to stay, he shall be well treated. As for the rest, when you are returned to Amalfi the maggiordomo will provide in the usual manner. And, to conclude, I am more happy to live privately with Signor Antonio, my husband, than to remain a Duchess.*'

Anne was thinking: *Giovane valoroso*, a valiant young man. His eyes turned from grey to blue, the same blue as women's eyes are supposed to turn when they are pregnant, and positively laughed when he was excited. His curly hair had a different twist every day, according to the way he had slept on it the night before, and he never troubled to keep it in order. When he smiled, his teeth suddenly broke out as white and regular as ivory in the red frame of his lips, and his face was as brown as a sandboy's. The Duchess adored his hands, which were pinkish at the knuckles, and listened to all his creeds with sympathy, never letting him see that she knew he was a little boy. When he was tired and disillusioned, he put his head between her breasts and kissed them and cried, and the Duchess dandled him to sleep. It would be nice if John could play upon the lute.

'The most pathetic thing,' said Mr. McInvert, 'was her appeal for servants, now that she could no longer command them.'

Mr. Pupillary was scribbling on an envelope:

You are Giovanna, she was sweet,
Her brown eyes always smiled,
Her hands were lovely, strong and kind,
She loved, and was beguiled.

And was beguiled, he reflected. Could one beguile virgins? Surely they liked it. It was better than carrying stones, and in any case virgins who were compelled to carry stones were always eventually beguiled, probably by the foreman.

‘Maiori,’ pointed out the professor. ‘S. Maria a Mare. A statue of the Virgin was captured at the sack of Constantinople in 1204, and brought back by a merchantman trading from Amalfi. He was attacked by pirates and constrained to throw the lady overboard. Luckily, however, she was made of wood and floated safely into Maiori.’

Nobody seemed much interested in virgins. Mr. McInvert was thinking: Paestum; Greek temples. I wonder what they’ll be like? Disappointing, no doubt. Stones, stones, placards, guides, pay at the gate. No lovely creatures in the gymnasium, nor brown men in such white garments going to the baths. Statues, ease, beauty, nakedness, decent laws, love and the delighting gods. Bah! He had outgrown all that when he left school. They were probably as spawning a race as any other, and as to leisure for the arts: in this world, no. One didn’t have it. Business before pleasure. *Gridando ‘Perchè tieni?’ e ‘Perchè burli?’* Horrible, horrible, thought Mr. McInvert, nothing in the world was ever beautiful, nor ever will be.

‘Vietri,’ said the professor, ‘for pottery. The peasant arts nicely reproduced by the manufacturer at a higher price. I once brought a rather obscene glazed donkey here. We must tell the Joneses on the way back. They’ll like a few plates with fishes painted on them to put over the mantelpiece.’

‘And why shouldn’t they?’ asked Anne.

‘Why, indeed!’ said the professor. ‘There is no real reason why one should despise articles manufactured in imitation of the primitive, so long as they are beautiful. A Birmingham Buddha may be better than any in Burmah. I confess to priggishness.’

Mr. Pupillary asked: ‘Did Apollo possess Daphne?’

‘I think not,’ replied the professor. ‘She was turned into some tree or other, wasn’t she?—(Don’t you remember the picture in the Louvre? Such a favourite of mine: so ingenious—like Gilbert and Sullivan)—and enabled to escape him? I can never remember what these people got turned into.’

‘Then it’s a nuisance,’ said Mr. Pupillary, ‘couldn’t one pretend she was, poetic licence and that sort of thing? I’ve just written a poem assuming it.’

‘Well, now, it’s done,’ said the professor, ‘let’s hear the poem. It will probably be so bad that it won’t matter in any case.’

‘I refuse to hear any poems on classical subjects in the present year of grace.’ Mr. McInvert stopped his ears.

‘Don’t suppose,’ began Mr. Pupillary, ‘that I am reading it because you asked me to. I should have done so whether or no. I must first apologise for the archaic form. Rhyme and metre. Superfluous in conjunction. However:

The sun was far too beautiful, and we
Warmer and brighter and by much more young
Than the sun driver when he smiled and sung
French songs to Daphne, sitting on his knee.
He loved her youth and liked her ill at ease,
More innocent ashamed, and she adored
The insouciance and brilliance of her lord.
Both loved two bodies by Praxiteles.
Apollo spoke Italian and good French,
Knew things she didn't know, and half un-guessed
Secrets (of Hyacinth for one) possessed
Deep in his laughing eyes. His rosy wench
Made artless pudic gestures which inflamed
Even himself, the sun. The Milo might
Have tried but could not better them. The bright
Idiocy of her remarks quite tamed
His restless mind, which comprehensively
Gathered fool's wisdom, saw that daft was wise.
He loved the pools of wonder in her eyes
And, being much travelled, lied extensively.
They kissed—but why continue? If they smiled
Their smiles were worthy of their later tears.
So you, a Daphne of these latter years,
Are like all Daphnes: and shall be beguiled.'

'As a comment on your state of mind,' said the professor, 'it may be of interest. But as a poem——'

'Do you know,' replied Mr. Pupillary, 'I think you may be right.'

'Not at all,' Anne cried, 'it was beautiful.'

Mr. Pupillary made a wry face.

'May I take my fingers out of my ears?' asked Mr. McInvert, peering from one to another out of his silent world.

'The watch towers,' began the professor, 'were erected in the sixteenth century, as a refuge from pirates.'

'Guide book,' pointed out Mr. Pupillary in parenthesis, and the professor blushed to his second beard. They jolted and curved in silence.

'Railways and trams,' Mr. McInvert commented, blowing a kiss out of the window, 'what a relief after Amalfi.'

'Beastly,' said Anne, 'I don't like Salerno.'

'Nevertheless,' began the professor, recovering his good spirits, 'the cathedral is less unworthy than most on this peninsula. We must visit it on the way back. The Cattedrale San Matteo. If you meet a man called Costanzo you know he was born in Capri, Andrea was born in Amalfi, and Matteo in Salerno. It's amazing how they hold to their saints. Imagine all the English stockbrokers calling their children Paul. George is very rightly our

king and governor. But the difficulty comes in when you live, as I do, in a parish which worships at All Saints. And then if your son was born to you in Jerusalem, I suppose you'd have to call him Holy Sepulchre Jones. It sounds like Max Beerbohm.'

'Does this road go on for ever?' asked Mr. Pupillary.

Anne wished it did. She liked the touch of his knees.

Mr. McInvert said: 'We're raising some dust.'

'For which reason we are in the front hearse,' added the professor.

'You wicked old man!' Anne laughed. 'I believe you thought of that when we started.'

'Naturally.'

Mr. Pupillary leaned backwards out of the window. 'Dear Mrs. Skimlit,' he said lovingly, 'won't she be gay when we get there!'

'Bless her merry heart,' added Anne piously.

For the rest of the drive the professor lectured on the medical school of Salerno and the greatness of Amalfi before A.D. 1000. Anne thought about the Duchess who resigned her life and Duchy for her *maggiordomo*; Mr. Pupillary about the age-limit in seduction (he must find out the laws of the country); and Mr. McInvert about Socrates, Alcibiades, and Athenaeus's 'Drink with me, be young with me, love with me, wear crowns with me, with me when I am mad be mad, with me when I am temperate be sober.'

Mrs. Skimlit dismounted from her chariot.

'The dust,' she said, quite making ridiculous the medusa. It was a final remark, delivered with the weight of death-bed orations. With her nose she sought out each member of the first car's party, pointed, pinned, examined, and discarded them with infinite contempt. She resigned them to the avenging fire, and not only resigned them but condemned them, unmercifully, renouncingly. She washed her hands of them; the irreproachable Pilate. They were not gentlemen. The girl was a hussy. She might have known. Now she would have to change everything when she got home.

Mrs. Jones said: 'Really, it was awful. Your car went so slowly that we couldn't go slower to let the dust settle, and when we tried to pass, the chauffeur speeded up so that we weren't able.'

'Oh!' cried Mrs. Menzies, suddenly seeing them, 'look at the temples!'

Everybody looked round anxiously, expecting to see them disappear. They did not disappear. With yellow and ancient majesty they continued to regard Mrs. Skimlit and party, as they had regarded her last year, and would regard others again, daily, and even nightly when there was anybody discerning enough to make their pilgrimage after dark. They made no change in that enigmatical attention which accepted all kinds of attributions without denial. Young ladies would say they were gorgeous, old ones that they were majestic; students would say they were pure or unified, or that they worked from inwards outwards, or from outwards inwards; pederasts would speculate on orgies which never happened inside them; professors would consider their entases; dyspeptical beef kings would wish they really understood what it was all about. And every day painters of every kind, though few with any discernment, would paint them at all angles and suppose that nobody had ever painted them before, and cameras of all denominations (though without tripods), with more or less pride as befitted the capacity for photographic expense

of their American or merely Italian owners, would click at them, and hope that the picture would be a success. Occasionally royalty or important personages would visit them, and moon at them, and wonder what being an ordinary person would be like, and feel satisfied or dissatisfied with the amplitude of the reception, and say they were very beautiful, and go away. Always also, presumably, the man at the gate would become deathly tired of them and wish that entrance fees had never been invented, or that if they must be invented the portiere might profit by them, and dream about the cinemas in Naples and the Galleria Umberto and perhaps the Teatro San Carlo, if he were fond of music, and in any case about anything metropolitan, and not this dreary monotony of small change and swindle in a ghastly rusticity of flat countryside, and dust, and foreigners, and the cursed mosquitoes which had driven out the old Romans, and perhaps pricked the round rumps of their disreputable progenitors the Greeks.

Mrs. Menzies exclaimed: 'Aren't they lovely!'

The rest of the party did not commit themselves, Mrs. Skimlit because she was far too angry to think about them, and the rest because they were too sophisticated to be rash. Anne knew that she was in the company of highbrows, and kept silence; Mr. McInvert distrusted himself because he loved the Greeks; Mr. Pupillary never recommended anything he was expected to recommend, or only on very exceptional occasions; and the professor awaited his opportunity. Finally, Mr. McInvert said:

'Well, there isn't as much barbed wire as I expected.'

The professor: 'No; in public officiousness the Italians are a moderate race. If you went round at the back I dare say you could get in without even paying at all.'

Mr. Pupillary: 'Should we try?'

The professor: 'On the contrary, I am sufficiently attached to the temples to wish to contribute to their upkeep. After all, however supercilious we may affect to be, inside ourselves we think that they are satisfactory. I myself feel a particular (cultivated) exaltation over the entasis of the temple which is called the Basilica. You no doubt do not experience this form of exaltation, because you have not cultivated entasis. But none of you is without some sensation. Mr. McInvert will be thinking about Greek life, Mr. Pupillary about Unity, and so forth. In gratitude for our communal though different gratifications, I shall thus lead the way towards that peculiarly gas-breathing gentleman whom I observe in the gateway.'

Mr. Pupillary: 'If Aldous Huxley had not already said that the Italian contadino may be expected to break at any moment into a bright white flame, I should say it myself. Acetylene, you know.'

The professor: 'One wonders what they eat. The waters of the stomach evidently combine with some comestible. Onions, not so much, but possibly macaroni. The result is certainly acetylene.'

Anne Menzies: 'What are the temples called?'

The professor: 'They call the big one before us the Temple of Neptune, but its internal evidence makes the one on our left the oldest. If it was the oldest it would obviously be the original one, dedicated to the patron of the locality. The patron of Paestum, as of Positano, was Poseidon. Thus the oldest temple would, in my opinion, be dedicated to Poseidon, and the grey one on our left, not the big yellow one in front, should be known as

the Temple of Neptune. The three temples, according to the guide-book, are, however, called the Basilica, Neptune, and Ceres, from left to right.'

Mr. McInvert: 'I think they are rather beautiful.'

Mr. Pupillary: 'Yes, I find them satisfactory. Especially this rather Egyptian atmosphere of the middle one.'

Mrs. Skimlit: 'When were they built, Professor?'

The professor: 'In the fifth and sixth centuries.'

Mrs. Menzies: 'Before or after Christ?'

The professor: 'When I am compelled to refer to the *anni Domini* I always say so. Otherwise you may be sure I mean the pre-Christian eras.'

His three beards rotated merrily at the thought that his own playground covered the whole of pre- and quasi-history. The learning of his companions was bounded by years, his by centuries.

Mrs. Jones: 'Well, I'm glad we came, Bob.'

Mr. Jones: 'Shall we have lunch before we look at them or look at them first?'

Mrs. Skimlit: 'When I was here last we had luncheon on the steps of the golden temple.'

Mrs. Jones: 'Let's have lunch first.'

Anne Menzies: 'It seems rather a shame to sit and eat out of a bag in a temple. Rather bank-holiday.'

The professor: 'Not at all, my dear. The only shame is that the lunch should be in a bag. If it were a real lunch in a luncheon basket, not two eggs and eight sandwiches, we should do perfectly rightly in eating it anywhere. People who come to old places with the antiquarian complex, and talk in whispers, should be suppressed. It is the perversion and dissimulation of sight-seeing. Besides, if one didn't eat when one was in the presence of anything ancient, one would starve in six weeks—(McSweeney did take six weeks, didn't he?). Have you ever reflected, I mean, that the stones your most modern villa is made of, and your own body were ashes when the world first cooled, and gasses before that? No; ancient things, like modern ones, were made to be enjoyed. I have no patience with people who won't talk because the sun is setting, or won't sleep because it rises. When I climbed up Monte S. Angelo in my youth I took a damned good bottle of wine, a chicken, and a cigar, and enjoyed them on top. I'm liable to believe that I savoured that expedition more than any of your moonstruck athletes who stagger up four thousand feet to gape at Ischia and drink the best spring water which, I hope, gives them goitre.'

Mrs. Skimlit: 'I shall eat my lunch here. I can now only eat the eggs. The sandwiches are dusty.'

Mrs. Menzies: 'Do eat mine. They were under the seat, and I don't like sandwiches.'

Mrs. Skimlit: 'Thank you, I will if I may.' She was hungry.

Mr. McInvert was thinking: If all this Hellenic myth is not perverted, people with bodies like bronze and next to no clothes must have walked down that highroad to the baths. Grave and beautiful priests must have moved slowly and chanted where I am now sitting with half a hard-boiled egg. Lover and beloved must have walked and wrestled and competed in gracious exercises, rosy knee to knee, over every inch of grass and blossom

that my eye can cover. They must have thrown stones at the same fat lizards and leaned, so frankly and cleanly and easily, and with such curves, against the same warm columns that we are leaning against. Occasionally they will have made excursions up Monte Capaccio, and perhaps removed the white covering of their bodies and sported in the sun.

He looked fixedly at Monte Capaccio as if in the hope of witnessing such a spectacle.

Mr. Pupillary: 'I have a bad egg.'

Anne Menzies: 'Take mine. I've had enough.'

Mr. Pupillary: 'I'm afraid that can't be true. Much as I should like it, the accursed education of the other members of the party forbids me to accept it. Personally I have no scruple, and if I were alone with you I should take it at once, but beneath the accusing eyes of my elders, which say to me "Do not be greedy; do not take food from a member of the opposite sex but rather give yours to her," my courage wilts.'

Anne Menzies: 'Don't be silly, John. Honestly, I don't want it. If you don't eat it I shall throw it away.' She liked calling him John, and enjoyed the idea of supporting him with eggs.

Mr. Pupillary: 'In that case, the conventions having been sufficiently satisfied, I shall devour it with pleasure.'

'In conclusion,' said the professor, wiping his mouth, 'I drink a health in inferior Chianti to Poseidon, and particularly to Amphitrite.' He bowed to the ladies, who, even Mrs. Skimlit, sparkled in return. He was a droll man.

Mrs. Skimlit, like a white Persian cat, brushed the crumbs off her lap with one claw, righted her hat, and stood up. She said: 'I am going to visit the temple of Ceres. Just a little walk. I shall be back in a minute.' Everybody understood. The professor stood up and said: 'Whilst the ladies visit the goddess of vegetation I shall avail myself of the so-called Basilica.' He strolled off. Mr. McInvert followed him with Mr. Pupillary. They looked sharply from left to right and stood in a row on the south side.

'Fine capitals,' remarked the professor.

'About these Greeks,' began Mr. McInvert, voicing the question which was on his mind, 'were they really a leisured and cultivated race, loving beauty and eschewing ugliness in life? I cannot believe it. It is impossible to live in the ideal. Our present occupation leads me to enquire into the more intimate forms of their civilisation. From the Platonic ideas of lovely boys and exquisite gymnasias one would never believe that any Greek ever made money or used the lavatory. What *were* the sanitary arrangements of the Athenians?'

The professor: 'When I was last in Athens they had not altered. There were none.'

Mr. Pupillary: 'But, great heavens, I had always supposed that even Alcibiades had bowels.'

The professor: 'Indeed he did, and discharged them in the open air over a gully. The male population resorted to the gullies after breakfast, and the ladies, more strictly segregated, did it in the back-yard. Plumbing only came in with Imperial Rome. The Greeks were not an engineering race. Even in modern Epidorus there was only one communal privy in the middle of the market-place, at any rate when I was there last. A marble slab with a small hole in it. In Ostia, on the other hand, I found a room with twenty jakes round three sides of the square, evidently a public latrine. And in Cnossos a real

water flush, operated with rain-water from the roof, under the stairs.'

Mr. McInvert: 'I really can't imagine Alcibiades relieving himself over a gully.'

The professor: 'Well, for the upper classes there was probably a closet at the baths. It is from the upper classes that you get your ideas of the cultivated and art-loving civilisation. The lower classes were a peasantry which might have been mistaken for the peasantry of Greece to-day, or for that matter for the lower Italian peasantry which we see about us. The peasantry are the same in all ages. They live and die. Only in our concept of the Greeks they have been omitted, as in our concept of the Romanovs they have been over-stressed. Such civilisations are called beautiful as succeed in neglecting them. And quite rightly so. One must neglect the ugly to observe the beautiful.'

Mr. Pupillary: 'Myself, I should think that one ought to find a beauty in ugliness. One must adapt the ugly to observe the beautiful.'

The professor: 'Well, my dear boy, when you have done so, tell me, and I'll be the first to congratulate you. Begin by adapting Whitechapel to Mayfair. In the meantime I shall continue to neglect Whitechapel: I'm not capable of observing it.'

Mr. McInvert: 'Perhaps we had better not continue to neglect Mrs. Skimlit.'

At that moment Mrs. Jones, who had stayed on the steps of the Temple of Neptune with Anne Menzies, was saying: 'Except for his lips I think he's very good-looking.'

Anne: 'I like his lips very much.'

Chapter 7

MR. PUPILLARY had changed into his darker clothes immediately they got back from Paestum. He was dusty and might as well change at once. In the Hotel Santo Biagio nobody put on evening-dress, but everybody changed for dinner. Why this should be, remained beyond the professor even.

In the drawing-room there was nobody but Anne Menzies and Miss Albino, since the rest were still busily concocting *demi-soirée* creations in their bedrooms. Mr. Pupillary, who had nobody to talk to, was tempted into the stronghold of the enemy. The presence of an ally, in Anne, and only one other person, not yet actively hostile, rendered it possible; and the instinct of curiosity, which is perhaps the motive for the revolution of the spheres, made it desirable. Mr. Pupillary entered the drawing-room with the air and object of an explorer. He saluted Anne, bowed to Miss Albino—whom he yet knew only mentally as Crashaw's 'Magdalen'—and walked round looking at the pictures. Whenever he entered a room with pictures in it, he paid them, as few people do, the compliment of looking at them. Curiously, this was frequently considered rude. The English goodman who possessed a salon, and in whose salon Mr. Pupillary viewed the paintings and ornaments attentively, could only suppose that his visitor, with manifest ill-breeding, was assessing their price. When he fingered glass to try the cut, or looked at the bottom of beakers to see if they were old, his host decided never to invite him again.

Having made a tour of the pictures, and found them to be exactly as he had expected, not omitting the view of a cliff with an oily sea under it and a perfectly lifelike grotto, all in excellent taste but quite meaningless, his eyes lighted on the central object of the room, the visitors' book. He took it up.

The page said:

I have a complaint to make. Sig. Ambrogi's hotel is too good to be true!! No grumbling, no swindling, the best food, as much as you want, everything so cheery and done only to please the visitor!!! Really it is terrible!!!!—LUCRETIA

ALBINO. 12.4.08.

Mr. Pupillary said: 'My God, listen to this, Anne.' He read it out. 'Nine exclamation marks. Why didn't she put one after the date?'

Miss Albino, who was having her own literature ridiculed, regarded him as a codfish might regard Mr. Scott, when in the process of being made into emulsion. Miss Menzies, who realised that Lucretia Albino could be none other than the lady in the room, made mouths at him like the original Lucretia trying to warn one of her brothers that the porridge was not what it seemed. Mr. Pupillary continued in blissful ignorance.

'This is a good one,' he said. 'Listen to this:

In the Santo Biagio Hotel
All goes smoothly and well.

MATILDA SMALL.

Matilda might have thought of other rhymes. Hell, for instance, and nasty smell, and oh how the boarders yell. I like her epigrammatic smack, however.'

Anne was unable to arrest his downward course: like the swain of the unlucky Clementine, being no swimmer, she was compelled to watch him in the foaming brine.

Mr. Pupillary continued:

'Winter with her icy fingers never touches the scented blossoms of these fairy seas.

M. HAMILTON GREEN.

I wonder who first said that winter had icy fingers? "Scented breeze" would have been an improvement on "scented blossoms." Then it would have rhymed with "seas," and we could have brought in the "blossomed trees" a little later. However, what's done cannot be undone. Ah, here we are. I expected this. Inspired by Mrs. Hamilton Green's "fairy seas" no doubt.

Magic castles opening on the foam
Of fairy seas in perilous lands forlorn.—*Shelley*.

JANET SMYTH.

A pity she didn't attribute it to Rupert Brooke. It must have been a struggle.'

'I don't know why you are so bitter, John,' said Anne, trying at all costs to put a stop to this before Miss Albino exploded. 'It does no good to be clever about what quite honest people have written in good faith.'

'Honest people!' exclaimed Mr. Pupillary, who had been stung by being called clever. 'Good faith! Do you call people honest who write slabby eulogies to people they have never seen, and who won't believe them? Do you call it good faith to indulge in revolting affectations in cold ink? Do you suppose that good faith and honesty can exist at the same time as sentimentality and false emotion and insincere assumptions of poetry? The things don't ring true, and that's enough of the honesty of their progenitors. As for this book, it should be banned with all its brothers and sisters. A man of any decent feeling, if he were shewn it by the proprietor before taking a room—that, I suppose, is its mission—would go away at once in a deep silence. It marks the hotel as a miserable simpering asylum for the *borghesia*. It would damn any place.'

Miss Albino, who had after all patiently held her peace, in her own domain, under the gravest insults, rolled her thick eyes, and said in a deep contralto:

'Affectations are not confined to the elder members of this hotel, Mr. Pupillary.'

'Possibly not,' replied that shameless youth, 'nor should the right of pointing them out be so confined.'

'Please don't attempt to be impertinent. I am twice your age, and have the right to be spoken to politely. Perhaps I have no right merely because I am old, but the fact that I

have experienced the world, and lived in hotels, for twenty years before you were born, must give my opinions a respectable weight——’

‘A quantitative experience is not necessarily a qualitative——’

‘Be quiet. When you have lived a little longer and rubbed off your adolescent intolerance and the desire to shew off a very immature and flashy judgment, you will learn that rudeness and cleverness are not the only currency in life.’

‘I see.’

‘Don’t say “I see.” You do not see. You talk about the revolting affectation and insincerity of a few maiden ladies who have had the unsceptical good-heartedness to write recommendations in Signor Ambrogi’s book. They may have ill-expressed them, because they were not all literary geniuses like yourself, but they meant nothing but well in doing so, and put them into poetry, as they thought, because their hearts were full. Because you have scraped up some technical knowledge and snobbishness you assume the right to pour out clever and superficial and, I assure you, equally revolting fal-lals, over a form of ornament which was meant sincerely and which came from the heart, perhaps a stupid heart. None of your brilliance, which you will not believe that nobody admires, comes from your heart. This is a sign of youth, and I forgive it for that reason, though I should dearly like to employ the deterrent conformable to youth: that is, to spank you. It would purge your vanity. In the meantime, since the gong has sounded, I suggest that you go to your dinner, and recollect that it is not the only dinner in the world.’

‘Thank you,’ said Mr. Pupillary. He marched out of the room, suffocating with indignation, shame, and bewilderment; red to the roots of his golden hair.



In the front room of the small *osteria* which provided flea-bitten beds for commercial travellers and the best red wine at sixpence a bottle, Donna Celeste, the padrona, was sitting over a charcoal fire. The inhabitants of the Hotel Santo Biagio had never heard of her or her establishment. The front room was villainously dirty. There were wooden tables, rush-bottomed chairs, an uncovered stone floor, barrels and bottles of wine—far better wine, untreated chemically, at sixpence, than was sold for five shillings in the Santo Biagio, which was not an exorbitant hotel—and a coloured print of the localised virgin of Positano, floating in several coronets over the sea and the village. The artist had thoughtfully written POSIT over the latter, and to this a long miraculous story was attached by the padrona. From what one could understand of her dialect, a fine ship containing the image of the Virgin, which now reposed in the new church, had been sailing towards Naples. The great sails had suddenly ceased to draw, just beside the islands of Li Galli, and the drunken captain, coming on deck, had been startled to observe that the other vessels of his convoy were forging ahead on either bow, under a stout breeze. He had crammed on sails, cursed his crew, and done all that he could to convey his relic to the church which expected it in Naples. But a dreadful and mysterious cry welled up from below the hatches. A trembling cabin-boy was ordered below to investigate, and reappeared, livid with horror, to state that the Blessed Virgin had spoken with him. The crew and captain were finally persuaded to test his story, and found the crowned Mother of Christ articulate. She continued to repeat the words ‘Posit, posit,’ until the galleon had

been put about and a safe anchorage found in Positano. The village then possessed a single church dedicated to a different saint. It still stands on the hilltop near the Città dei Morti—a flourishing milieu which was suddenly abandoned by its parishioners only a few years ago, and now stands with empty streets and houses, populated by rats, fireflies, and lovers. A new church was therefore required to house the Madonna, who insisted upon staying, and miraculously provided materials for its construction, out of a countryside which had previously been considered barren of building materials. The rest of the padrona's narrative becomes obscure in minor miracles, and loses interest, but the comparison of her statement about the place-name Positano with the professor's statement that it derived from Poseidon, is not uninteresting. Both, at least, were gods.

The front room contained, beside the tables and the pictures, a calendar which informed one of the particular saint who patronised to-day—oddly, it was Santo Biagio, essentially effective in afflictions of the throat, and so very appropriate to the winter—and the usual ritual photograph of Mussolini. The charcoal fire over which Donna Celeste sat was a portable one, and she was compelled to sit over it because it gave no heat. In one corner of the room a small boy who appeared to be ten years old, but was in reality eighteen, lay huddled with his back to the wall, sleeping fitfully like a dog. The padrona screamed at him with alternate business sense, when her guests were thirsty, and a kind of distorted practical kindness. Round the tables were seated the fishers of the village, playing at Scopa and Scopone with the honest and ancient cards issued by Comm. Guglielmo Murari at Bari, and stamped by the Regno d'Italia for three lire. They might have been the original cards which gave the suit of spades, through Spain, to a game more usual in the Santo Biagio. The fishermen seemed to be on the point of homicide throughout the evening, and the room was a pandemonium. The padrona, like the Duchess in her Kitchen, seemed unaffected by the noise. She occasionally shouted for silence, and was instantly adopted as an arbitrator in the quarrel of the moment. 'Ma che!' and 'Cazzo!' fell about her like plates. Spittle patterned the floor.

There were some cab-drivers among her guests, dressed rather flashily in comparison with the nondescript serge, string, or woollen clothing of the others. One of these, who had brought a commercial traveller to lodge with her, was seated among the favoured four who shared the fire, lit beneath their quilled chins and greasy noses by its embers. They stretched their hands out above it and the creased palms took on an infernal radiance, while the upper surfaces projected an invisible blackness to the ceiling. The eyebrow sockets of their eyes gave them a surprised look, lit from below. The padrona's face was a difficult railway terminus; its wrinkles glowed and crossed.

Next the cab-driver, who had been dressed by a twenty-five shilling tailor in Naples, sat the Aphrodite of Mr. Pupillary. She stirred the embers with her foot.

The room was lit by two oil lamps on the tables, and the distorted shadows of the card players made gigantic menaces up the walls and ceiling. Black shadow poured on the floor towards the absorbent charcoal of the fire. Through the whole picture a tonal quality never ceased to ring, a sound of darkness, light, spitting, glasses, oaths, and a monotone. There were no windows.

Outside in the starlight, a baritone began to sing:

La chitarr' è un 'strumento
Che si suona con le dita,
Ma la donna, piu istruita,
La suona con la . . .

The twenty-five shilling cab-driver rose to his feet, his rimmed eyes looking more dissipated than ever, flashy, and cunning in the firelight. He went out with Aphrodite.

A whip cracked like the stars.



The drawing-room conspiracy came to a head at about the same moment which saw the cab-driver whip off with Aphrodite towards some fore-marked cavern, where he could tumble her in the grass.

The Misses Cowfold and Mrs. Skimlit had not been able to approach Miss Albino the night before, because Mrs. Skimlit's wanderlust had then taken her on the momentous trip to the smoking-room.

The parties rose from the dinner which had been prefaced by Miss Albino's lecture to Mr. Pupillary, and forgathered in their respective haunts. Mrs. Skimlit led her troops to a preliminary skirmish. It was a leadership which was to prove abortive, and that for a strange reason. One would have thought that Mr. Pupillary's new insult to Miss Albino would have provoked her to a ready concurrence in the attack upon him. After listening to his facetiousness about her entry in the hotel album, she should have been an easy ally to the party which hoped to expel him from the place. If he had gained the better of her in the battle which followed this misdemeanour, she would have been. But the chance of war which had seen her conquest also inspired her with a kindly feeling towards the vanquished. Miss Albino, in fact, was perfectly ready to forgive Mr. Pupillary, not on the very adequate grounds that he was young, but because she had given him a good thrashing. He was, in a sense, her trophy, and she intended to keep him by her.

Frau Kunst: 'You have been to Pesto to-day?'

Mrs. Skimlit: 'Yes.'

Miss Prune: 'You had a lovely day.'

Mrs. Skimlit: 'I did not enjoy it.'

Mrs. Prune: 'But I thought it was so beautiful, and such a fine drive, and the weather here has been like summer. We sat on the terrace after luncheon and had to fetch our sunshades. The peasants have been blasting in the——'

Mrs. Skimlit: 'Miss Menzies and that young man pushed their way into the first automobile and compelled us to sit in the other. The dust they raised was intolerable, and suffocated me for four hours.'

Miss Cowfold: 'One would expect it of Mr. Pupillary.'

The other Miss Cowfold: 'I should tell you that he threw an orange at my sister yesterday.'

All:!!!

Miss Cowfold: 'Indeed he did. I was sitting on the balcony when he endeavoured to

throw the waste of his orange in at my window. I naturally resisted, and he used insulting words.'

Mrs. Skimlit: 'But you should complain to Signor.'

The other Miss Cowfold: 'That's just what I said.'

Mrs. Skimlit: 'Don't you think so, Miss Albino?'

There was an unexpected pause.

Miss Albino: 'Well, really I should take no notice of it. After all, the boy is young, and I gave him a good talking to just before dinner. He began to make clever remarks about the people in this hotel, and I told him not to think he was the only pebble on the beach.'

Miss Cowfold, hopefully: 'What did he reply?'

Miss Albino, annoyed: 'Well, really, I should hardly think there was anything to reply.'

Mrs. Skimlit: 'Do you mean to say he listened to what you said.'

Miss Albino: 'Certainly. I told him exactly what I thought, and he had nothing else to do.'

Mrs. Prune: 'I think that was rather nice of him.'

Mrs. Skimlit: 'But he threw oranges at Miss Cowfold!'

Mrs. Prune: 'Yes, I know, that was rude of him.'

Miss Albino: 'It was not "nice" of him not to reply. There was nothing he could say.'

Mrs. Skimlit: 'I am sure it was very magnificent of you to put him in his place, but don't you feel that our business is more to get rid of him altogether than to take these half-measures? He will make a nuisance of himself again in a couple of days.'

Miss Cowfold: 'One has a right to a little consideration even in a hotel.'

Frau Kunst, to the surprise of everybody: 'He is only a boy.'

Miss Cowfold, taking a fatal step: 'I think that Miss Albino is too sanguine in expecting him to behave in future just because she has told him to.'

Miss Albino, nettled at this slur upon her ability to put people in their places, and seeing the trend of Mrs. Skimlit's diplomacy: 'Are you asking me to make a complaint to Signor Ambrogi?'

The other Miss Cowfold: 'Oh no, of course not. But we felt that——'

Miss Albino: '——because I scarcely feel that I should be right in doing so. If anybody else feels that it ought to be done, that is a matter between them and the management. If Mrs. Skimlit, for instance——'

Mrs. Skimlit, abandoning the cause of her lieutenants who have defeated her by their own precipitance: 'Certainly not. I have no personal feelings in the matter. No insult has been offered to me personally.'

Miss Cowfold: 'Of course if it's only a matter of my sister and myself, we should hardly like to make a personal question of it.'

Miss Prune: 'Suppose we let things stand, and see what we can see.'

Frau Kunst stokes the fire.

Mrs. Prune: 'The peasants have been blasting——'

Thus the drawing-room conspiracy came to an unimpressive end. The kindly everyday occupations of the Santo Biagio were beginning to thaw before a greater force.

Chapter 8

ALL except the professor and Mr. McInvert were accustomed to take their breakfasts in their rooms. These two, sidling into the dining-room with precautious steps, rendered necessary by the bare marble floor on which one slipped when hurried, would sit at separate tables and consume their English eggs. The professor's post would be placed upon his tray. He sought to give Mr. McInvert the impression that all his letters came from the Royal Society; but many of them were bills. It is fair to say that some of them were from the Royal Society, or from specialists in his own subject from odd parts of the world. One enthusiastic Nord wrote from Abisko, where the unending night and snow had lately been leaving him with little else to do. He partly expended his energies, which were to cumulate to the vernal orgy of Schnapps which celebrates in that country the return of nature, by corresponding with the professor on the civilisation of the iron age. Nobody corresponded with Mr. McInvert except his mother, who wrote punctually on Sundays between tea and dinner, when the servants had gone out.

'Good morning,' said the professor, filling his mouth with toast and Italian honey. 'Lovely day.'

Mr. McInvert doubtfully admitted that it was. He was always chary of associating himself with these forms of approbation. His outlook was partly superstitious and partly pessimistic. When people asked him 'How are you to-day?' he always replied, 'Oh, holding together,' or 'Still alive, thank you,' not so much because he was feeling ill, which he often was, as because he scrupled to commit the sin of hubris. His experience had taught him that the Greeks were not mistaken in attributing so much importance to the avoidance of pride against the gods. It was just this superstition which flourished in a parallel degree among the Celts and Anglo-Saxons when they touched wood for luck. They touched wood to avert ill-luck, to avoid the consequences of having boasted before the powers. Thus, when Mr. McInvert was absolutely compelled to admit that he was feeling well, to avoid giving positive offence to an enthusiastic enquirer, he would go secretly off without speaking or touching anything, in search of a piece of pure unvarnished virgin wood. This is a substance which it is often difficult to find in a civilised interior. A match is not sufficiently bulky to absorb the discharge of so much guilt. When Mr. McInvert had found it, often by turning up the carpet with the point of his shoe—for he was not allowed to touch anything with his hands—he would ritualistically tap it three times, keeping his fingers against it after each tap for the correct period of time, which was determined by intuition. When his superbity and indiscretion had flowed from him to it, and the right amount of sanity, salubriousness, and benevolent safety grown from it to him, he would return to everyday life with a feeling that certainly not happiness, but possibly contentment, might remain with him for that hour at least.

In the same way, when people said to him that it was a fine day, he would feel that such an arrogation of security was a dangerous proceeding under the eyes of our malevolent directors. He would also feel, very often, as he did to-day, that lovely days were of very little use, very infrequent, and almost unnecessary. He positively resented bright weather. Fine it might be, for those who were happy and well and had hopes of

returned love, but to him the pathetic fallacy was only too real. For him, only too frequently, the finest days were nothing but coincidences of heat and dust, or mockeries of his unhappiness. All times were his seasons, and very bad seasons at that. All places that the eye of heaven visits were to a wise man most unhappy havens. One could multiply the misquotations.

To-day particularly he had something on his mind. He was doubtful, he was afraid, he was almost sure. It was like influenza: by a great act of will one might almost throw it off. But one's will was debilitated, it was divided against itself. Would it be able to stand? At one moment one said: No, this is impossible, it cannot be allowed to take place, at all costs one must steer clear of an infirmity which continual experience has always shewn to be ending tragically. And then one would torment oneself with the speculation that once in a million times the termination might be happy. This might be the time. This might lead to the rapture, the assistance, the companionship, which would make up entirely and to spare for the years of solitude and misery which had built one's life. One said that there was no harm in trying: that it was a sin, and a missed opportunity, not to try. At the same moment one was aware that this was fallacious, that one's frozen will was thawing before the fever of the body. The influenza. One was aware that the particular harm did reside just in the trying: that one's only hope lay in the conscious and consistent missing of all opportunities. If one allowed oneself to entertain the idea, to experimentally proceed in the enterprise, one found that the brakes were inadequate, the slope downward, and the cliff impending. He was thirty-three. He had been in hell fifteen times, fifteen times over the precipice. Surely that was enough experience and experiment? But then the delights, the hopes, the fears: all one's piercing moments came upon one when one was in love. Perhaps it was worth while suffering the agonies of the damned, if one could buy thus a moment of felicity? How much cancer was equivalent to one love affair? It was impossible to determine. Looking backward, one was surprised to find those fifteen smatches of Tartarus and the souls in bale existed in the memory only by their bright moments. That evening at Algeciras. . . . It was a blessed dispensation of providence which allowed mankind to forget its tortures and painfully hoard the crowded hours. He wondered if they were truly worth an age without a name? Parisian Debussy, dying of cancer in a dark room, how did he see his life? Glorious, or influenza? La grippe. The gripes. Expressive word. He was in for a go of the gripes.

He refused to be in for it. He would not suffer this indignity. His will and his mind were his own, cool, sensible, and logical: they were acquainted with the miseries in store, with the wily persuasions of the revolting heart, and they would not allow themselves to be put upon. He had decided, in a weak moment, in the middle of the night, to confide in the professor. He was a man of culture and would understand. But now he refused to do so. He would not admit, not even to himself, that there was anything to confide. That was the only way to save oneself: by a vast effort of will. He would lock this subject in his heart, refuse to consider it, and watch it starve to death, like a kern or gallowglass in the secret chamber of a Scottish castle. Its corpse would swell and stink. That was the trouble. It would swell and swell till the chamber could no longer contain it. Then the suffocating agonising growth would burst its walls. It was safer to give it an outlet, to get it off his chest. The crass stupidity of Spartan boys. How far better to let the fox go, than to keep it caged till it gnawed the vessels of one's heart! He decided to tell the professor. It was a difficult subject to introduce, and required courage, but he must not allow himself to be a

coward; he must live a life directed entirely by the icy judgment of his brain. He would count ten, and then begin. One, two . . .

‘I have a letter here,’ said the professor, ‘from my friend, Professor Skål of Upsala University. He asks me to look out for arrowheads or cooking utensils if I should hear of any discoveries on the peninsula. The early civilisation of a place so naturally favoured must have been considerable. Nature does not provide the means of livelihood without the beings to enjoy it. When the patrician families who left for Constantinople after the death of Constantine were shipwrecked at Ragusa, and marched and marched till they could find A-Melfes on the site of what is now Amalfi, they did not cross a virgin country. They were compelled to ask the permission of the Picentines before they were allowed to settle. It is for Picentine and earlier relics that Skål enquires. If you should happen to come across any, poking about in small landslides and so forth, I should be most obliged if you would let me know of them?’

‘I will,’ said Mr. McInvert. One, two, three . . .

‘Have you ever tried to make an arrowhead?’ enquired the professor, suddenly leaning forward over his breakfast with fascinating enthusiasm. ‘I assure you it’s a skilled occupation, and one which is almost extinct in England, except in Derbyshire. You take your striker in one hand——’

Mr. McInvert watched him knocking his egg-shells together, with mute resentment. Why wouldn’t he listen? Why couldn’t he see that one had something most important to confide? His selfishness to always monopolise the conversation and expect one to poke in landslides when he might have seen that one was dying, starving for assistance!

Mr. McInvert leaned across the table and said urgently:

‘Have you ever been in love?’

The professor paused with an egg in either hand and looked at Mr. McInvert.

‘In love?’ he enquired.

The door opened, and Dr. Arnold-Browne came slithering across the marble with Miss Prune.

‘Good morning, professor,’ said the latter.

‘Good morning, good morning,’ replied the professor, with some relief, ‘and where are we going to-day?’

‘A little photography,’ Dr. Browne explained. ‘I’m taking the young lady to get some snaps in the village.’ He always called her jocularly ‘the young lady’ in much the same way as Sir Walford Davies will refer to us as ‘scholars all!’ One imagined his fluty voice—but much less mellow than Sir Walford Davies’ (whom one can scarcely picture in a Hawks tie), a voice, in fact, which combined athleticism with medicine much rather than grandfathers with music—vibrating through the ether: ‘Good morning. Miss Prune and scholars all, and how shall we amuse the young ladies to-day?’ But no, he would definitely not have amused them with music. Perhaps he would have talked to them huskily about cameras, and the inside of motor-cars, and his experiences in the Great War. To all intents and purposes he had ceased to live in a forward direction when the battleship on which he served steamed home after the armistice. But he had sawed off a great many legs before that, and kicked a great many balls of different shapes, and the quiet house in Gloucestershire to which he had retired could not rob him of his tie. With a hairy hand he

caressed it.

Miss Prune gave a giggle: 'Dr. Arnold-Browne is so good at photography, and I'm so silly; he's going to come with me to correct my aperture.'

A dark thought crossed the doctor's mind, and he loosened his shoulders.

Mrs. Skimlit and Miss Albino came in. It was hopeless. Mr. McInvert got up and went out into the garden.

'Queer bird,' remarked the doctor to the professor, as soon as he had disappeared. 'He'll soon be dead.'

'Oh no!' exclaimed Miss Prune, profoundly shocked. 'I hope not!'

The doctor laughed with professional amusement. 'Tuberculosis, you know,' he said. 'As for me, I've never had an illness in my life.'

Chapter 9

MR. PUPILLARY was feeling at a loose end. Presumably it was Sunday, for there was no blasting in the garden. There was nobody to see, nothing to do. In the lorn, exalted, despairing, and so tangled chambers of his mind he turned over the idea of walking round all the streets in the village on the off chance. If he should meet her. . . . She would smile at him. He would give her a cigarette. It would be a perfunctory smile. Cupboard love. Everybody smiled in the south. They would speak for a moment, and she would go away. It would be worth it. But perhaps he would not meet her. It was impossible to be in all the streets at once, and when one was in one street she would come out of a house in another: when one got into the second street she would have entered a new house in the first. He looked out of the window, and the nesting ramifications of Positano lay below him: two roads, the upper and the lower, wound about the buttresses of the mountains. Between their dusty parallels the exhausting staircases stumped up and down. He already prided himself on his ability to get from the old church to the hotel quicker than Mrs. Skimlit, even when she had a ten minutes' start; but, however thorough one's knowledge of the honeycomb, the laws of permutation and combination must be too strong. He was full of a vast dynamic energy which swirled about inside him, baffled by stopped exits, slopping at his heart. It was intolerable to be stuffed with power and impotence at the same moment. He desired to make popping noises and to bang things. Anne came in and he leaped upon her for relief.

Mr. Pupillary: 'Anne! What are we to do? I shall go mad if I stay in this wretched place another minute. May I strangle you? Will you play the piano? Shall we go to Ravello?'

The moment he had said it he regretted it. It would mean going out of sight of Positano, away from any possible chance of meeting Aphrodite.

Anne: 'John, I should love to. But how shall we get there?'

Mr. Pupillary said hopefully: 'It is rather far. Perhaps we had better go another day.'

Anne: 'I suppose we could take a carriage. How long does it take?'

Mr. Pupillary: 'Hours and hours.'

Anne: 'Never mind, it would be something to do. I'll ask the proprietor to 'phone for one.'

Mr. Pupillary: 'They charge an awful lot.'

Anne: 'Well, what are we to do, then?'

Mr. Pupillary's mind flashed across the piping stairways of Positano. After all it was absurd to mope about all day, without the faintest chance of gratification, and in the evening go miserably to bed. He had done all this before. A trip to Ravello would serve as a distraction. He embraced the opportunity with a new enthusiasm; he was strengthened by despair.

Mr. Pupillary: 'We could go in a party and divide the cost.'

Anne wanted to say 'Wouldn't it be nicer to go alone?' She did say: 'Who shall we

take?’

Mr. Pupillary: ‘Would your mother care to come? or the Joneses?’

Anne, brightly: ‘I’ll go ask her, and you ask the Joneses.’ She called after him: ‘See about lunch, to take with us.’

The planned cab became a motor and drew up in the new square of Ravello, paying the toll upon entry. There was a certain amount of argument with the collector before these moneys were handed over. Eventually Mr. Pupillary got out, looking rather red, and handed Mrs. Menzies down. Next came Anne, and last her father. Mr. Menzies was redder than Mr. Pupillary.

Mr. Menzies: ‘Why didn’t he tell us there was a toll before he brought us? I don’t believe there is a toll. The whole thing is a swindle. Wherever you go it’s *tassa di soggiorno, bollo*, and now *pedaggio*, or whatever he chooses to call it. One would think that the whole country existed by preying on the visitors.’

Mr. Pupillary: ‘But I assure you——’

Mrs. Menzies: ‘Come along, dear. Don’t go fussing over sixpence.’

Mr. Menzies: ‘If I didn’t fuss over sixpences——’

Anne: ‘Look at the cathedral, daddy.’

The chauffeur stared ahead with a bored expression; like Mr. Eliot’s undertaker, he was aware that this sort of thing had occurred before. The Americans. The English. They were rich, weren’t they? If they were too poor to pay for their pleasures they should stop at home and run a motor, as he did; curse it. To go to New York, or London, as somebody’s valet possibly, and see the big towns and the big world where money dropped into your mouth. . . . He would come back in a brown suit with a yellow waistcoat and never do another stroke.

The cathedral was shut, and Mr. Menzies was turning back in a greater pother than before, when a fat man came hastening across the square, waving a bunch of keys. They waited for him, and he let them in with an ingratiating gesture.

Mrs. Menzies enjoyed herself. The sacristan, or whoever it was, told them all about the history of the church: how these pillars had come from Paestum (it helped her to have a picture of the place as she had seen it herself), and those pictures had come from—where was it? In any case Mrs. Menzies admired the church, because she thought it was beautiful, and enjoyed being told about it. Even Mr. Menzies thawed before the representation of Jonah and the whale. He ceased to regret his after luncheon nap, and plied everybody with questions about the pulpit. Anne was happy too. She did not pay much attention to Jonah, but watched Mr. Pupillary. Even the sacristan was happy. He had seldom been received with such innocent appreciation. These people seemed scarcely to realise that he would expect a tip. He felt happier and happier as he wondered how much the tip would be.

Mr. Pupillary was the spectre at the feast. If the sacristan had been unable to talk English there might have been a little present distraction in translating for him. But he spoke English better than Mr. Pupillary spoke Italian. It would have been ridiculous to

insist on acting as interpreter. When he addressed the man himself he spoke in Italian, firmly, but that was the limit of superiority which he could demand.

And all the time Botticelli's Venus was twenty miles away. Somewhere in those intricate streets she was lurking. Would it have been worth while to have stayed at home, to have quartered the warren all the afternoon, trusting to Cupid? It would have been worth while, infinitely worth while. Looking absently at a dusty picture by some long dusty painter of Salerno, Mr. Pupillary knew that he could not live without the carrier of stones. It was not a question of seducing her any longer. He no longer speculated about a Don Juan affair. He wanted the girl absolutely, for ever, in every way.

They had talked several times since their first meeting. Each time he had given her a cigarette; each time those teeth had melted in a smile. Her body was not graceful; it was the unconscious spirit of grace, moving with such unity that he was not conscious of the whole, but of the parts, each exquisite. Her eyes were naked bathers, bathing still, still glistening in their pools. She was a fruit, a wine, a wave. He wanted to press her body to him, so that it flowed to meet him, so that they were one and indivisible. He would hold her thus for ever, almost without lust: except the lust to hold her still—alive, warm, innocent, lovely, eternally possessed.

Mr. Pupillary was filled with the appreciation of waste. Here was this old vampire talking about Andrea di Salerno, and that old fool of a Presbyterian asking questions about Church history. Anne Menzies was staring at him like a moron. The old lady was slipping off to put something in the collection box.

Why, oh why had he come? There in Positano was the body and soul of beauty, and he did not even know her name. She was there, at this moment, doing something. What was she doing? Oh, that she could be thinking of him! But she couldn't be. She would be doing something ordinary, walking or sitting. It was vital to him that he should know which it was. Either action was so precious that it was important to be sure.

Here they were cooped in a sterile pile of bricks and mortar: there she was doing something, and he didn't know.

Time came over Mr. Pupillary and crushed him. Every second of this time was a second of wasted separation, so poignant that it was immeasurable as a second, but became, instead, a timeless assassination in his nervous centres.

When they had finished with the church they had luncheon in the car. The chauffeur had abandoned it. They could see the back of his head in a barber's shop: a defeatist head, black-haired, bored and desolate, even in the process of being shaved.

Anne sat very close to Mr. Pupillary, occasionally touching his knee with her own. Her feelings for Mr. Pupillary were the same as his for the peasant, but the touches merely annoyed him.

After luncheon Mrs. Menzies suggested the Cimbroni.

This turned out to be a villa which belonged to a philanthropic peer. He lived there very seldom. In his absences he threw it open to the public, on payment of a small fee which went to charity.

The very thought of this landowner filled Mr. Pupillary with the blackest feelings. Had he not possessed the estate, had he not so needlessly thrown it open to the stupid curiosity of a thoughtless population, there would have been nothing more to see in Ravello. They

could have gone back to Positano, and he could have begun at once to institute a feverish search. But the wretched fellow had poked his nose in; the damage was done, and there was no escape.

Mr. Pupillary was scarcely in an appreciative mood. He wandered sulkily about the gardens, making cynical interior comments.

‘HUMANI NIHIL A ME ALIENUM PUTO’ he saw written or carved on some wall or other. So the fellow posed as a philanthropist. And then, as usual, there was a lot of sentiment cut on the garden seats: quotations from Omar Khayyám, and so forth. There, backing against a shrubbery, was a copy of Donatello’s David. How, Mr. Pupillary reflected, he had always wanted to spank that fellow’s bottom. Well might he back against the shrubbery.

Anne’s reactions to the Villa Cimbroni were the opposite of Mr. Pupillary’s. After all, she was visiting it with the man she loved. He was visiting it with the woman who loved him. There was a diversity of opinion.

The two leaned over the balustrade at the end of the terrace. Hundreds of feet below them, on a promontory of the headland, stood the ruined tower in which the Duchess of Amalfi had been strangled. Still lower down was Amalfi on the right, and the garish tower of Atrani on the left. The drop was vertiginous.

Anne leaned so that her elbow touched Mr. Pupillary’s. After a moment he moved it away.

Why had he moved it away? It was so difficult to tell. The painter, now, with whom she had had to break off her engagement . . . Love was such an extraordinary and lonely thing. One was never so lonely, so conscious of the unfathomable separateness of people, as when one was in love. She had touched his arm, and after a moment he had moved it away. What did that moment imply? If he had been completely indifferent surely he would have moved it at once? But he had left it—for a moment. And then he had moved it. He might have moved it because he disliked her, because he could not bear to touch her. But then he had suggested this expedition himself. Nobody had thrust it upon him. And now he was leaning next to her. If he disliked her, why did he ask her to come to Ravello and lean on balustrades beside her? Clearly there was no repulsion. He had moved his elbow out of delicacy, because he was shy.

Poor deluded Anne! She wanted him to love her so much that it was not very difficult to believe he did. Her reason staggered under the burden of her feelings, bemused, hazy, and desperately concentrated. People were so separate, and it was so vitally necessary to claim the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps he was indifferent; perhaps he liked her; perhaps he loved her, but was shy. It was impossible to be certain, and she must not lose the chance. Love was so precious, and the chance so slender, that no action of hers must put it off. Such a tender possible bloom must not be injured from her side. The boy might be sulking: she must not sulk as well. He might be doubtful of her feelings: she must not allow them to appear inimical. He might be as confused and conscious of their distinctness as she was: she must not hold herself separate. In case he loved her she must hope he did.

She allowed her elbow to slip along, following his. They met again. Mr. Pupillary became conscious of the pressure for the first time—his earlier movement had been instinctive.

Her elbow was against his. Apparently she had moved it there, but perhaps it had come there by mistake. In some odd ways Mr. Pupillary was humble. He seldom realised that people were in love with him. This time he was far too occupied with his own emotions in any case. The elbow was there, probably by mistake, but for the second time: it would hardly be polite to move away again. He maintained the position.

For Anne the sky was beautiful, the sea superb. Like the advertisement for that new kind of hygienic glass, a hand wiped across the landscape in a flash. It left it sunny, sparkling, positively bursting with violet rays: where, before, a few consumptive cupids had eked out their dubious existence among the ill-lighted factory cobwebs of her heart.

Opposite states are so seldom contiguous that they become impressive when they are. Night is not divided from day whilst shoulder to shoulder with it: they are separated by twilight. How much more impressive it would be could we see the pall of darkness approaching, against the sparkle of the sun, with a straight edge between them: if we could see the night stealing towards us like a great wall, like the shadow of a moved door swinging across the carpet when the nurse retires with her lamp.

Some such psychical contiguity obtained at the Villa Cimbroni, and must have been impressive to the mental eye of any wandering deity who may have been present. Mentally, all the landscape to the westward of Mr. Pupillary lay at the blackest midnight: all to the eastward of Miss Menzies was noon in Africa. The two states touched at the meeting elbows, like the layers in a vertical Neapolitan ice.

It seems almost impossible to do full justice to this phenomenon. Hume is unanswerable, and nothing exists outside ourselves. So on Miss Menzies' side God existed, was in heaven, and all was right with the world. On Mr. Pupillary's side of the nadir, not only Antichrist but rampant Atheism tinged the sea. On stepping from one side of that elbow to the other, one would have stepped from one planet into another: one would have found all sorts of things vanishing or materialising, along with God, at the moment of transit: one might even have suffered alterations in one's own person, such as the disappearance of one's clothes, or the accentuation of one's bandy legs. Nor would such marvels have exhausted the wonders of the phenomenon. Its crowning miracle was twofold: that such an alteration of the surface of our habitable globe, and of the laws of nature, could have been effected by so small an initial cause as Love; and that the whole illusion was actually invisible. The acute observer might have looked anxiously seawards for the beam of darkness emanating from Mr. Pupillary; but, on the evidence of the five senses left to themselves, he would have rubbed his eyes and looked in vain.

Mr. and Mrs. Menzies had discovered a cupola with some Latin written round the top. Mr. Menzies had been able to translate this, and even to spot the quotation, so they were both in undiminished humour.

'What a pity,' said Mrs. Menzies as they drove home in the car, 'that the Joneses couldn't come! We *have* had such an agreeable day.'



After luncheon Mr. McInvert could stand it no longer. He stood at the window of the smoking-room, looking down on the abandoned workings of the blasting peasants. He had stood there every day since he first watched them from the garden, after every meal. Now that they were no longer there, he was wretched.

The workings mocked him with their vacancy. The rosy girl no longer smiled up from between the oranges: the slipping muscles no longer clenched beneath the dusty bronze: the *Torna a Surrient*' trickled from the unattainable lips no longer.

Mr. McInvert turned on his heel with an exclamation of misery and sidled across the dining-room. What could he do? The Menzieses and Mr. Pupillary had gone to Ravello: the professor had hidden himself cunningly, perhaps for fear of being asked about love again, and could not be found: Mrs. Jones was bilious, or suffering from Mediterranean fever. She was closeted with Mr. Jones in their own bedroom. Mr. McInvert, in despair, turned the handle of the drawing-room door.

It was a fatal step. Mrs. Skimlit, in full regalia for walking, was awaiting a victim.

'Ah,' she said, 'Mr. McInvert. Were you looking for somebody?'

'No. At least, I was just . . .'

Mrs. Skimlit wagged her finger skittishly.

'I believe you were looking for somebody to go for a walk.'

'Oh no,' said Mr. McInvert. 'I am no walker. I scarcely ever go for walks. I was just . . .'

'That I can't believe. Why should you come to this beautiful country if you don't want to see its sights? You don't mean to tell me that you haven't been to see the mountain villages?'

'No. I'm afraid not. You see, I'm not . . .'

'Well, there's no time like the present,' said Mrs. Skimlit definitely. 'If you put on your shoes we can go together.'

Mr. McInvert surrendered. In five minutes they were plodding up the stone steps which lead upwards and upwards, past the natural arch, into the heart of the mountains.

Mr. McInvert wished that he possessed Mrs. Skimlit's character. Peeping at her with a covert side glance, he wondered at her definition, her integrity. What a wonderful old woman! How extraordinary human beings were, when one came to think of them. What sort of life, he wondered, did Mrs. Skimlit lead when she was alone? What had she been thinking about, how had she been occupied, as she sat solitary in the drawing-room, waiting for a victim? In a state of suspended animation, positive and neutral, she had waited there with her hands in her lap: a monolith, the monument of a mighty period.

Mr. McInvert's heart warmed to Mrs. Skimlit, in the rushing anagnorisis of human sympathy. The old lady had been flesh as he was, perhaps even now was subject to the same emotions. Mrs. Skimlit must have loved.

'Mrs. Skimlit,' he said, stopping dead in his tracks, 'have you ever been in love?'

Obviously, when one came to think of it, she was the ideal confidant. Lonely as she must be, she would be pleased with confidences. Old as she was, surely she would be understanding?

But Mrs. Skimlit never faltered in her stride.

‘No,’ she said venomously. ‘No.’ And Mr. McInvert had to run three steps to catch her up.

Love was in the air. A pink impalpable cloud, heightened by the growing sultriness of the weather, it hung over the inhabitants of the Santo Biagio as if they had been sprayed with June Roses in a second-rate country cinema. Perhaps it was the heat, perhaps it was the growing secret practice of taking sunbaths in front of their bedroom windows between breakfast and luncheon: whatever the reason, the Saxon visitors were becoming restless. The sun has a notorious effect upon the liver.

Mr. McInvert, Anne Menzies, and Mr. Pupillary were not the only sufferers. Miss Prune, whose protruding teeth though a deterrent to advances were no protection against the feelings of their owner, was beginning to have disturbing dreams. Sometimes they merged into wakefulness; but without relaxing for that reason. The only thing was to pretend that she had not woken up. The Misses Cowfold, too fat to be absolutely conquered by the pangs, yet were beginning to be irritable. In spite of their resolution during the orange peel outrage, they had already quarrelled about a division of the breakfast butter. The tension had lasted for ten minutes at least.

And there was Miss Albino. The advancing spring had made her restive. Her pale eyes moved furtively behind the thick glasses. She felt she must be up and doing.

Human beings, Miss Albino knew, were beyond the power of love. True love, the selfless love which asked nothing and gave everything, found no footing in the human breast. It was dogs, dogs only, and particularly poms and pekineses, that were capable of love like Christ’s. And yet, in every part of the world, little dogs were being maltreated at every hour of the day. . . .

Miss Albino did not fritter away her Sunday afternoons in expeditions. Instead, she visited the Animals’ Dispensary.

Somewhere in England, in Balham and Bournemouth and Helions Bumpstead, middle-aged spinsters like Miss Albino contributed their half-crowns, tirelessly, with love in their hearts. All the money came together mysteriously, was administered by a Board. Long ago Miss Albino had written to the Board. She was the kind of woman who would think of writing to a Board. And the Board had heard Miss Albino’s petition favourably, had sent an inspector from Naples (the Naples inspector had, even longer ago, been sniffed over by an inspector from Rome, and the Rome inspector’s predecessor, in the last century, had been instituted from London itself), had opened a branch in Positano under Miss Albino’s care. The Foreign Dumb Friends’ League was a growing force. It had made a point, in its half-yearly prospectus, of starring the new branch at Positano. There had even been a picture of Miss Albino, in hobble skirts and a basin hat, holding a Dandy Dinmont to her breast. Miss Albino drew a tiny salary from the office still. She was not only a woman who thought of writing to Boards, but a woman who knew that even twenty-five pounds a year was better than nothing.

So, whilst the various expeditions were seeking their selfish relaxations in Ravello, or the Mountains, or Amalfi (whither the doctor had taken Miss Prune for photographic reasons), Miss Albino sat in the F.D.F.L. Dispensary, thinking of love.

It was not much of a dispensary, and few of the natives came there. Two or three stray dogs and a female assistant were fed and housed, by the half-crowns from Balham, and there was a collection of bottles and bandages in case first aid should ever be necessary. It never was.

Miss Albino's branch would have been a failure, if she had not become affiliated to the R.S.P.C.A. It was that activity which kept her office on its legs. Miss Albino had her collection boxes in every hotel on the peninsula, and her address on each of them. There was a little printed notice, also, which asked any visitor to any hotel, who saw instances of cruelty in the streets, to take the name and address of the offender and send it to Miss Albino. Then Miss Albino wrote a letter of protest, if possible, to the employer of the offender, and tried to have the man discharged. She had succeeded, more than twenty times, in throwing cab-drivers and carters out of house and home. It was her way of contributing to the happiness of the world.

Miss Albino sat in the dispensary, thinking of love.

Love was beautiful. It was not what you had with men, not what you went on a honeymoon for. True love, the love of Christ and the Pekinese, was bodiless, was platonic. Human beings, even when they were not beastly, were irritable, fickle, undependable. There had been nothing undependable about her little Peeko. His tail was always ready to wag, his little wet tongue always ready to lick her face.

Miss Albino maintained that Peeko was just as clean as she was—perhaps cleaner. She had always allowed him to kiss her wherever he wanted to, on the mouth, anywhere; and he had always slept in bed with her. But little Peeko was dead.

Sitting idly in the dispensary, where the three mongrels basked and scratched themselves for fleas, Miss Albino wished for Peeko to be alive. Her soul yearned out to him across the bourne. Oh, that her little mannikin might come back to her! Oh, that she could be kissed again! She had nobody to go to bed with now, no little wet nose to hug against her cheek: she was starving for Love.



Even the professor, for a moment, in a different way, had been ever so slightly shaken. But he had kept his head. He had gone up, after tea, to the fishermen's osteria at the other end of the village.

Now he sat at a board table outside the door, drinking red wine at three lire a bottle. His companions were a German painter and his mistress, who rented a crumbling palazzo on the hillside and lived on about a hundred pounds a year. The professor did not speak German, but the grape gave a spirit of international amity to the scene. The setting sun shone on the summits of Monte S. Angelo, turning their bluffs and buttresses a rosy pink, like the fabled city of Petra.

The professor, in whom the red wine had cured the momentary upset of spring, began to tell his companions, in English, about the city of Petra. It was a city, he said, built by Hadrian in A.D. 131, not far from Mount Hor in the mountains of Edom. A pure example of English classical architecture . . .

But the German and his mistress did not understand English. They patted the professor on the back and ordered another bottle.

Chapter 10

IT rained. In spite of the guide-books and the posters of the E.N.I.T., it rained without intermission. The blue sea disappeared in squalls of muddy water, and the summits of the hills drizzled in a Scotch mist.

But no inclemency of the elements could disturb the Anglo-Saxon temperament. Miss Prune and Mrs. Skimlit tramped the road towards Amalfi, clad in mackintoshes. Miss Albino, in an ample burberry, plodded towards Meta. Mr. McInvert, standing rigidly under an umbrella, watched the peasants, who had to work whether it rained or not.

How beautiful they looked, thought Mr. McInvert, moving his feet restlessly in a puddle, with their thin garments clinging to their bodies from the wet. One could catch every curve, every movement of the muscles. What happiness to be a peasant, little more than a lovely animal, a creature of to-day's employments who looked neither before nor after! None of these people tormented themselves with minds or were wrecked by the dictates of civilisation. They carried their stones, laid their charges, awaited explosions, slept, ate, drank, and made love. That was why they were lovely. Though he loved only one of them, all the others were lovable.

They had no preoccupation or responsibilities. Every one of them was ready to laugh or smile at the signori on the terrace. Every one of them, male or female, seemed to have no ambition beyond the achievement of a cigarette. They would look upwards, put two fingers to their mouths, and blow an imaginary puff. One threw down a cigarette and was rewarded by a melting smile. The present gave such pleasure that it was a pleasure to see it accepted.

The professor was watching Mr. McInvert from the smoking-room window, talking to Mr. Pupillary over his shoulder. He was aware that Mr. Pupillary wanted to look out of the window himself, and that so long as he stood between him and his object Mr. Pupillary would remain by the fire, a victim to his conversation.

'These peasants down there,' said the professor, 'no doubt they are cajoling McInvert to give them cigarettes. How charmingly they smile! And it means nothing whatever. My experience of the South Italian mentality has been that it is always smiling, always fawning with courtesy. The porter smiles, the waiter smiles, the proprietor smiles, the chance acquaintance is friendliness itself. But out of sight, out of mind. They wouldn't stir a finger to help one in one's absence. The serving class hire their amiability for gain, and the gentle classes extend it from force of habit, perfunctorily, but quite deceptively, so long as one keeps one's eye upon them. They haven't the character to shew anything but pleasure in one's company. But as soon as one has turned the corner, as soon as one has removed one's physical presence, as far as their friendliness goes, one ceases to exist. I loathe every person south of Rome. I wouldn't mind if the people were actively treacherous, if they spoke you fair but stabbed you in the back, in a Corsican kind of way. There's something virile about that, at least. But here they don't even trouble to stab you. Their treachery can rise no higher than hypocrisy.'

'Why do you come, then?' enquired Mr. Pupillary impatiently.

‘God knows,’ replied the professor gloomily.

He perked up again after a moment’s consideration.

‘Racial comparison has always fascinated me,’ he said. ‘It leads nowhere and is completely misleading, but I like it. Now take the Latin races. I should say that the chief characteristic of the French was intransigent commercial avarice. Gay Paree is a myth calculated to relieve Americans of superfluous cash. The French dash and brilliance died before the Revolution, if it ever existed. I find the French commonsensical, family-minded, saving, hysterical, and self-centred. Their vices are redeemed by pride. One of the most refreshing experiences I have ever had was at Modano, as we hovered on the frontier. I left a warm wave of Italian insincerity with a porter at one end of the platform and addressed myself with greasy affability to a porter at the other end. He turned out to be a French porter, and I shall never forget the thrilling, heart-warming scorn with which he turned away from me, not even troubling to answer the ridiculous question which I had put to him about Mont Blanc.’

The professor watched Mr. McInvert in silence. The latter had become galvanised into action. He became entangled in his umbrella, nodded, smiled, held up a cigarette between finger and thumb. Then he wrapped the cigarette in a note for twenty lire, and hid it behind a stone. He was in the middle of an amorous nod when he happened to glance towards the smoking-room window and saw that he was watched. Mr. McInvert blushed to a rich shade and hurried indoors.

The professor continued evenly: ‘Take the Spaniards,’ he said, ‘there is something female about them. The French I should say were definitely masculine, and the Italians, at least in the south of Italy, definitely feminine. The Spaniards are hermaphroditic.’



Miss Albino trudged along through the rain, stepping regardlessly in puddles. The wind blew the slanting water in her face, clouding her glasses, bringing a flush to her pale cheeks. This was better than stopping at home, better than hugging a fire all day.

Somehow the stormy weather helped one to think. The monotony of sunshine was exchanged for activity. The sea came in breakers against the cliffs, leaping up in fountains of angry spray.

One could invent plans as one beat against the breeze: plans for the revival of the dispensary, for a grand entertainment whose proceeds would go towards the prevention of cruelty to animals. One might, for instance, hire a room at Amalfi and invite all the English people at all the hotels . . .

Miss Albino ploughed along the highway, through villages, past crumbling churches, round the successive bluffs. The villagers were mostly indoors, crowding round the charcoal braziers under the last effort of the winter. Miss Albino caught glimpses of them as she passed.

In one dusky interior a drunken-looking ruffian was beating a little girl with a broken whip. The Italians are sufficiently attached to their children to make this a rare occurrence, and Miss Albino paused to verify it. The whip cut, the child caterwauled, and Miss Albino passed on. It was none of her business.

The room having been hired, one would have to post announcements of the

entertainment in every hotel. Her small private parties, in which they played guessing games and handed round the bag afterwards, were all very well. But in this case there would have to be some real attraction. A conjurer, for instance—but how did one obtain a conjurer in Positano? Perhaps if she could get a singer from Naples . . .

Miss Albino rounded a bend in the road and reached a bridge. At the near end of the bridge was a rustic cart, painted in many colours, drawn by an anaemic mule. At least it appeared to have been drawn by the mule. For the moment the creature was stationary. The driver of the vehicle, evidently almost sick with frenzy, was standing by the side of the mule beating it with a stick. The blows resounded through the mountain passes with a hollow noise. The animal appeared to be asleep. Under the sharper blows occasionally it twitched an ear.

Miss Albino began to run, but the fellow was blind to his danger. Nothing existed for him except the mule.

‘Ah, blighted maledictions,’ he was exclaiming, ‘ah, massacred saints and violated virgins! Ah, manna of St. Andrew and miraculous blood of St. Januarius! Ah, pig, viper! pagan and incestuous mule! Forward, march, proceed, go! Provided you would shoulder your obligations! Sterile, perverted, misallied, bastardly animalistic unbeliever . . .’

Miss Albino hit him on the head.

This was the last straw. The unhappy man spun round, burst into tears, began to run away: all in the same movement. But love had burst its bonds in Miss Albino. A complexion of the spring had undone her. She saw herself instantaneously in a thousand postures: as St. George (but defending the dragon), as St. Francis (but martyred for the little brothers), as Nurse Cavell facing the Huns. She advanced upon the malefactor as he recoiled. She brandished her stout English walking-stick as he backed against the parapet of the bridge. She hit him sharply on the nose.

The man gave a yelp of agony and despair, disappeared backwards over the parapet. Fortunately he had only about twenty feet to fall.

Patting the mule affectionately on the nose (it tried to bite her), Miss Albino set out on her return journey to the hotel. She glowed with achievement. She was almost in her teens again.

Mr. McInvert stood outside the smoking-room door, bracing himself to meet the professor. He listened to the voice droning away inside.

After all, he had done nothing wrong. And perhaps the professor would not mention it. But he must be careful, he must give no cause for scandal in future. Obviously the whole thing must be dropped. He must stop watching the peasants.

Inside the room the professor was saying: ‘I think it would be a good thing if we could get up a party to go to Capri, I feel a crisis approaching. A trip like that might keep us out of mischief.’

‘What sort of crisis?’ asked Mr. Pupillary.

‘A vernal saturnalia.’

Mr. McInvert came in.

‘Ah, McInvert,’ said the professor, ‘Pupillary here was just suggesting a trip to Capri. Inspired by Dr. Arnold-Browne, no doubt. What do you say to that?’

‘I think it would be an excellent idea,’ said Mr. McInvert. This ready acceptance would shew that he had no reasons for wishing to stay at the hotel.

‘Good. We’ll get a regular party together. The boat doesn’t go till Tuesday, so there’s plenty of time.’

Mr. Pupillary wondered whether to refute the professor or not. What assurance to attribute the suggestion to himself! But still, it might be amusing. One had the whole of one’s life before one. And anyway, there was plenty of time to back out of it by Tuesday.

Mr. McInvert sat down.

‘Capri!’ he said heartily. ‘I have always wanted to go to Capri.’

The professor lifted an eyebrow.

Chapter 11

THE weather was so much warmer since the rain that bathing had become an institution. The hotel, preserving the duality of nature, bathed in two factions. The Drawing Room tent, patronised by Miss Prune and Dr. Arnold-Browne, and on one momentous occasion by Miss Albino (who had marbly limbs with bruises on them, like a matronly mushroom, and wore a bathing dress with a sort of petticoat over the bloomers), was pitched on the hotel side of the cove. Somehow characteristically of the Drawing Room—through asceticism perhaps—it had selected decidedly the worse site. The cliff above it was damp, possibly from some sort of drain, and this kept the immediate environs humid. The beach itself was there more shingly than at any other part, and the humidity made the dark sand into a kind of mud. The smell of garlic flowers was blown in that direction by the prevailing wind.

The Smoking Room tent was pitched at the opposite extremity, by common consent, and the beach was divided by an invisible convention. This equator kept the waterfall, and the ruin of the old mill, within the territory of the Smoking Room. So the Smoking Room faction had the benefit of a fresh-water shower bath, of spacious if crumbling rooms for picnics, of dry sand, clean grass, and a fine view, without the scent of flowering garlic.

There was no reason why the Smoking Room should have had the better site, the Drawing Room had actually been the first to peg a claim: no reason, that is to say, except that the Drawing Room seemed to prefer its squalor.

Mr. Pupillary was lying on his tummy in the sand, dressed in a scandalous pair of drawers. The professor, wearing a panama hat well down on his nose, sat beside him, in a deck-chair with red stripes, smoking a cigar. It was after luncheon, and they had the beach to themselves.

‘This love business,’ said the professor, ‘I find it amusing and instructive. Far, far too little has been written on the subject of love. People write poems about it, and smutty novels, and text-books. They talk about the pangs and joys in a very lyrical way, no doubt, and boring old fools like Rabelais make out the one-sided case for robustness, and Havelock Ellis is all very well. But what I complain about is that nobody ever takes a humane view of the matter. There is so much easy scientific thinking to be done about it (like parlour chemistry in 10s. 6d. boxes, within the reach of anybody), and so much humour and admiration to be extracted from it. Why should we be compelled to sigh or coarsely guffaw or knit our brows over the deep-sea hag-fish? The grin, I feel, the kind satiric grin, is so much more appropriate. Real jokes are never laughed at: they sink in, expanding, inexhaustible, incompatible with the hysteria of laughter. Love as a joke is neither a cynical nor a laughable one: it is merely a very, very good joke. It is sweet as well as bitter, and incomparably stimulating. It stimulates wonder. Just think about all your past love affairs dispassionately: about your feelings of their importance, and of your own real importance in Jimmie Jeans’ universe, and of all the people in this small world at present harbouring those feelings, and of their misunderstandings and misconceptions and futility and aspirations. Think what is the physical centre of all these swooning hopes and fears: face the bodily basis of such a pullulating superstructure. Look at our own hotel, for

instance.

‘Poor old McInvert is tottering about up there, leaving notes for somebody in crannies of the rock. Arnold-Browne is trying to write a sonnet to Miss Prune. Miss Menzies is wondering where so-and-so is. And you, my dear boy, must have your reasons for paying no attention to my discourse. Think of that, and all in one hotel! All that soul-searching and heart-burning and jealousy and exaltation on account of Miss Prune. Arnold-Browne walking about pretending to be Sir Galahad—or is it Don Juan? Dear me, and why should Mr. McInvert attempt to emulate the cony?’

‘We haven’t got to the joke yet. The antics of the love-lorn are merely strange and pathetic in themselves. The joke doesn’t come in till you come to me. Here am I, smoking a cigar and digesting that satisfying risotto. None of you lovers even know that we had risotto for luncheon—certainly none of you could say it was a risotto à *foie de volaille*. And yet it was; and yet this Regalia Londres cigar is not unsatisfactory. Not a very grand cigar, but, apart from snobbery, and when one is in good health, an adequate one.

‘I do not have to cudgel my brains for words which will rhyme with Prune: I do not have to scuttle about leaving pieces of paper, which will never be found, under stones in the garden; I do not lie on my tummy tormenting myself about the whereabouts of a certain person, wondering whether she really loves me, and what my parents will say if I marry her. I do not lie awake at night and suffer from indigestion in the morning. My reason is unclouded, my conscience quiescent, and my internal organs are functioning admirably. I am quite sure that it is good to be alive, that angels do not walk upon this earth, and that nobody is worth dying or suffering poverty for. In fact, I am not in love.’

The professor dropped his cigar ash affectionately in the middle of Mr. Pupillary’s back.

‘You have to get the cosmic outlook,’ he continued, ‘and match it with the possibilities of good, happy, quiet, loveless living, before the real preposterousness and mirability of the lover become evident. What a fuss, what a miracle, and what a joke!’

The professor stared out to sea with great good humour.

‘Not,’ he added, ‘that I have never suffered the gentle passion myself. I hardly like to confess how many years of my life have been wasted in exaggerated transports. Not wholly wasted, for they were lovely, in a way . . .’

Some recollection came back to the professor, and he sat still.

‘Love is all right,’ he said, ‘when it keeps the bounds of nature. Hypothetically I can imagine a love which would be the greatest thing in life. But it never is, it never is.’

He brightened visibly.

‘It always bursts its banks, and spoils everything. It slops over. President Roosevelt would never have approved of it. When I was a young man I was always miserable. I was thirty-one before I saw reason. At that age I was an indifferent horseman and a drooping romantic. Then on one cataclysmic night (I had been hunting—those were great days before the war—and had enjoyed a hot bath) I read that poem of Byron’s about the night being made for loving. I put it down and wrote a poem myself, a poem which I consider a great one:

By God, it's good to be alive
With a tired body and a mind accepting,
With whisky and warm fire and music and tobacco
After a day's hunting.

Love and life, these are hard questions:
Let them be hard and leave their secret deep.
Happy men know the day was made for moving,
And the night for sleep.'

The professor waited for applause. There was none. He glanced at Mr. Pupillary suspiciously.

'Well?'

Mr. Pupillary, who was looking straight down into the sand, made an indistinct movement and said: 'Yes, extraordinary.'

The professor felt quietly for his walking-stick, leaned across with feline caution and brought it down sharply on Mr. Pupillary's behind. Mr. Pupillary gave a startled exclamation and began to scramble to his feet. Then, thinking better of something, he lay down again, giving the professor a baneful look.

'Listen,' said the professor sternly, and opened his mouth to proceed with the discourse.

But it remained open. He had forgotten what he was talking about.

'Love,' said the professor, 'love.'

He repeated the word several times in the effort to regain his thread.

'What I object to in the modern attitude to love is that there is no attempt at practical enquiry. People fuss about with *Asterina Gibbosa*, if they are inquisitive at all, but nobody ever indulges in practical inquisitiveness. It is no good asking why the body behaves in certain ways. Psychological and physiological approaches, the surgeon's interest, take us nowhere. And all the time there is the quite obvious and useful approach of commonsense. By enquiring into the nature of love as a personal nuisance, without any specialised knowledge, one can reach any number of valuable practical conclusions.

'For instance, when we use the word "Love" we refer to a number of different states. It is one of those words which are completely ambiguous. If I were the Prime Minister, I should put forward a bill called the Four Titles (Erotic) Introduction Act. It would be calculated to define the feelings which we loosely refer to as "love," and to give them separate names.

'The Agapemone, like the other house, has many mansions; our poor single word covers a multitude of sins. Think of your own affairs, for instance. Were they all the same? Did you love all your young ladies in the same way? I myself, and I don't think the experience is singular, have been in love with two people at once. There was no infidelity to either party, and the states of feeling did not encroach upon one another. The point was that I was in lust with one of them, and in something which I might call emotional affection with the other.

'Now consider. Suppose the one after whom I lusted had felt emotional affection for

me, and suppose I had proposed to her. According to the present limits of the English language I should have informed her that I loved her, and she would have said that she loved me. But do you think we should have been happily married?

‘No. There is nothing for it but an Act of Parliament. After that Mr. A. would inform Miss B. that he was in lust with her, or in sentiment with her, or in sympathy or in desire, instead of merely claiming that he was generically in love. Then there might be some hope of an understanding. Only, of course, we should not be able to use those words: they have already been thumbed and distorted out of any definite meaning. We should have to legislate for new words entirely. *E.g.* *Yah*, *Ooh*, *Hoy*, and *Glub* (Saxon), or—but I can’t trouble to invent words of Latin derivation. Besides, they would be distorted by their use in Latin.

‘In proceeding to define these words, in giving them a legal meaning, we should have to recognise the two main elements of love—sympathy and lust. Lust explains itself (what a good word, to have maintained its integrity against centuries of use!), and sympathy we must try to fix by putting together several ambiguous words and leaving it to their L.C.M. Sympathy is friendship, affection, liking, mental and emotional attraction, trust. For the sake of clarity we must define it as something absolutely asexual.

‘These two elements, then, combine in any number of shades: literally in any number. But for the sake of our parliamentary measure, we must confine ourselves arbitrarily to the four main compounds.

‘*Hoy* is what we have mentioned as sympathy or friendship—an element. *Yah* is what we have defined as lust. *Ooh* is a synthesis of sympathy and lust in which the lust predominates, and *Glub* is a similar synthesis in which sympathy is the predominating factor. But why make all this fuss?

‘Well, the answer is obvious. Think of Othello, the greatest tragic figure in the world. He loved Desdemona, and Desdemona loved him—if we use the word “love” without definition. The whole tragedy of Othello was that he failed to realise the different kinds of love, failed to understand that their union was at cross-purposes. The Moor was stupid, not so much in failing to see that she was faithful, as in failing to admit that the empire of Desdemona’s mind could not march with his own. She loved him as much as she could in her way, and he in his. They did not understand each other; they never guessed how many kinds of love there were. That was why there was no explanation, only a grand misunderstanding, and a dead woman in a bed.

‘And then, when we have reached this stage in the argument, when we have admitted the different kinds of love and the importance of recognising them, another question presents itself insistently. If there are four main kinds of love, which is the best? Miss B., when Mr. A. informs her of his *Ooh* (under the new régime), may well wonder whether *Ooh* is good enough to justify matrimony.

‘What, then, is the value of *Yah* (lust)? People are too cavalier with lust. It is thrown out of court, too frequently, by highbrows as well as Puritans, without a hearing. We must see that justice is done at last.

‘True lust, then (N.S. *Yah*), is not promiscuous. When a character in a modern sexual novel says “I must go to London and have a woman,” he is not stating a case for lust. This is not lust. It is civilised idiocy, the bane of having a mind. His feelings are not directly

provoked by the proper provocative, but are having an adventitious provocation thrust upon them by the mind. For true lust is conditioned as much as any other reflex, is honest, is directed towards a definite part of a definite person. It is not the sort of thing which goes on between a man and a chance acquaintance out of Piccadilly: not a matter which can be satisfied with anybody: it is an experience which is fallen into with a definite person. True lust comes of itself, provoked by and associated with a concrete single stimulus. It is monogamous, and extremely satisfactory. It has one advantage, which is singular: contrary to the general idea, it is not followed by regret.

‘By proceeding to discuss desire (N.S. Ooh) let us attempt to find out why regret takes place—*omne animal post coitum triste*—and why it is absent in proper lust. Well, we said that desire was a combination of lust and sympathy in which the former predominated. The solution leaps to the eye. A combination implies two elements, and the two elements must work together. The coition of a person suffering from Ooh must be a double coition. It must therefore be synchronised. Two horses are drawing this vehicle, and if the timing is faulty the movement will fail. If the emotional and physical satisfactions do not coincide there will be something lacking in the whole, a sense of jerk, regret. And, of course, it is a matter of great complication to make them coincide. We are no longer dealing with the comparatively simple mechanisms of the body, but we are also dealing with the much more tangled machinery of the emotions. And, worst of all, we are compelled to deal with them together. That is why the realisation of desire is so often followed by regret, while the realisation of lust need seldom be. The coition of lust is a purely physical matter, does not have to go in double harness; and, indeed, the only thing which one can reasonably regret about it is that it is over so soon.

‘We proceed to sentiment (N.S. Glub). We defined it as a combination of sympathy and lust in which the former predominated. There is going to be more sympathy, then, than lust: more of the emotional than the physical. So it is going to be even more troublesome than desire. For in desire, although we were dealing with two components, the physical was, after all, the major partner. We noted that the physical mechanism was incomparably the easier, the more tractable of the two. But now the less easy, the less tractable, the emotional component is the major partner. We are still in double harness, in a sort of tandem; but now the more nervous horse is in the lead. And so, in sentiment, failure will be more frequent than ever: regret more constant.

‘Finally we come to sympathy itself (N.S. Hoy). It is an element, not a synthesis, and therefore the complications of a tandem coition do not obtrude. In any case, since we defined it as asexual, no physical coition will take place. This does not exclude an emotional or mental one: and such a coition, since we are claiming that the mind’s mechanism is more complicated than the body’s, will, on the face of it, be difficult. But not necessarily difficult. We find ourselves in sympathy with people, as the word implies, when their feelings are similar to ours. And if the mechanisms are similar they ought to be able to run together without very much trouble.

‘We are now in a position to define the comparative values of our four titles. The elements, sympathy and lust (Hoy and Yah), are the least complicated. They both give great satisfaction; but it is a satisfaction not very difficult of attainment, because of the lack of complication. I am unsure which of the two is more valuable. Lust’s is a more piercing pleasure, sympathy’s is a more lasting one. When we are inclined to prefer the

delights of lust we must remember that the whole of our life will not be passed in bed. If we vacillate towards the pleasures of sympathy, we must yet remember that a good deal of it will be. The problem appears to me insoluble, though for various reasons I should myself incline to sympathy.

‘I am in no doubt, however, as to the comparative values of desire and sentiment. They are both superior to lust and sympathy, because they are both more difficult of achievement. The more rarely one succeeds in a thing, the more satisfactory is success. And, on the same principle, sentiment is superior to desire for the same reason. Hoy and Yah are good, Ooh is better, but the highest and rarest form of human happiness resides in Glub.

‘Love as sentiment, the divine Glub, is the love which we felt in adolescence. So rare, so difficult was it, that we have been schooling ourselves to escape its raptures ever since. Then mental throes, anguish, and ecstasy, swayed on the agony of a knife edge. That Love was the food for Fortune’s tooth. I know where my mistress’s body is, and without impossible strain I can calculate its desires and fidelity from its motions. But my mistress’s eyes cover her soul, and that escapes my embraces: if it exists, if it exists. That was the love for misunderstanding, for chances missed, for jealousy and fear; but also, since the most difficultly achieved, for the highest joy of achievement, and for the fine pathetic fancies of the human race: for constancy, patience, aid, complete reunion—for the marriage of two minds. But bodily minds, the height of human rapture.’

The professor looked at Mr. Pupillary in triumph, but there was no response. The boy breathed evenly, eloquently of his condition.

The professor quietly gathered together Mr. Pupillary’s clothes and towel; chuckled revengefully; carried them with him up the stairway to the hotel.

Although it was tea-time, Mr. Pupillary slept on. The beach seemed quieter after the monologue, the sun poured down, the sandflies hopped. One of them bit Mr. Pupillary under the armpit, but he did not stir. He was dreaming of Costanza, was it in Yah or Glub? . . . and that was more than the professor had done for all his talking.

Chapter 12

AFTER dinner Mr. McInvert did not take up his usual seat in front of the fire. The succeeding days had found him progressively more restless. His eyes were hot in his head, and roamed about whilst he was speaking to you. The awful thing about them was that they never looked towards the canyon where the peasants were blasting. They roved the whole hemisphere on either side of it, above it in the sky, and below it at his feet. The canyon remained unvisited, almost consciously cut out of the existing universe with a fret-saw: a vacuum, an aching hole in space, gaping with lack of visitation.

And in this hole one was conscious of Mr. McInvert's imagination horribly tunnelling. His eyes evaded it, but his mind toiled in it day-long, night-long for that matter, a mining monster. Such a dragon as Mr. McInvert's imagination then was would have been terrible to meet. It was a dragon of jealousy, fear, hatred, and desire: but it was also, which made it so much worse, a dragon of innocence—a famished dragon with straining eyes, pathetic purpose, and full of a perplexing effort against doom.

When one talked to Mr. McInvert one was conscious of that hole by overpowering telepathy. He paid no attention to it so strenuously, and of course paid none to what one was saying, that the gap engulfed the whole conversation. All Mr. McInvert's universe, oneself included, disappeared inside it: merging into the avid horrors of chaos, of infinity and mathematical abstraction.

Mr. McInvert was too restless to sit before the smoking-room fire, and the terrace plucked him irresistibly. From the terrace one could hardly look at anything but the canyon, and Mr. McInvert could never go there in the daytime. But now, at night, when the work was no longer going forward, he could visit it with impunity. He could sit here in the darkness and pry with his tired eyes into the place where the gap had been. He could leave a little money behind the stone. He could verify and strengthen the recollections of his mental dragon, allowing it to roam about, sniffing.

The professor was coming out from dinner with Mr. Pupillary, on their way to the smoking-room, when he caught sight of the back of Mr. McInvert's head in the moonlight. Faint silvery beams played about the forest of his ears.

'Hullo,' said the professor, 'something gone wrong with the curriculum. What's taken him out there, I wonder?'

Mr. Pupillary opened his mouth to provide the solution.

'Of course, of course,' added the professor hurriedly. 'The question was merely rhetorical. We must save him from himself.'

He opened the French windows, and stepped out, followed by his satellite.

'Well,' he said, 'and how's the brow of Egypt?'

Mr. McInvert turned his eyes towards him slowly, breaking upwards from the pit. Another interruption.

The old gentleman drew up his chair confidentially.

‘We represent,’ he added, ‘more devils than vast hell can hold. We thought that lunacy might prove a distraction. The same thing, only different.’

Mr. McInvert was still silent.

‘You don’t seem pleased to see us.’

Mr. McInvert woke to the needs of civilisation.

‘But I am,’ he said, ‘delighted. I was thinking of something else.’

‘And what?’

‘Oh, life,’ said Mr. McInvert. ‘I was thinking about life in general.’

‘What better topic for speculation! We all possess it; and yet how seldom we reflect about it. There it is, in and around each of us, like Saint Theresa’s sea in the fish, and possessing a million aspects. Yet we, the plebs, wander about in the dining-rooms of existence whilst you alone, one just person, are staunch enough to face it here.’

Mr. Pupillary was wondering behind the cloak of darkness. What did the old man think he was after? Was he bating the fellow, or trying to cheer him up, or merely talking for the pleasure of hearing his own voice?

‘But in which aspect,’ continued the professor, ‘were you addressing the problem of our being? Were you regarding it psychologically; trying, for instance, to identify consciousness at the apex of afference and efference; or were you looking at it from the point of view of biology or of morals?’

Mr. McInvert behaved sensibly, considering his state. He had the wit to avoid biology and psychology, thus keeping the conversation at a pitch which might remain within his grasp.

‘I was thinking about the morals of life.’

‘There,’ said the professor, with great approbation, ‘I knew you were. One of the most sensible men I’ve ever met.’

Mr. Pupillary asked in a rather tired voice: ‘Are we to have a lecture?’ After all, he reflected, one way of passing the evening was as good as another. Costanza would be in bed by now. (He had found out her name.)

The professor looked hurt.

‘Really,’ he said, ‘I don’t want to talk to anybody, if it’s a bore.’

Mr. Pupillary: ‘What were you going to say?’

The professor: ‘I can’t say it now. Pupillary has made me feel shy by introducing this lecture-room atmosphere. No, I shan’t say another word.’

Mr. Pupillary: ‘Oh, come, Professor! You know you will.’

‘Actually,’ said the professor, after a moment’s thought, ‘I suppose you’re right.’

Mr. Pupillary: ‘Well, get it over now.’

The professor: ‘I must first recover from the slight. Let McInvert tell us what he was thinking.’

Mr. McInvert hastened to disengage himself.

‘Oh no,’ he said, ‘I hadn’t any definite train of thought. I was just reacting to life in general.’

‘And what was the reaction?’

‘Pretty mouldy,’ said Mr. McInvert.

‘McInvert,’ said the professor, pulling up, ‘holds that Life is mouldy. There are three of us here, quite enough for a symposium. Now, what is your considered judgment, Pupillary?’

‘I think life is dreadful.’

The professor opened his mouth.

‘No,’ he said. ‘We can’t talk out here. Come back to the smoking-room and be comfortable.’

‘Life,’ said the professor after they had settled down again, ‘is after all too large a question for discussion. It lays itself open to theory only, and theory is a mistake. All discussions on life should be practical, should be confined to a single circumscribed aspect which is open to applied criticism. For instance, instead of discussing whether life is pleasant or not we ought to discuss the way to extract pleasure from life. In this way we may improve our pleasure. I was thinking along these very lines in my bath this evening.’

The professor put his finger-tips together like Sherlock Holmes.

‘Life is not sufficiently enjoyed by any of us, because we do not take a properly minute interest in perfecting it. We only notice perfection in the more thrilling experiences. In love, for instance. Lawrence’s gamekeeper had been sufficiently interested to note that the perfect coition comes seldom in a lifetime. I think he said only once. But this is true, though less immediately striking as strange and pathetic, of all other activities. We strive to perfect the coitus—at any rate the gamekeeper did—but we leave these myriad minor enjoyments to look after themselves. This is a serious blemish. It means that people do not try to relish their lives. Almost everything satisfactory should be tasted critically, like port. Not necessarily with a too conscious control, but more consciously than at present. And we should do our best to deduce from the taste the ingredients which are wanting, in order to supply them: to interest ourselves in, and make a hobby of, improving every one of our pleasant experiences. Old people do this often with great success. I knew an old man who possessed fourteen pipes and filled every one of them every morning before breakfast. He used to lay them in a carefully dressed row and smoke them during the day. No doubt this was an attempt to order his smoking in the best possible manner. He made a hobby of his life. Too few do so.’

‘We ought,’ added the professor, ‘to be as particular about the exact relish of our baths, for instance, as about that *ignis fatuus* which fascinated Lawrence. The bath should be entered warm, and raised, *after entry*, to hot. Thus the ineffable warmth, wetness, milkiness, and all-fondling embraces come on us with perception and gradual tremors, filling the winter night with bliss.’

A bluebottle interrupted the professor by flying into the fire and bouncing out again. It lay on its back, buzzing vigorously.

Mr. McInvert leaned over and looked at it. Its wings had been singed down to the stumps.

‘Tread on it,’ said the professor, who wanted to go on with his discourse.

Mr. McInvert raised his foot, hesitated, stirred the bluebottle with the poker.

‘It seems a shame to kill it,’ he said.

‘It’s kinder,’ said Mr. Pupillary.

Mr. McInvert watched the bluebottle meditatively. He had not been listening to the professor.

‘No,’ he said, ‘I don’t believe it is. I believe I’d rather go on living, even without my arms, than be absolutely dead.’

Besides, he thought to himself, there was something else. . . . That lizard, if he could make up for it somehow. . . .

Mr. McInvert took a matchbox from his pocket and emptied out the matches. After some difficulty he got the bluebottle inside.



The moon and stars coated the peninsula with their powdery light, so that the whole scene was of the kind which is said to beggar description. Indeed, there is something impossible in a fine night at Positano.

The sea of deep blue but liquid velvet bore the tiny boats of fishermen upon its bosom, and in each boat was a bright lantern which struck down into the water with an arrow of gold. These beams, these lances of stabbing fire, plunged to the nadir, or, taking the surface course, trickled across the secret, sleek buttocks of the waves. Their paths, and the path of the moon’s shedding, stretched for miles. The peninsula itself was in that condition of frosty visibility when the moon throws a faint shadow. One could see the clouds, distinguishable but indistinct, meeting the high and placid mountains at their crest.

Quite high on the buttresses of Monte S. Angelo a boy, who kept goats, was sitting on some ruinous stone steps, looking down. From where he sat he could see beyond Capo d’Orso on the one side and Capri on the other. Forty miles of moonlit panorama stretched below him. The houses glimmered with a faint blue-grey, the trees were black and toy-like, even the lanterns of the fishing boats were only golden needles. Everything was shaded in pastels—a characteristic of the peninsula by night as well as by day.

The boy was half-witted. His face was like a faun’s, and he spoke no known language. He was watching a figure on the steps below him: those steps, of rough-hewn boulders roughly laid, which stretched up from Positano in an hour’s climb.

The boy watched the climber without interest, saw him pause, mop his brow, and stare across the sea. Then he chose a stone and threw it dexterously.

Dr. Arnold-Browne was the climber, a victim of moral qualms.

One was a doctor and one knew the facts of life. As far as one was concerned personally, this Christianity business didn’t cut much ice. It was all right for old wives, the doctor kept telling himself stoutly, but for a medico it didn’t do. A doctor, surely, must know where things were kept. . . . One lived, and one died, and in the meantime one tried to enjoy oneself. How ridiculous to forgo enjoyment, as a concession to the ‘soul’ which would survive after death! When one was a corpse, one just rotted. He had attended too many death-beds to be a believer in any measurable moment at which the bright little man

popped out of the departing brain and shook his wings.

The doctor sought to convince himself with these apostrophes, but sought in vain. The shades of Rugby and Caius, or wherever it was that he had been bred to be a Hawk, pled against him mutely. He would have referred to them as a still small voice.

He could not say that life or sex were what they seemed. Mercury for syphilis he knew about, but love defeated him. Also he was incapable of stating the case for either side. All the time that he was struggling with the statement of medical agnosticism there were interferences from other spheres. 'Never,' his father had said, taking him aside on the platform at Paddington, 'never do anything *base*, Tommy. You know what I mean. Never do anything *base*.' And then there was that sermon in Chapel about the sin against the Holy Ghost. Dr. Arnold-Browne had a hidden fear of the Holy Ghost, occasioned by its unfortunate nomenclature. A ghost, a creature in a sheet, which lurked round corners waiting for him, ready to billow out with a shriek of retribution: holy and horrible.

One couldn't be sure. Perhaps there was something in what these padres said, after all. Failure of the heart's action, angina pectoris, cancer of the womb: these were physical matters which one understood. But why the cancer, and what ghostly pang attended the parting of the vessels of one's heart? How did the world begin? Where did one's consciousness go when one died? The thing was inexplicable without a God. And if a God, then possibly a Christ, possibly a Holy Ghost. After all, it was the padres' business. Perhaps they knew about it. Perhaps it was best to be on the safe side.

And on the top of this puzzle was the complication of decency. Could an old Rugbeian, an old Hawk, seduce a virgin with protruding teeth? Seduction was compatible with goodness at games certainly, for none of his friends ever talked of anything else: but was it compatible with teeth? There was something about Miss Prune which hinted that it might be caddish to seduce her. To buy a mistress in Leicester Square was a matter which could be boasted of with one's hand upon one's tie, but the conquest of Miss Prune—virginal, procrustean—wasn't there something about that . . . something un-English?

Definitely, there was. Dr. Arnold-Browne knew in his heart of hearts that he ought not to deflower Miss Prune. It might be dangerous from the social point of view; it would be caddish from the point of view of every decent fellow; and the Christian God, in whom he secretly believed, would have his wrath and indignation justly provoked.

But Dr. Arnold-Browne wanted to do it. That was why he was stumping up an endless stairway in the moonlight, with his mind in a series of undulating layers which broke surface alternately. Beneath the layers of medical agnosticism, superstitious fear, and moral decent fellowship, surged the mighty layer of Miss Prune herself. Just as he was drawing to a conclusion about the Holy Ghost, that righteous spectre would dislimn and fade: its lineaments would melt into Miss Prune's, often outrageously. Instead of the Holy Ghost, Dr. Arnold-Browne would find his mental eye fixed vividly upon Miss Prune's navel, shining in a bathing dress.

Then he would perspire up the stairway faster than ever, murmuring, like the bishop: Down, Satan, down!

The fit of lust would be succeeded by a mood of agony. Mrs. Arnold-Browne had for the last five years been useless to him. Here he was, bursting with possibilities but compelled to be sterile: the sense of wastage filled him with despair. Oh, Elizabeth, he

would murmur, Elizabeth Prune, I want you. I want you. I want you.

It was like the advertisement for Pears' Soap, with the baby half out of the bath clawing for it. Dr. Arnold-Browne's soul was a baby, gross and infantile.

The climbing figure struck one of the roads which intersected the stairway at right angles, and paused for breath. It turned seawards, mopping its brow. The moonlight absorbed it in peace.

'Oh, God,' soliloquised the doctor, 'what a lovely night. I wish I were dead.'

It was at this propitious moment that the goat-boy threw his stone. He was two hundred feet above the doctor, and the stone weighed twenty ounces. One might try to calculate its momentum.

Dr. Arnold-Browne was aware of a screaming whirr, boring through air and night. He ducked instinctively as the projectile exploded at his feet, bursting into a hundred tinkling flints. He straightened himself with an oath, peering upwards along the shoulder of the bluff, only to duck again and run like a rabbit, as another stone smashed itself on the parapet beside him. Then the moonlight became filled with the crescendo of approaching missiles, and the reports with which they landed. The doctor ran, zig-zagged, cursed. The half-witted goatherd laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

Chapter 13

IT was noon, and Mr. McInvert was sitting on the terrace. He was alone, except for the bluebottle. A little sun, he had thought, might do it good. He did not expect it to live, but he hoped it might: he hoped it might go on living even as a wingless creature dependent on him. It was boring that he should have to tend it—he had no maternal instincts—but he was sorry for it, and it would certainly die if he turned it loose in its present state. It would never be able to find food. Secretly, in his heart of hearts, he hoped that it might grow a new pair of wings, before next summer perhaps, and fly away.

So he had soaked a biscuit in water and left it in the matchbox. Now he sat beside the box. He had broken off one of the smaller sides and balanced his spectacles on top, thus providing a glass window to the hospital. The bluebottle, disturbed by the sun, buzzed intermittently with its mutilated stumps. It kept walking up the sides and turning somersaults.

Mr. McInvert tired of the bluebottle. Where, he wondered, where on earth had everybody gone to? Then he remembered it was Sunday.

There was no sound of blasting from the ravine where the peasants worked, no sound of clashing needles and small-talk from the open window of the drawing-room behind him. The only faint noises came from the dining-room, where luncheon was being laid. Mr. McInvert sat in the sunshine, motionless as the peninsula. For days now he had been too restive to sit down at all, but to-day he was exhausted. He sat, recuperating for the passions of Monday. None of the peasants were working.

From Mr. McInvert's stillness one would have thought that he was thinking. But he was not: he was only feeling. To-morrow he was to go to Capri on this wild-goose trip; he supposed it might be a distraction. He would be away from the possibility of watching the garden alterations for two whole days. It would be hell to be away from them, but it was hell to be near them. One would see.

Mr. McInvert lay there in a kind of apathy, his eyes fixed upon the roof of the English church, below him in the piazza. He was not aware that he was looking at it.

The congregation under the roof were also unaware that their roof was being looked at. They had other matters to attend to. And the church itself was presumably neuter, impervious to admiration or interest—fortunately, perhaps, for it excited little of either.

The English church in Positano must have been built, the professor always used to maintain, by that famous mythological bishop of Bristol who travelled through the Continent half a century ago, giving his name to at least one hotel in every township that he visited. It was not, the professor admitted, quite the sort of church that he would have expected that bishop to build: but he attributed it to him, because nobody less travelled would have been likely to think of building a church at all in such a peaceful haven as Positano. Architecturally it did not do the bishop credit. It was made of tin.

The professor used to enjoy talking about this church as much as anything else in Italy. 'Look,' he would say, drawing you to the edge of the terrace, 'at the houses of Positano. Notice that pleasing roof-form, like an inverted pie-dish. Observe the colours of

the plaster: pink and blue and yellow. The Italian church looks like something in a Russian ballet. It has coloured tiles, and stripes painted all over it. You will agree with me, it is a pleasing scene.'

'And there,' he would say, suddenly pointing gleefully in the necessary direction, 'is the English church. Look at it, my dear fellow. I promise you it is exactly what you see. Corrugated iron, with red paint on the window ledges and diamond panes. There is a notice-board outside with gothic lettering. Come down with me this afternoon, and we'll look over the interior. It well repays a visit.'

In the afternoon he took you there, willy-nilly. 'Now,' he would say, holding you affectionately by the arm, 'shut your eyes. Open them. Godstone, or is it East Croydon? Shut your eyes again.' He would turn you round, facing the piazza. 'Now open them. Positano. Behind you Godstone, before you Positano. Contiguous and at peace, just like paradise in the Scriptures. I feel like the little child sitting on the cockatrice's den, or whatever it was.'

Then he would make you lean against the iron railings—it even had iron railings—and begin to talk.

'But seriously,' he would say, 'what an act of faith! All the way from Croydon to Positano the true Church preserves its unshakable integrity. It seems to me marvellous and great, something really impressive. There they are in the suburbs, the free-thinking pastors with large congregations and saintly broad-minded reputations. One wouldn't believe that they existed. But they do, they do. Going one better than God himself, they have given us a tangible proof of their existence, a real tin tabernacle which you can touch and see—a real eyesore, a piece of real appropriate symbolism, a sign from heaven. There must be strength behind a movement which can build churches like that in this beautiful piazza. A devilish power, I admit, a strength bubbling from the pit, but admirable all the same. All manifestations of energy, even of diabolic energy, are great. And what energy to conserve the pattern of, to transport the materials for, and to erect that edifice on the shores of the Mediterranean. How Blake would have exclaimed!'

He always saved up his last observation till you were nearly home. Then he remarked:

'The delightful thing about it is that all the fishermen and peasantry of Positano consider the English church far more wonderful than their own. For them it is a miracle. They have never seen anything like it before. And of course they're quite right. The English church is more marvellous than the Catholic one. It is so easy to be beautiful here; and that is all their own building has succeeded in achieving. We, on the other hand, have pulled off the superior miracle of real horror: in spite of the sun, in spite of the blue sky, in the face of the sea.

'That is why I attribute the foundation to the bishop of Bristol. Such a travelled man must have been wise. I like to think that he realised all the possibilities of the situation. He built that church, with an eye that relished its atrocities, correctly forecasting their effect. I hear that the people of Positano are becoming Protestants by the score.'

This was a piece of rhetorical mendacity, as Mr. McInvert would have seen if his eye had been able to pierce the roof. Had he been able to see through corrugated iron, a quarter of a mile away, he would have found himself in the middle of matins: and he would have noticed that the church was not overcrowded with proselytes.

A seedy clergyman, with boils, was conducting the service. One wondered who the bishop of Europe was, and why he had selected this particular example to disseminate the Gospels. In a high harsh voice he neighed the verses of the ninety-second psalm. On the left-hand side of the altar Miss Albino, who earned a small salary by doing so, was playing the harmonium. On her right, facing the stricken clergyman in the second row of rush-bottomed chairs, stood most of the Drawing Room faction—Mrs. Skimlit, that is to say, the Misses Cowfold, Mrs. Arnold-Browne, Mrs. Prune, without her daughter, and Frau Kunst. The latter visited the English church because they told her it was Protestant. In the fourth row of chairs stood a pathetic deputation from the Smoking Room; Anne, with her father and mother. Otherwise the church was empty.

Mrs. Skimlit was erect and hard. She held her Prayer Book in a gloved hand, with a vice-like grip. The Misses Cowfold shared a Prayer Book. They drooped together, vast and fruitful, a fit subject for Rubens; except that they were clothed, and dripped with generous festoons of wooden beads. Anne Menzies was thinking that they looked like two cows leaning over a gate. Certainly there was something of Hera in their bovine eyes—so much so that the professor might have been inclined to turn himself into a hornet and complete the analogy.

Mrs. Arnold-Browne was looking out of the window as well as she could between the leads. Nobody ever paid any attention to Mrs. Arnold-Browne, perhaps because her husband had set the fashion. The doctor had ceased to notice her years ago. So little was she noticed that she has scarcely previously been noticed in this book. And yet she existed. In happier circumstances she might have resembled Mrs. Menzies. She was a small, quiet woman, who spent much of her time looking out of windows, as she was doing now. If anybody had looked at her at this moment, they would have been surprised to see that she was thinking.

‘But mine horn,’ sang Mrs. Skimlit in a firm clear soprano, ‘shall be exalted like the horn of an unicorn; for I am anointed with fresh oil.’

Curiously enough, the couple that Mrs. Arnold-Browne was thinking about, as she looked out of the window and Mrs. Skimlit sang about her horn, were within her line of sight: at least, the mouth of their cave was.

[Dr. Arnold-Browne had taken Miss Prune to do a little photography. On the hillside above the hotel, a few hundred feet above the point at which the town might be said to have ended, existed one of those natural archways in the rock which are a characteristic of Southern Italy. At the base of this archway was a small grotto or cavern, both picturesque and convenient. It was convenient that it should be picturesque, for the doctor had been able to suggest the archway as a suitable subject for photography. He had borne the spot in mind for some time. In fact, as soon as Dr. Arnold-Browne had decided that it would be wrong to seduce Miss Prune, the poor girl’s fate had been sealed. His mind was at rest, and his body therefore was in a position to dictate his conduct.

On this bright Sunday morning he had decided to lead her to the place of sacrifice: not as a sacrifice, of course, but to see what it might have been like. Now that he had made up his mind not to seduce Miss Prune, it would be quite all right to take her there. Dr.

Arnold-Browne assured his guardian angel that it would be as safe as houses. It wasn't as if he wanted to seduce her. If he had intended to, of course it would be a wrong thing to take her. But now that everything was decided, now that there was to be no question of seduction at all, what possible objection could there be to photographing an archway?

Even if they went inside the grotto afterwards—to take a photograph looking outwards, in a natural frame—what harm could there be? It was all as right as rain. Even if there were, at most, a kiss . . .

So when Mrs. Arnold-Browne looked out of the church window the doctor was saying, with boyish enthusiasm—or ever so nearly with boyish enthusiasm:

‘By golly, how nice and cosy it is in here! I vote we sit down and have a bit of a rest.’

‘Oh, do let's,’ said Miss Prune.]

‘There's a friend for little children,’ sang Mrs. Skimlit piercingly. ‘Above the bright blue sky.’

Mrs. Arnold-Browne started involuntarily, and looked out of the window. She thought she had seen them going up the mountain. Up there, the bright blue sky . . .

Somehow the atmosphere of the church was not concentrated. It was such a fine day; the sun beat down so enthusiastically upon the corrugated iron; perhaps, if one might say so without irreligion, there was something tiresome in that clergyman's voice.

Miss Albino, strumming mechanically for the little children, began to wander in her mind. She had no dogs now. It was impossible to keep them in hotels, in Italy. Perhaps it was as well. When her dearest darling little Peko died. . . . She had nobody to love her now. But she herself could still love—unselfishly, platonically, without return—could still love the poor galled nags of the cab-drivers, the outcast mongrels which one found being kicked about the streets. There's a friend for little mongrels. . . . A love which never changes. . . . Love, love, love. Miss Albino shut her eyes and swayed to the passion of the music.

Anne Menzies was not paying much attention to the service either. Mr. Pupillary had come to church with her on the last two Sundays, for a joke. But he had been preoccupied lately, had been going off somewhere or other on his own, and had excused himself from church to-day on the grounds of letter-writing. He had always maintained that he never wrote letters. And then there was that girl—at least it might have been Mr. Pupillary and a girl. The day before yesterday he had stayed out to supper, saying he was going on some expedition or other. She had so wanted to see him, for just a little while, that she had waited up. She had waited on the porch for more than an hour, so that she might meet him casually, in the darkness, on her way to the post. And then a carrozza had driven by with a man and a girl in it. They seemed to be getting on very well together. It was so difficult to tell by the tiny lights of the carriage lanterns, but the outline of the man's hat had looked like Mr. Pupillary's . . .

Anne Menzies's eye followed Mrs. Arnold-Browne's out of the window.

[The private beach, where the hotel bathed, was invisible from the church window. On the beach was the ruined mill, and in the mill, invisible not only from the church but from everywhere else, sat Mr. Pupillary and Costanza. Or rather Costanza sat on Mr. Pupillary. His right hand slapped and caressed her buttocks, his left hand strayed along her lap. They were both dressed in their Sunday clothes. Whenever Mr. Pupillary's left hand strayed too high Costanza put her little fingers over it and said, 'Cosa fai?' Whenever Costanza said 'Cosa fai?' Mr. Pupillary replied, 'Niente.' Then he started again from the knee.]

The clergyman with boils was preaching.

'My dear friends,' he said, 'the Mission to the Pawnees of Sarawak . . .'

Poor Pawnees, thought Mrs. Menzies charitably, how lucky there was to be a mission to them. She imagined them like little prawns, all pink, with their eyes on stalks. Or was it shrimps that were pink? Or did they only go pink, after they were boiled, like lobsters? Anyway, the missionary would arrive, in a white surplice, and would preach to the prawns out of the Prayer Book—wagging it up and down like the clergyman in the penny-in-the-slot executions—and the prawns would wag their stalky eyes to and fro in a mysterious and graceful rhythm . . .

Mr. Menzies nudged her awake in time to make the ascription as was most justly due.

['It's cold in here,' said Dr. Arnold-Browne, 'after the sun outside. Sit closer and warm up.'

He put his arm round Miss Prune, and tapped her thigh in a comradely sort of way. Miss Prune snuggled a little.]

'Hymn 210,' said the clergyman. 'The two hundred and tenth hymn. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity.'

Mrs. Prune opened her hymn-book absentmindedly. She hoped her girlie was having a nice time with her photographs. She had always been so keen, always so clever at one hobby or another. It was kind of the doctor to take an interest and explain all about apertures and exposures. Mrs. Prune herself had never been able to understand what one exposed . . .

[The doctor's voice was hoarse, his eyes shifty. He seemed to have difficulty in moving from one position to another.

'Come,' he said, and swung Miss Prune upon his knee.

'What are you doing?' asked Miss Prune weakly.

'Nothing.'

But, in this case, it was a lie.

‘Don’t,’ said Miss Prune, ‘don’t! Don’t!’

He did, however.]

In the church Mrs. Skimlit clenched her hymn-book.

Love is kind and suffers long,
Love is meek and thinks no wrong,
Love than death itself more strong;
Therefore give us Love.

As the last verse died away, Mrs. Arnold-Browne and Anne Menzies joined hopefully in the Amen.

They filed out reverently, and the clergyman began to tussle with his surplice. His collar had been scratching the boil at the back of his neck. He must take a cascara to-night.

[Costanza and Mr. Pupillary were still seated in the ruined mill.

‘Cosa fai?’

‘Niente.’

Mr. Pupillary began to begin again.]

The returning church parade passed the steps of the Catholic church. Exhausted by the oven of their own devotions, the Misses Cowfold, who were too fat to stand the heat, peered at the dark interior through the door quite enviously. Two or three crouching figures knelt passively in the gloom; there was a smell of incense, quiet sounds, a dim light. Mrs. Skimlit did not look in. The smell of incense had been quite enough.

She was still stiff with indignation when the party came round the last corner, into sight of Mr. McInvert. Still sitting motionless in the deck-chair, he regarded Mrs. Skimlit’s distant advancing figure apathetically. She moved like a ramrod from feet to forehead. Then there was a wobble. The black dress, the black hat, were the two rigid arms of a metal flail: in between was the high snow-white crown of her hair, a tremulous joint. Mrs. Skimlit was an asymmetrical flail to scourge the Catholics. She also looked rather like a music-hall turn, a far-too-forbidding Nellie Wallace balancing plates upon her head.

Mr. McInvert moved uneasily and looked the other way.

From high above the hotel the steps lead down from Monte S. Angelo. Mr. McInvert could see the doctor and Miss Prune coming down them. *Pop, pop, pop, Pop, pop, pop:* down they came, with the broken loping rhythm of true mountaineers. Only Miss Prune appeared to be more agile than the doctor. She was a good hundred yards in front, and did

not look back.

The jerking of the distant figures as they came down the steps made Mr. McInvert feel dizzy. He looked away, caught sight of Mrs. Skimlit again, and turned right round, looking down on to the private beach. Mr. Pupillary and a girl were coming out of the ruined mill. Mr. McInvert winced, picked up the bluebottle, and made for the dining-room.

The professor was there already.

‘Ah!’ he exclaimed. ‘Lunch! Lunch is what justifies a Sunday morning.’

Chapter 14

THE SABBATH lethargy of work well done descended on the peninsula after luncheon. Even Miss Albino, who spent her Sunday afternoons in the dispensary, ceased to worry for the moment.

Things had been moving since Miss Albino vanquished the mule-driver. Yesterday there had been a hostile crowd, led by an angry woman in a shawl. The dispensary windows had been broken. There had been threats which sounded practical, not of assassination, but of judicial proceedings. The man's leg was said to have been broken. It was an exaggeration, of course, but it made one feel queer.

Miss Albino sat in the dispensary, fanned by a gentle wind through the broken windows, and pondered. She had been through so many states of feeling since yesterday: states of regret, of fear, but chiefly of high martyred love. She had appreciated the full significance of love for the first time. Those hymns in church. . . . Love as sacrifice, as the mortification of oneself.

Miss Albino began to weep—from self-pity, from nervous tension, from an appreciation of love as sacrifice. It was beautiful, beautiful, but oh, how sad! The tears trickled, the sobs gathered to a climacteric. They filled the dispensary with a slow rhythm. They calmed themselves, because there was no desire to control them, into sighs. The sighs became deeper, became measured breaths, became at last definitely snores.

Snores seemed to echo over Positano. A vault of sleep seemed to hang over the hotel, almost physically identifiable with a great puce cloud high up in the heavens. The cloud was a feather bed. Just and unjust slept the same sleep beneath it. Four deck-chairs stood in a row on the terrace, holding two married couples. The four chins rested on four chests. Mr. Menzies, free for to-day at least from the horrors of sight-seeing, breathed softly through his nose upon the book in Gaelic. His wife was gently nursing, even in her sleep, the recollected friendship which she had once struck up with *Helen's Babies*. The book had been left behind by Angela Hopwood, on her second visit in 1910, and it was now devoid of either cover. For the last ten years it had stood on the bottom shelf of the library, in undetected solitude. No title was legible on its cover, and nobody had troubled to take it out for further enquiry. Now Mrs. Menzies was nursing it back to life again: not reading it, but giving it her protection, even in her sleep.

Mr. and Mrs. Jones had divided the *Sydney Herald*. With invincible commonness they had spread its sheets over their faces, to protect them from the sun. Mrs. Jones lay in shocking animal comfort, shewing a good deal of her legs. They were sincere and galvanic legs. Mr. Jones stirred an advertisement for lingerie with his snores. The corner of newspaper fluttered, flattened itself against his face, blew out with the exhalation, poised itself and trembled in the reedy breeze.

The four sleepers lay at peace, unplagued by love. Theirs had already been consummated, so far as they expected it.

The four ladies from Devonshire had retired to their rooms, but not to sleep. Before four writing-tables they plied their pens, writing home, to everybody they could possibly think of, letters which would be stamped and dated from Abroad. Love for them was a stranger as much as it was for the sleepers on the terrace. The dissolution of the Italian spring had passed them by. Their minds had never been in Italy at all.

Costanza was waiting in her best clothes. It had been odd with the Englishman this morning. She had been in two minds, but she was glad he had not insisted. Evidently he was rich, like all the great people who stayed at the Santo Biagio, and he would certainly have given a nice present. But she did not intend to give herself for money. Love was not like that, not when one was young.

Yet he had been a nice gentleman. He was young as well, and she liked his yellow hair. He was almost as beautiful as Andrea.

Costanza, waiting in her best clothes, stretched like a kitten: she thrust out her cool round legs, drawing back her brown arms, so that the small firm breasts gave an outline to her bodice.

Mr. McInvert and Mr. Pupillary had been bathing. They lay together on the grey sand.

It was impossible, Mr. McInvert was thinking: one could not go on like this. Everybody, all round him, was making love. In a hundred houses, now, warm bodies were wrapped together in siesta. The goats upon the mountain, the sandflies on the beach, the fishes in the sea, were indulging their amorous propensities. Why should he alone be sterile?

The possibilities of his body—he was still not middle-aged—overwhelmed Mr. McInvert with the knowledge of waste. All this was here, all this was stored up, to be put to no use. It was monstrous, impossible. Anybody with any sense of fairness would see his point of view once it was put to them.

Mr. McInvert coughed as a preliminary.

‘Pupillary,’ he said, ‘I say, have you ever been in love?’

Mr. Pupillary turned over enthusiastically.

‘So you’ve guessed it!’ he said. ‘By God, I should say I am! And isn’t she marvellous? I love her so much, with everything I’ve got. It isn’t just beastliness or anything of that sort. I’d marry her even if she made me promise never to go to bed with her. She——’

Mr. McInvert listened, shifted with impatience. But nothing could stem the flood. Mr. Pupillary continued to talk about Costanza, vehemently, till it was time for tea.

Even then it was not over. Mr. Pupillary caught him and talked from tea till dinner. He shewed signs of continuation after dinner also, but Mr. McInvert, a broken man, retired early to his room.

Chapter 15

GRADUALLY the hotel went to bed. The proprietor, in new boots, stood in the hall with a sort of tired affability waiting for something mysterious. Was he waiting to turn the lights out, or to say good-night to his beloved building after everybody else had gone, or had he some secret assignation with the leaders of a fascist or an anti-fascist plot? There was something political about that urbane and obstinate proprietor: perhaps politic would be the better word.

He stood in the hall, waiting. The chambermaids had gone to bed long ago; the waiters slept out (one saw them going away in the evenings, looking unnaturally human in felt hats); his family was undressing in their basement lair; the little boot-boy had just gone upstairs to his cupboard next the bathroom. It was a mysterious cupboard, this, and the English patrons might have thought it unhealthy for a boot-boy, had they known about it. It measured four feet by six, and had no window. But they did not know about it; it was kept locked during the daytime.

The proprietor stood motionless, waiting for the lights to go out in the smoking-room. The drawing-room was dark; the dining-room was dark. One could see the private bottles of Capri and Lacrima Cristi on each table, standing motionless like the proprietor, faintly lit by the light from the smoking-room; waiting for their owners to come back to them tomorrow. What still life and fidelity! The marble floor darkly glimmered, the white tablecloths shone with an opacous lustre. Over all, the bottles presided, still, patient, convinced. Their life was arrested, but they knew perfectly well it would begin again.

In the smoking-room the professor was talking to Mr. Pupillary.

‘Life,’ he was saying, ‘how rich it is, how full of whole-time occupations! Quite apart from eating and drinking and making love. I can never understand people who commit suicide, or ruin themselves on account of madcap indiscretions. All for Love, the World Well Lost, and that sort of thing. It’s just bosh. The world is never well lost, and anybody who gives all for love is little better than an imbecile. They don’t know what they’re giving, what they’re losing. They haven’t any conception of life as it is. They haven’t any *interest*, that’s the trouble. I’ve no patience with the modern mind.

‘People say to me that life isn’t worth living, or that they hope they won’t live beyond seventy. We should only be a burden, they say, and life would be a burden to us. Stuff and nonsense. God knows, I wish I could live to be a thousand. Look at all the things there are to do. Indeed, the only complaint one can rationally make about life is that it’s so short. Leave learning aside for the moment. Leave aside the insignificant little fact that one can find interest—not only interest, but thrills—for a million lifetimes, however physically decrepit, in music and literature and painting and all the ologies. Leave all that out of the question entirely. And then, what does one know about hawking and coursing and aviation? What experience has one, what experience can one hope to have in a miserable seventy years, of polar exploration and tying knots and slipping greyhounds and pruning trees and firing horses and landing aeroplanes and all the million ways of risking one’s glorious, one’s delicious neck? Look at the ordinary country gentleman, the man who

can't afford to run a Bentley or a Moth. Has he time to fulfil his opportunities? Can he hunt three days a week (and every hunt is a new lifetime), and shoot three days a week, and fish three days a week? No. That's nine days. He can't. And yet if he hunted or shot or fished for seven days a week he wouldn't be bored with it. And that's only the relaxation. What about the ways of crops and prize cattle, what about gardening and horse-breeding and the mere menial uses of his hands? Do you know how to hold a dog's cheek so as to give him a dose of oil? You can groom a horse, of course, but could you give him a pill and know when to prescribe it? Are you a qualified veterinary surgeon? Could you graft roses? Could you hunt hounds apart from riding to them? Of course not, and neither could I. We haven't the time. We haven't the time to begin living our lives. And yet people say that life isn't worth living. And yet young men, who don't know what they are throwing away, are ready to squander all the possibilities of the whole thing for the body of a single woman. It's the grand tragedy of existence.

'Of course I wouldn't suggest for a moment that you were in such a position. But suppose, for the sake of argument, that you were. Suppose you contemplated an unsuitable marriage. What would happen if you went in for it? Bliss for a couple of years, I dare say. But what afterwards? If I may make a guess, my dear boy, after your two years' bliss you wouldn't be more than twenty-five. Think of it—forty-five more years to live, and your wife growing fat. No love, no money, no society, no more hunting. Even if you had money it wouldn't benefit you. You'd have to go and hunt wild boars in Bavaria.'

The professor leaned back in despair.

'Young men,' he said, 'get tired of the humdrum life, and I suppose it's natural. They haven't the wit to recognise the delights which only society makes possible for them. They think they must, for God's sake, get out of the rut and *do* something. Well, it's a laudable intention. But why do anything so drastic as go to Italy and marry a peasant. There are so many other ways of kicking over the traces, so much safer comparatively, and quite equally satisfactory. A great friend of mine used to derive infinite pleasures from leaving a donkey on Rudyard Kipling's lawn. It used to make Mrs. Kipling livid, and they had all the local police force hidden round the house. He used to take it there all the same. It was exciting, it satisfied an aesthetic urge; and if he had been caught, dodging through the midnight shrubberies with his donkey, it wouldn't have mattered very much. A small fine, I suppose, or a few days in prison. But what's that compared with being married to a peasant for forty-five years?'

'No,' said Mr. Pupillary. 'Quite. Do you think . . .'

'And that's life,' continued the professor. 'Grand, glorious, just legal life. That friend of mine was a great reader and a world-wide authority on obscure Greek poetry. He used to read, sing, write, hunt, fish, make love, and leave donkeys. When he killed himself last year in an aeroplane he was still welcome in society, and all his avenues were open to him. It was simply that he knew what he was after. He hadn't any doubts about whether life was worth living or not. He crammed into it as much as he could, but always sensibly, always like a wise happy man; and he'd never have married anybody, God bless him, even if it had been Her Majesty the Queen!'

'Yes, quite,' said Mr. Pupillary. 'But do you think we ought to keep the proprietor up?'

The professor hoisted himself out of his chair unhappily.

‘No,’ he said, ‘I suppose not. No. Well, good-night. And . . .’

He looked at Mr. Pupillary sadly.

‘No,’ he said. ‘Good-night.’



The proprietor saw them to bed. He stood at the foot of the stairs with his hand on the switch, waiting till they were in their rooms. Then he turned off the light with a faint sigh, hesitated in the darkness, and looked around him. Undoubtedly he could see in the dark. He was affable, hard, subtle, politic: but now one realised that he was also a warlock. He stood there, among his possessions, sensing the position of every one of them. He had built them with his life's blood.

One has no idea of the soft avarice of proprietorship, unless one has been born a pauper. The proprietor of the Santo Biagio had never known a father. Since he could remember he had worked in hotels, as a boot-boy, as a waiter, as a secretary. Always a little better, always with a little saved, always urbanely, plumply, purposefully, he had gently swarmed the ladder. It was twenty-eight years since he had owned an hotel: the little osteria at Agerola. It had been a beginning, a small beginning. He had made money with it. Then he had moved to Vettica Majore, to make a little more, and thence to Salerno, where he had made a pile. But he had always remembered Positano, always intended to come back there and develop it, as soon as he had the money. The possibilities of the place had struck him when he was secretary of the Quisisana in Amalfi, thirty years ago: and he was a tenacious man. He had dreamed.

Standing in the darkness of the hall, the proprietor remembered how he had bought this palazzo: how he had altered it: how he had built this terrace, thrown out that wing. He remembered everything by its cost, and estimated its success by the increments of the ensuing year. He knew exactly how much his profits had been in any given month since he bought the building. He remembered exactly just what he had done without in order to have a door made here. All the doors and windows and chairs and tables, and many of the rooms themselves, existed for him as prices, as savings, as dated accretions to the sweet power of ownership. He stood among his possessions, swelling, bosoming, protecting, brooding over them: a dove with eggs.

After he had sucked stability and position from the hall, the little man made for the terrace. He was metaphysical to-night. Not only was the hotel his tangible, his absolute own offspring, but the guests were in a sense his also.

He stood on the terrace looking up at their windows, recalling the names of the occupants of each room. He knew the rooms far better than the people in them, but he knew the people all the same. How strange that Mrs. Skimlit should be sleeping in the room which had cost eighteen hundred lire in 1924—sleeping in it, and believing it to be her room, Mrs. Skimlit's room, when it was really his room and would have forgotten Mrs. Skimlit in a couple of months. He sensed the room as a room on its own, then as Mrs. Skimlit's room, then as his room, his own room, which had cost eighteen hundred lire in 1924. It did not exist only as a price. It existed as a piece of the house, the house existed as a piece of the grounds; the grounds existed as his possession—a child which was to grow, which was to be watched, which would improve, year after year, in beauty

and value and stability.

The proprietor lit a Toscano and looked meditatively at the room, blowing out a cloud of silver smoke into the moonlight.

Inside the room, which boasted the two end windows on the right of the first floor, Mrs. Skimlit was reading her Daily Light. Aloof from the world, silent and still in the tense concentrated beam of the reading-lamp, Mrs. Skimlit read her devotions, leaning with one elbow on her pillow.

There was no doubt, once one was in the room, about whom it belonged to. The smell of eau-de-cologne; the neat orderly possessions; the row of boots with pointed witch-like toes; the travelling clock; the severe but somehow handsome dressing-gown: all struck one overpoweringly with Mrs. Skimlit. It was her room. It could never belong to anybody else again.

Those were the hairbrushes with which tirelessly, with which with feline strokes, Mrs. Skimlit groomed her shining hair. There, on the bedside table, was the elastic band which secured her Bible, Daily Light, and Prayer Book. Here was her pincushion, bristling with acute, with pointed pins. Her hatpins protruded from it stiffly: glittering rustless pins, concealing their piercing tips in poniarded stuffing. Mrs. Skimlit was a Borgia.

On the top shelf of the wardrobe, smelling of camphor, lay the black hats which balanced in the daytime on Mrs. Skimlit's head of hair. They were of black straw and black satin and black velvet. Although they were large, and like pork pies, there was nothing loose or spreading about them. They too, like the St. Stephen of a pincushion, had been stabbed to death.

But one was not really interested in the furniture. Mrs. Skimlit herself, in the still beam of the reading-lamp, filled the room. She was so motionless, so compact, so serene. The rice-paper pages of the Daily Light did not betray, by a single tremor under her fingers, that she was alive. Except for the regular sideways motion of her eyes she was as dead as Pharaoh. Propped up in her white, her virginal tomb, the firm, clear-skinned mummy of a dead queen waited for posterity: austere and fascinating. Her bosom hardly rose; her bed-wrap was as clean as the white sheets; her glorious hair hung over her shoulders in two plaits of perfect snow. She was a little girl, seventy years old, and she was dead.

Since the light in the next room was out, the proprietor concluded that Miss Albino was asleep. But she was not. The pale watery eyes stared upwards at the moonlight on the ceiling.

This was her twenty-fourth season at the Santo Biagio, and she had begun to know her Italy. Twenty-four winters had passed over her at the same table, in the same bedroom, playing the same harmonium at the church. They brought her Chianti now, without asking what she would drink, as soon as the last bottle had been finished. Also they brought her water to dilute it with. At dinner she got a glass of hot water without having to ask for it. And 'signor's' English correspondence: she was closeted every day with him at eleven

o'clock. It was quite a hobby. Dear Santo Biagio, dear Signor! Why, it was her home. She was as much a part of the hotel almost as Signor was. A fixture at her table by the window, she had watched the other guests come and go. Some had stayed for three years even, but she had outlasted them. They had gone at last, and faded against the background of her own permanence.

Like Signor, she could remember when this wing had been added, when that flight of steps had been built into the hillside. She could remember the great moments of the hotel: when Bernard Shaw had stayed there by mistake, when E. V. Lucas had written about it in a book called *A Wanderer in Sunny Lands* (she had the book still: it was only a brief reference), and when Ibsen, who wrote *A Doll's House* at Amalfi, had probably come in for a meal. At least he might have come in for a meal. It was extremely probable, considering he was living at Amalfi. The only trouble was that she was not quite sure of Ibsen's dates. And then there was Longfellow. But she was afraid Longfellow was quite definitely an anachronism. Perhaps, however, he stayed in the palazzo prior to its adaptation as an hotel.

It had been stupid of her to make that row with the cart-driver, but she could not have known at the time that he was a respected fascist and friend of the Podestà. The animal had been cruelly galled, cruelly starved.

And now Signor told her that she had struck the wrong man. Fascism, what was it? One heard about it; one was told not to mention Mussolini's name (for if you weren't talking to a fascist, you were talking to an anti-fascist, and you never knew which it was); one realised that there was something powerful at work—some said it was good, some said it was bad. One had to be careful. She had always been careful. And now this wretched carter turned out to be a fascist, on leave or something, and Signor told her that he had a broken leg. As far as the man was concerned, she was glad of it. It would teach him something about the pain which he inflicted on animals. She had not meant him to fall over the parapet and break his leg, but he had done so. She was not sorry.

But she was afraid. Signor had looked grave, had since cold-shouldered her a little, almost as if he were afraid to associate with people who broke the legs of the fascist party. Miss Albino remembered several curious instances of fascist power. There was that Russian painter who stayed in prison for three months waiting to be tried, and then left the country. Miss Albino also knew where the nearest prison was: in Amalfi. And the Amalfi prison was under the duomo. If you went round the corner of the steps you could see the dungeons. The cells had barred windows. They were large, but on the other hand they contained perhaps a dozen prisoners each. The prisoners mostly spent their time clinging in bunches to the bars of these windows, begging for coppers. The less fastidious inhabitants of Amalfi spent their time outside these windows, spitting at the prisoners. Inside the cells you could see dirty garments hanging up to dry.

Miss Albino had once been to look at the convicts, but she had gone away again quickly. Now she remembered them: that scarcely human festoon jabbering at the bars, with their background of filthy linen. Surely she could scarcely be put there? But one didn't know. How legal was Fascism? She had been told that even the English consuls would not interfere if Fascism came into it.

If she were not sent to prison she might be deported. Like the Russian painter, she would quietly disappear. Perhaps there would be no trial, only a communication from the

Podestà. Her passport would not be renewed. Her registration would not be accepted. . . .

Miss Albino moved restlessly in the bed, so that it creaked beneath her weight. To be debarred from Italy; it would be the end for her. She could not afford to live anywhere else. The French hotels would have no kind Signor who was content to remit payments in exchange for secretarial assistance: there would be no vacant harmonium offering its small emolument.

And yet she was glad, glad that she had broken the creature's leg, glad that she had defended the poor suffering animal against human inhumanity. Miss Albino gritted her teeth in the darkness, an expression perfectly fiendish in her eyes. She hoped he would suffer, suffer tortures, agonies, martyrdoms. The devils, to hurt our dumb friends like that. Miss Albino detested cruelty, it made her sick. She hoped his leg would get gangrenous.

Human beings were cruel and beastly. She had never received love from a human—not the love of little Peeko, not the adoring faithful undictating eyes. Oh, Peeko, Peeko, she was so lonely without him. He would have understood her trouble now; he would have stuck to her in spite of Mussolini; he would have been able to advise her.

Little Peeko had been so wise. He had understood everything that was said in front of him.

How she had enjoyed making him his little dinners: soup, fish, meat, sweets, and savoury, a new menu every day. It had strained her invention, but she had managed it. And then their long talks in the evening, when he had told her everything he thought. . . .

Miss Albino pretended that Peeko was still alive. Snuggling his little ghost in bed with her, she cried herself to sleep.

Next to Miss Albino's were the windows of Mr. Pupillary's room. They were lit. The proprietor could see Mr. Pupillary sitting at the writing-table, in defiance of the mosquitoes. He felt no resentment towards Mr. Pupillary for using up his electric light, because the bills of all the guests were calculated on the principle that they would keep their lights on all night. It was the early sleepers, not the proprietor, that paid for Mr. Pupillary.

Mr. Pupillary was not writing, though he held a pen in his hand. He turned it to and fro, held it horizontally between his fists, eventually snapped it in half. On the sheet of paper before him was a tangle of figures, quite incomprehensible, and a cheque-book with the counterfoils much given over to calculations.

He would do it, whatever happened. One was only young once. That was what knocked out the old man's arguments.

If he had not loved her, he might have taken her as a mistress. That would have been an extravagance, but not an irretraceable step. Even the old man would have made no fuss about that. But he loved her, by God he loved her, so that if she died he would die as well. And so it was not enough to take her as a mistress. He had no feelings about the sanctity of marriage, or about its being wrong to have a mistress. Nor did he feel that he would be doing her an injury. Not a bit of it. It was just that to have her as a mistress was not enough: it was just that he feared to lose her. He wanted to bind her to him with the

strongest ties, to hold her pledged, possessed, safe. As a mistress he held no claims upon her: he was insecure.

It was at this point that Mr. Pupillary's pen snapped in half. Oh God, he wanted her! Not only to go to bed with, not at present even mainly to go to bed with. He wanted all of her, all that lived inside her eyes. What was it? It was nothing, but he wanted it. And he did not know . . .

She had kissed him, but perhaps she kissed everybody. He had lacked something, or had he been imagining something which must be always lacking? She said she loved him, but he was afraid. . . . If only he had gone a little further this morning. 'Cosa fai?'—'Niente.' How weak-minded! Perhaps if he had had the courage to go on, he might have been more certain.

And yet if he lost her he would die, he would certainly die. So he must marry her, not seduce her, he must bind her with the best cords he might. It was madness: the old man was right. But, oh God, when one was mad already what could one do about it?

Mr. Pupillary's consciously handsome face had been looking a little less conscious of its beauty lately, but it could look as sulky as ever. Now it was sullen.

He would ask her to marry him to-morrow. They could be married at once, without any preliminaries. He was sure she would have him. After all, he was young, not ugly, and for her rich. It would mean that he would be a pauper sooner than he had hoped: after two years, three years perhaps, but they would have been years of love. It was worth it, infinitely worth it. What was the use of waiting to enjoy oneself till one was old? The chance might pass, and never come again.

She would have him, but would she want him—for himself? Mr. Pupillary tossed his golden head and looked out of the window. Then he walked up to it and looked down upon the village of Positano. He could see her window.

Poor Mr. Pupillary stood there for about half an hour, with quite a human expression on his face.

The proprietor stood quite still, so that Mr. Pupillary would not notice him. He noted that Mr. Pupillary was not the only person standing at a window.

Anne Menzies was standing in the darkness at the next window, with all her consciousness concentrated on Mr. Pupillary's. She could see his shadow on the tiny balcony, thrown by the electric light behind him. Oh, she hoped, she was sure he must be thinking of her. The person in the carriage with the girl could not have been he. Now that the moon was shining and Mr. Pupillary standing so motionless at the next window, Anne knew that he loved her. He was standing there to be near her, thinking of love. What would happen if she showed herself? What if he stepped across from his balcony to hers?

For half an hour Anne Menzies kept Mr. Pupillary company, leaning her forehead against the frame of the window nearest him: as if the frame had melted, and the dividing wall had gone: as if the frame were Mr. Pupillary himself, and her own body dissolving in his arms.

Mr. and Mrs. Menzies slept next door to their daughter. Whenever Mr. Menzies began to snore, Mrs. Menzies gently stroked the grey hair on his forehead. He stopped snoring at once.

The Misses Cowfold shared a room. The two beds stood against opposite walls.

This room, like Mrs. Skimlit's, had escaped from the ownership of the proprietor and belonged to the Misses Cowfold alone. Like a hat-box which has had a litter of kittens in it, it could never belong to anybody else again. In fact, the two ladies might have been two monstrous kittens, in their blowsy den.

Mrs. Skimlit's was a room of terrible precision. The Misses Cowfold inhabited its opposite. An imaginary meridian, of no absolute definition, divided the floor space into two parts: the part in which Agatha, and the part in which Ælfrida, kept her clothes. Since all the clothes were of the same voluminous sort, and all equally soiled, it was impossible to observe the boundary. Frequently Agatha would put on one of Ælfrida's shoes and one of her own; but fortunately it made no difference. The sisters, with all that they possessed, were one and indivisible. They were too lazy to quarrel for more than a few hours.

At the moment they were united as ever, in their snores. Agatha's was slightly soprano, and anti-phonically Ælfrida, who suffered from asthma, bore her stiff bourdon.

The common Joneses, who slept above the Cowfolds, kept their windows wide open. Sound, they decided, must have a tendency to rise upwards, for the snores were plainly heard. Kept wakeful by this concert, the Joneses were whiling away the darkness in their common way. So, although it would be interesting to mention their difficulties with the mosquito curtain, it seems more modest to pass along.

Mr. McInvert was sitting at his writing-table, as Mr. Pupillary had done. Unlike Mr. Pupillary, he was busy writing. Sheet after sheet was dragged from the immaculate brethren on the right, scored deeply with the fluent ink, and passed over to the left, where it lay gasping and disfigured on the growing pile. Mr. McInvert might have been Polyphemus making a hurried meal of trembling argonauts.

Every now and then he glanced at his bluebottle which was undergoing an electric light cure under an inverted tooth-glass. He looked at it anxiously, superstitiously, wondering whether it was weakening. In some way his fate was bound up with it. If it recovered it would be a good omen; but if it died . . .

Mr. McInvert was fervently writing the story of his life, a protest against authority, a vehement petition of right.

He was not sure why he was writing it: whether it was to cleanse his bosom of the perilous stuff which weighed upon the heart, or whether . . . well, for some other reason.

Next door to Mr. McInvert the four Devonshire ladies, in four separate rooms, slept the sleep of the just. Soon they would return to Devonshire, to ask their friends whether they had been abroad this winter. Anticipating this pleasure, they had all dropped off to sleep simultaneously: four cosy Marathon runners nearing their goal. They had started their long task three months ago. Now they were on their last lap, now they were within sight of the object for which it had been undertaken. Soon, safely at home, they would be able to say that they had wintered in Positano.

In the top storey Miss Prune shared a room with her mother. Mrs. Prune, pretending to be asleep, listened to the restless movements of her daughter. Poor child, it was the heat, she supposed: or perhaps she had overtired herself with all that photography.

Miss Prune was in a whirl. Her brain, anxiously recapitulating the events of the day in different sequences, dithered in her head. She rehearsed the scene forwards, and backwards, and outwards in both directions from the middle. Well, she had done it at last. She was a whore now, a shameless woman. It had been disgusting, horrible. She could not think why she had let him do it, that filthy old man. She had lost everything now: virtue, safety, respectability. Roedean, or wherever it was, could no longer be revisited by her as a proud daughter, as a loyal Old Girl. God, the low church God with an 1850 reredos, could no longer be faced in the raptures of communion. She was cut off, bound for hell. Though, of course, one didn't believe in hell nowadays; not that sort of hell. But one did believe in the kind of hell which existed as the Absence of God. She remembered the sermons about it in chapel.

And then there were the diseases: one went blind when one did this sort of thing, or was it mad? And hockey one could play no longer: one lost the faculty for games. She was a pure girl no more.

As the realisation overcame Miss Prune a cold sweat broke out all over her body. Oh, why had she done it? For a motive of curiosity, for a pleasure lasting only a few seconds, she had thrown away the prospects of a lifetime. She was pure no longer. Miss Prune saw in a flash of visual imagery all the pictures of pure people painted since the pre-Raphaelites. She saw Sir Galahad standing with a blank sulky expression beside his boring horse, in a bramble bush. She saw the Knight of the Vigil, holding his sword before the altar: only now it was a female knight, in a nightdress, holding a hockey stick.

All these were gone, and all that they stood for. She was a scarlet woman instead, and that was too bad for visual imagery. Her favourite painters had never depicted the beastly—their fallen women were never worse than grand or pathetic—and so she possessed no picture of her degradation. Or rather no painted picture. The concrete image of Dr. Arnold-Browne without his trousers amply supplied the deficit.

The beast! Why had she yielded to him? Surely she could not have done it merely from curiosity, merely because she wanted to? She had yielded, that was it. It was a case of conquest; she had been overcome; she had been forced. The seducer! She would never speak to him again.

Next door to the Prunes Frau Kunst slept peacefully. She wore a nightcap.

Divided from his victim by this gentle hiatus, Dr. Arnold-Browne was also awake and anxious. What a fool he had been (but how good it had been), what a fool, what an idiot! Supposing Mrs. Arnold-Browne came to know about it: supposing they had been seen by somebody: supposing the girl couldn't keep her mouth shut! The scandal, the divorce. And most of the money was his wife's.

He glanced guiltily across the room. Her bed was lit by a patch of moonlight, and he could see her thin hands crossed on the sheet. Poor old lady, she was not so bad after all.

Dr. Arnold-Browne shuffled out of bed and woke his wife.

'Dumpling's cold,' he said. 'Can Dumpling come in?'

How many years was it since he had called himself Dumpling?

But Mrs. Browne was indifferent; she had recovered from the last vestiges of seduction which belonged even to the name of Dumpling.

'No, dear,' she said. 'I'm tired.'

The doctor went back to bed again, ashamed and frightened.

For a sinner the professor slept remarkably well. He had dropped off in the middle of a satisfied reflection about the mysteries of self-help.

The last room was empty. The proprietor, blowing out the last whiff of his Toscano, regarded it displeasably.

Then, tossing the stump of the cheroot over the edge of the balcony, he went indoors.

Both Mr. Pupillary and Anne Menzies, who were still standing at their windows, started when they saw his shadow detach itself from the static gloom.

The proprietor took off his new boots, his collar, coat, and trousers. His underclothes were ornamented with small pink strawberries. He gave his wife a push from behind, which sent her grunting across the bed, and plumped into it himself. He was asleep almost before he had won the brief struggle for the coverlet.

Chapter 16

THE small steamer vented a clanking noise from its bowels, shuddered from stem to stern. The hillsides of Positano began to revolve about it. The fishing boats which had been on the starboard bow appeared on the port beam: churned water gushed from its entrails. A few staggering lurches developed to the uneasy rhythmical wallow of her nature, and the ship was under way. Positano began to dwindle. Like a mannequin on a very slow turn-table, its little white houses and climbing streets presented perspective after perspective. It was difficult to pick out the hotel, but there it was. Surely that was it, and surely that was the head waiter waving from the terrace? The explorers waved back, in case it was.

The party from the Santo Biagio consisted of Mrs. Skimlit, the professor, Mr. Pupillary, the Prunes, the Menzieses, Mr. McInvert, and Miss Albino. Mrs. Skimlit had been an ardent member from the start, and the professor was intent upon his errand of mercy. Mr. Pupillary had consented to come when he was the victim of a mood. The trip had been arranged three or four days ago, before he had had that evening drive with Costanza, before she had sat on his knee in the old mill, before he had determined to marry her. That determination had only been reached last night. He had meant to propose this morning. And then she had not appeared: the other workmen had been unable to say where she was. He had spent the morning walking wildly up and down the market-place, watching the figures on the near and distant roads till he was dizzy. He had made two trips back to the hotel, in case she had turned up in the meantime, and both had been fruitless. Then he had gone to the professor, to tell him that he was not coming to Capri after all. On the way he had thought better of it. Perhaps it would be a good idea to have a brief separation, to sleep on it, as it were, before he took the plunge. By being away from Costanza he would know in full how much he wanted her. And perhaps she would miss him too, and find out the same thing. In any case, it was only for a couple of nights. Now he found himself on board, without the hope of retracing his steps, and knew that he had made a mistake. He did not want to go to Capri at all.

Mrs. Prune and her daughter were there, as also was Mrs. Menzies, for no other reason than that they felt they ought to see the fabulous island of Capri. Miss Prune, however, was grateful for the separation from Dr. Arnold-Browne: so she told herself. They had evaded each other's eyes at breakfast.

Mr. Menzies was there because his wife and daughter were taking him: that was why he was in Italy at all, for that matter. Anne Menzies had come because Mr. Pupillary was coming.

Mr. McInvert, like Mr. Pupillary, had decided to come in a mood which differed from his present one. He had thought that one place was as good as another, that the change might distract him, might take his mind off things. Now, like Mr. Pupillary, he knew that all that was a mistake. He only wanted to be in Positano, and not only in Positano, but leaning over the terrace of the Hotel Santo Biagio watching the workmen. The diatribe which he had written last night had cleared his mind. He had come to a decision. For about the second time in his life he was going to try it, to risk it, whatever the

consequences. Otherwise he could not go on living.

Mr. Pupillary and Mr. McInvert stood steadfastly side by side, watching the ravine where the workmen blasted, as it dwindled in the distance.

Miss Albino was watching too. It was her dear hotel. Perhaps she would not have many more opportunities of looking at it. She had come on this trip to distract herself, but also on a sort of round tour of farewell: just in case. It was at Capri, in 1912, that she had received her only proposal of marriage. She had refused it, in order to be pressed, and the poor fellow had never asked again. Miss Albino felt sorry for him still.

The professor broke in upon these soliloquies.

‘Here we are,’ he said, taking up an advantageous position in the centre of the trio, ‘here we are at sea. At any moment the boat may sink (particularly this one) and we be drowned. Too seldom do people addicted to ocean travel allow themselves to appreciate their situation. Here we are, a collection of land mammals, trusted to the evil element. For some reason, never really comprehended by me, this piece of pseudo-land on which we are standing is able in ordinary circumstances to retain a position at the top of the sea. If we were to step off it we should go to the bottom. If we were to tilt it up on end it would go down too. Meanwhile, by some scientific trick, it goes on staying at the top. But don’t forget that it’s only a trick. Don’t look so snug and secure. We are standing on nothing more than so many fathoms of water: deep, sucking, fluid, engulfing water. Balanced on top of it, just think of that. What sublime faith! A modern collection of St. Peters.’

The professor gave everybody a kind look and continued cheerfully:

‘Sea-sickness, that’s one of the most right of the natural phenomena. Have you ever considered that the sea is the evil or negative element? It is, and there’s a beautiful corollary. In this world the proportion of sea to land, as of evil to good, is two to one. . . .’

The boat clanked torpidly on her weary way. Mr. Menzies, feeling sick already, made his way to the stuffy little cabin below. It was provided with a hanging lamp and a board table. Round the walls ran a padded ledge covered in red serge on which four elderly gentlemen, seemingly pedlars, were lying down so that they might not be ill. They had come on board at Amalfi, whence the vessel started. Every now and then the second officer would lurch down the ladder and make them take their feet off the cushions.

At the board table the steward was playing scopa with three immigrants of indefinite profession. They played with ordinary French cards, from which the eights, nines, and tens had been removed. They drank cognac, smoked Toscani, and spat on the floor.

Mr. Menzies lay down sideways like the pedlars, trying to hang his legs over the side of the ledge, so that the second officer might have no cause for annoyance. He looked straight upwards at the hanging lamp. It swung. Mr. Menzies closed his eyes and thought of death.

Mrs. Skimlit had captured Mrs. Menzies and the Prunes. The four of them sat on a bench against the stern wall of the deck-house, looking rather like a party with their backs

to the engine in a third-class carriage. They swayed in unison, Mrs. Skimlit's black hat on its elastic foundation emphasising the motion with a rhythmical nod.

'Yes,' she was saying, 'I have been to Capri twice. The island is always worth visiting. Picture postcards, coral and tortoiseshell can be bought from itinerant vendors at luncheon in the hotels. The Albergo Sole Mio, where we shall be staying, makes a charge of forty lire a day, *en pension*. Admission to the Blue Grotto, or, in Italian, Grotte Bleue, costs . . .'

Her voice clipped along precisely, above the rumbling of the engines, the hissing of the waves.

Anne Menzies, escaping at the very outset, had attached herself to the professor's lecture. She stood next to Mr. Pupillary, watching the panorama of the peninsula, headland after headland, grotto after grotto, as it unrolled itself before them. Mr. Pupillary stared before him sightlessly. Miss Albino's eyes still lingered astern. Mr. McInvert was beginning to fidget.

'Once,' said the professor blithely, 'I visited my friend, Professor Skål, in Abisko. This entailed a train journey through Sweden which lasted about thirty-six hours. First of all there would be a lake with a diving board and a wooden hut, then a hillside covered with pines going up, then a hillside covered with pines coming down, then a lake with a diving board and a wooden hut. Imagine it for thirty-six hours! Each separate view was exquisite, but they were all the same. And then those pine trees! Matches, matches, I almost decided to give up smoking.

'This peninsula strikes the same note. The sea, a beastly little village, olive and vine terraces over a bluff, another village, more sea, over all the scraggy outline of the mountains. If VELMA SUCHARD could be written over the sky, in large red letters, one would feel more human: for this is just the sort of picturesque place which ought only to exist in advertisements for milk chocolate.

'Wherever one goes in the south of Italy one finds women with easels slapping their piffling little colours on *belle viste* which have been painted every day for half a century. The *viste* are all the same, and so are the pictures. If only somebody would paint the Faraglioni as perfect cylinders in a black enamel sea or sketch the Blue Grotto in alazarine! The thought of all the scribblers who have patiently copied all the lines in all the horizons within fifty miles makes one's brain rock in one's head. One would scarcely mind if they really did it meticulously. There is something attractive about a picture which one has to look at through a magnifying glass like a Breugel: just as there is something attractive about broad, massive, bulging modernisms, slaps of colour, mathematical monsters. But women who think they are like Whistler, are really unwilling and unsuccessful primitives (because they can't draw), and talk about "Simplification!" *Semplificate mio culo*.

'But to get back to the view. All these little fishing villages which we have to visit in this miserable old tub! One day you must make the full journey from Amalfi to Naples. First a bluff with a precipice and a natural arch or grotto, then a tiny village with two boats full of vomiting agriculturalists waiting to be embarked, then a bluff, then another village. The sea heaves, the vessel groans and staggers. And all the time everybody is sick.'

Mr. McInvert clapped his handkerchief to his mouth and walked hastily away. He passed Mrs. Skimlit's party at a run and leaned over the opposite rail. Oh God, he thought, the old cad, what did he want to talk about that for? As if it wasn't enough . . .

After a bit Mr. McInvert detached himself from the rail. Feeling feeble but refreshed, he tottered below. A nap in the cabin, if he could get one, would be just the thing.

Capri at last. It had been growing larger and larger, and now they were definitely under the eastern precipice. The trippers assembled at the rail and watched it anxiously, wondering what it was going to be like. Even Mr. Menzies and Mr. McInvert had dragged themselves up from the cabin.

The professor was pointing out the sights.

'There,' he said, 'that white villa with the cypresses, high up on the cliff there. I believe it's the authentic villa in which that count of Compton Mackenzie's used to live. I forget which book it was in. You know, the count who had a secretary and died of opium or something of the sort.'

'How disgusting,' said Miss Albino.

'And yet it sells,' said the professor. 'And yet that's why we're visiting the island. Getting on for two thousand years ago, an old misanthropist of seventy lived there. An anti-imperial propagandist, called Tacitus, circulated stories of his sadism and perversion—don't forget he was seventy years old—and we to-day are going to inspect this island.'

'Actually it was the Emperor Augustus who built every villa on Capri and was responsible for its development. Tiberius did no more than live in those villas, and, what is more, live in nearly solitary seclusion. But Tacitus informs us that he was a vicious man. And so Augustus, the godfather of the island, is commemorated by only one spurious statue, whilst half the streets, villas, summits and leaps bear the name of his nephew. What a curious light that casts upon human nature. If Tacitus had not fostered the idea that Tiberius, who, I cannot help repeating, was nearly seventy when he arrived at Capri, had devoted himself entirely to homosexual debauchery and pushing people over cliffs, the island would still be no more popular than Ischia there, across the bay. As it is, the tripper trade has developed the place into a vast emporium. Gaping at the vices of an elderly astrologer, thousands of sightseers of all nationalities come yearly to see the Grotta Azzura, eat a bad lunch, and buy coral, tortoiseshell, or inlaid walking-sticks. Not only so, but a regular brand of Capri literature has developed, and the legend has grown to such an extent that it has assumed flesh and blood. Real homosexuals visit the island incognito, hoping to meet their kind. Fiction has given birth to fact, and that unfortunate count really did come to live there, because of the influence of suggestion.'

Mr. McInvert was thinking about the Frenchman. Ugly stories: one wondered if any of them were true. Nobody understood anybody else. Perhaps the fellow had found a real and happy escape from life, and had had the bravery to see it out. One could never tell. Surely it was not a mistake, if one found beauty and happiness, to exchange the drab process of getting old—imperceptibly older, frittered away between small worries and large but not lasting miseries, hardly conscious of living and never conscious of being glad—surely it was not a mistake to exchange this for a briefer and sentient satisfaction. One day he must

try opium. And yet things always turned out to be worthless: expense of spirit in a waste of shame . . . before a joy proposed . . . a very woe. Shakespeare had got it. And then one was always afraid of death, of losing the scrabbling hold which one did fearfully keep on the cliffs of life, of dropping off into the void. Perhaps it was best to eke out a lawful life, like the rock which Shelley pinched from Scaliger, to keep on living with toil and terror, clutching at anything for mere continuation. Long meticulous life above the black mist which hides the bottom of the cliff, or a short spasm of happiness and the fall which turned one's bones to water, the disappearance into thick emptiness, towards rocks or nothing? That was the question, as Hamlet had remarked. All the really important remarks were hackneyed, as all the really important things were. Everybody loved and everybody died. . . .

Mr. McInvert's mind returned to the workers in the ravine. When he got back he would definitely chance it. It was no good going on living like this. And, besides, his love might be returned. One never knew in the south of Italy. There had been encouragement, smiles: certainly an attraction. And the little presents he had contrived to leave behind that stone had been accepted: they had disappeared without comment. If only it could be true, as it might be, what happiness they would have! He really began to believe that God might be turning towards him at last.

Mrs. Skimlit was thinking too. She wondered whether they would remember her at the Sole Mio. They ought to: it was her third trip. The professor might shew off his knowledge of history as much as he liked, but she was an old inhabitant of Capri as much as he was. It was not as if she had never been there before, never travelled. She would get hold of Mrs. Menzies and the Prunes, would shew them over the island. She knew the prices of everything.

Mrs. Skimlit began to lay her plans. Obviously Anne Menzies, Mr. Pupillary, and Mr. McInvert would attach themselves to the professor. That left Mr. and Mrs. Menzies, the Prunes, and Miss Albino. Now Miss Albino posed as an authority on Capri too, on the strength of a few months' stay in 1912. Rather than venture a contest for the leadership—Mrs. Skimlit was not quite sure that she would win—it might be best to split the forces. Suppose she allowed Miss Albino to conduct Mr. Menzies, and commandeered the rest herself? That would be a fair division, for Mr. Menzies was a Man. She was not quite sure that it would not be better to take Mr. Menzies herself, and leave the rest to Miss Albino. In fact, she thought she would. With a man it would be possible to take longer walks.

Meanwhile she was hungry. The salt sea air gave healthy people an appetite. She had crossed the Channel five times and never been sea-sick.

Staring disdainfully at Mr. McInvert, who had grown pale again and felt too ill to care, she ran over in her mind what there might be for lunch.

Mr. Pupillary was beginning to cheer up. He was irrevocably parted from Costanza for two nights, and he might as well make the best of it. Certainly he would miss her terribly, but that was almost a comfort: it shewed that he was right to marry her. And then what pleasure when they met again! For two days he would store his love, become charged with it, super-charged. He would soak himself in it: and then, returning like a cyclone, he would carry her off her feet. He would catch her up, dandle her, kiss her, laugh even whilst their lips were meeting. And this time there would be no more 'Niente.'

Mr. Pupillary, suddenly becoming conscious of Anne, addressed her cheerfully:

‘How would you like to live on an island?’

‘Oh,’ said Anne, ‘I should just love it. . . .’

But the professor nipped her in the bud.

‘That’s just where you’re wrong,’ he said. ‘That’s just where you make a mistake. You have to live on an island for a couple of months before you make up your mind about it, and then, I assure you, you won’t want to see another one again in the whole course of your life. Suppose you lived here, for instance; suppose you lived in that hotel by the Marina Grande. What’s it called? I can’t read the name very well from here. The Grotte Bleue. Imagine what would happen when you took your walk every day. You would say to yourself: shall I go by the steps to the left or the road to the right? Having reached the market-place, shall I walk to Monte Timberio on the left or Monte Solaro on the right? After you had walked up Timberio nineteen times and Solaro twenty-three times it would become a matter of indifference. When you had done each walk a couple of hundred times you might even begin to tire of them. And as for that awful moment when you turned out of the hotel! Steps on left or road on right? Ena, Dena, Dina, Do. Good heavens, you would go off your head. Dr. Johnson said that nobody would go to sea who had the opportunity of going to prison, for being in a ship was being in a prison—with the chance of being drowned. He ought to have added islands to ships, except that on an island you lack even the excitement of insecurity. You even lack the chance of being drowned.

‘The most formidable torture,’ added the professor, ‘which the great brains of Europe could possibly have devised for Napoleon could not have exceeded the cruelty of incarcerating that world-rambling mind within the dreary confines of his island. Elba was the most fiendish punishment recorded in history.’

Mrs. Skimlit said: ‘My grandfather was an ensign in the Napoleonic Wars.’

Chapter 17

THE party were landed in rowing boats, were ushered to the funicular. They reached the piazza, and Mrs. Skimlit exclaimed with pleasure upon seeing the white-bearded dotard in a red hat who is hired to sell picture postcards of himself. A gabble of cab-drivers accosted them from all sides. They were driven to the Sole Mio.

When the whirl had subsided and luncheon had been eaten, when Mrs. Skimlit had ceased to haggle about the pension and Miss Albino had gained her way, from long experience, about the soap, it was discovered that the professor and Mr. Pupillary had disappeared. Mrs. Skimlit marshalled the rest in the sitting-room.

‘It is too late,’ she said, ‘to visit the Blue Grotto to-day. We shall be able to see that tomorrow. The next best thing to see is the ruin of the palace of Tiberius, on Monte Timberio. We pass the Salto di Timberio, a precipice over which he used to throw his victims. The other sights, in order of importance, are: The Arco Naturale, the baths of Tiberius, the Faraglioni (but we can see them from any part of the island), the fort on Monte Solaro, and the village of Anacapri. On our way to Monte Timberio we can visit the church, dedicated to S. Costanzo, in the market-place. Where shall we go first?’

Mrs. Menzies said: ‘My husband is not feeling very well. I think he had better lie down for a little. I shall stay with him.’

Miss Albino said: ‘Personally I have seen the sights. I shall just go for a little walk up Monte Telegrafo.’

The Prunes said: ‘Is there anywhere where we could do some shopping?’

Anne said: ‘I saw some nice shops in the piazza. Could I come with you?’

Mr. McInvert said: ‘I think I had better look for the professor.’

Mrs. Skimlit tossed her head. It was a conspiracy, evidently. Very well, let them stay at home: she would go alone. In any case she had never wanted them to come.

The professor was sitting in Morgano’s with Mr. Pupillary. Morgano’s was full of Americans, and the professor had just made the quotation of a lifetime. He was so pleased that he repeated it.

‘*Oh famelice, inique e fiere Arpie,*’ he declaimed, bowing to a beautifully soignée young lady from Washington, who thought he was one of the famed eccentrics of the island and sparkled delightedly in return.

Oh famelice, inique e fiere Arpie
Ch’ all’ accecata Italia e d’error piena,
Per punir forse antique colpe rie,
In ogni mensa alto giudicio mena. . . .

The object of his advances turned to the senator at her side.

‘See that old gentleman, pop,’ she said. ‘Isn’t he cute? I believe it’s Dr. Axel Munthe.’

‘Yeah?’ said the senator (or it might have been a gunman on holiday), and the two watched the professor intently for about an hour.

The professor expanded under the scrutiny. He ordered four bottles of Asti Spumanti, and had them placed in a row before him, in order to foster the illusion of eccentricity.

‘Filthy stuff,’ he said, pouring out a glass for Mr. Pupillary, ‘but it’s an experience.’

They drank, and the professor began to talk.

‘That homily I gave you on love,’ he said, ‘it isn’t half exhausted. I was saying that what annoyed me about the modern attitudes to love was that they were none of them practical or dictated by common sense. People will talk about the wickedness of love, or the beastliness of love, or the joys of love, or even the scientific aspects of love. But nobody mentions the social side of love: love as relating to conduct and expediency: love as it would have interested Chesterfield, or even Cobbett. For instance, nobody has written about the two absorbing and vital sciences: of Not Falling in Love, and of Falling Out of Love.’

But to-day Mr. Pupillary was in a good humour too, and he had no intention of being a sleeping partner in the discussion.

‘You talk about love,’ he said. ‘You gas away for hours. But it doesn’t get you anywhere. People who talk about action bore me to tears. The only reasonable way of dealing with life is by living it.’

‘Quite,’ said the professor. ‘I quite agree. So long as you’ve got the guts to do so.’

‘Well, I have got the guts. You may not believe it, but I propose to marry a girl called Costanza, one of the peasants working at the hotel, as soon as we get back to Positano.’

‘I believe you implicitly,’ said the professor. ‘I have done for a week. That’s why I keep talking about love.’

Mr. Pupillary said stiffly: ‘I gather that you are trying to dissuade me.’

‘Not at all. I’m not such a fool as to think I should be able.’

‘Then why do you go on talking?’

The professor quaffed a glass of Spumanti to quell his rage.

‘My dear young sir,’ he said, ‘you have just remarked that the only satisfactory way of dealing with life is to live it. I hastened to agree, in case you had some inkling of the truth behind the proposition which you stated. But I qualified it by adding that you needed guts to see it through. You claimed to have these guts, because you were ready to embrace a rash course of action. But a person has not necessarily the guts to go through a battle because he has had the guts to enlist in it. I keep trying to open your eyes to the rational aspects of love, because I know that in fact you haven’t the guts to see it through. Nobody who has been to a university ever has. You may marry this woman, and you may cease to love her. But what then? Will you desert her? Will you go on living your life instead of talking or thinking about it? No. You will shoulder your mental responsibilities and settle down to married life—in extreme poverty, no doubt, and at great inconvenience.’

‘Well, that’s just what I said.’

‘What was what you said?’

‘I said that I had the guts to see it through.’

‘No, you didn’t. You said that you had the guts to live your life. Quite a different thing. If you go on *living* your life you will desert this woman as soon as you want to. That’s just the opposite of sticking to her.’

‘I think you must be a cad.’

‘Not at all,’ said the professor, beginning to enjoy himself. ‘If *I* married the woman I should stick to her. For, you see, I don’t claim to have the guts to live my life. I prefer to regulate it according to rules and reason. I prefer to eke it out with thought and conversation. I haven’t got the guts to evade my responsibilities and merely live it. So if I married the woman I should do so with open eyes, and in that case I should have to stick to her. That’s why I shouldn’t marry her.’

‘All this is talk,’ said Mr. Pupillary.

‘All right. But after all we’re *allowed* to talk, I suppose. It’s recreational. Have some more Spumanti.’

Mr. McInvert popped his head in at the glass doors and looked round the room. The professor hailed him.

‘Hullo,’ he cried, ‘come along. Have a drink. *Laborare est orare, set potare est clarius.*’

Mr. McInvert sat down solemnly and drank, looking at the professor with wide unthinking eyes. The professor filled his glass again. ‘*Si trigintis guttis morbum curare velis,*’ he said, ‘*erras.*’ These were pearls before swine. Mr. McInvert merely nodded and drank it up.

‘What is this?’ he asked. ‘What is this drink? Is it a joke?’

‘Yes,’ said the professor. ‘Have some more.’

Mr. McInvert drank another glass.

‘Extraordinary,’ he said. ‘Extraordinary.’

‘The professor,’ said Mr. Pupillary, ‘was telling me all about love.’

‘Yes,’ said the professor, turning his sharp eyes on Mr. McInvert in a disturbing way. ‘I was just going to explain to him the science of Not Falling in Love.’

But Mr. McInvert suddenly began to talk. Perhaps it was the Spumanti.

‘The Science of Not Falling in Love,’ he said, ‘what a vital science and how little understood! Two-thirds of mankind are in a position which makes it unwise to fall in love. Gentlemen are unwise to fall in love with persons below their station; well-to-do people have to avert their eyes from all the thousand million nubile wenches who are poor or ill-educated or lowly born; poor people in medium or infra-medium positions, who cannot afford to marry, have to avert their eyes from all wenches whatever—for the rich ones won’t have them; middle-class people have to avert their eyes from rich and poor alike. Besides the vast percentage of important inhibitions dictated by social reasons, there is the vaster percentage of people whom physical reasons inhibit. For instance, there are the plain and ugly people. (What numbers of these!) They have to be sparing of their passions because few are likely to return them. And then there is the unimportant but equally interesting percentage of people who have odd adamantine peculiarities which definitely forbid them to fall in love: Roman priests, impotent people (with the desire but not the execution), homosexuals, etc. I ought not to omit the positively vast percentage of people

for whom falling in love is unfortunate for no other reason than that their love is not returned. I suppose a man falls in love twenty times for every once that he is able to marry, even when he is not poor or ugly, simply because it takes two to make a match. . . .’

‘Exactly,’ said the professor, who could not bear to have the words taken out of his mouth. ‘That was just what I was telling Pupillary. . . .’

‘All this the world well knows,’ continued Mr. McInvert, without heeding the interruption, ‘but none knows well to shun the heaven which leads men to this hell.’

‘On the contrary,’ exclaimed the professor. ‘On the contrary, my dear fellow——’

Mr. Pupillary found his hat and quietly slipped away.

In the sunlight, and encouraged by the aniseed, he felt ready for anything. They were fogies to sit there talking about love when love itself, balancing on rosy pinions, waited for them in the world outside. In two days, in less than forty-eight hours, he would be back in Positano: he would hold something in his arms.

Meanwhile he must pass the time. He would like to overleap it at a single pace, in sleep, in unconsciousness, sacrificing to oblivion two whole days of his inadequate store; but that was not possible. He must make the time fly instead, in movement, in action.

Mr. Pupillary made for the Sole Mio. He found Anne Menzies waiting for him.

She had known he would come back. How clever of him to have slipped away just before Mrs. Skimlit started her proposals for sight-seeing! Anne had guessed his reasons all along, had only waited for Mrs. Skimlit to be gone, for the party to have dispersed, before slipping out of her engagement to go shopping with the Prunes. Now she had waited for him, and he was back.

Mr. Pupillary hailed her joyfully.

‘Come along, Anne,’ he exclaimed. ‘Let’s go and do something desperate. What about driving up to Anacapri?’

‘John, I should love to. Mrs. Skimlit says there’s a ruined fort there or something.’

‘It’s on the top of Monte Solaro. What we shall do is this. We shall get together a cold meal, with a couple of bottles of wine, and drive up to the village in a carrozza, and climb the mountain, and have dinner in the fort by moonlight!’



Miss Prune was shopping with her mother. They had bought a shawl, and a packet of Beecham’s pills from the chemist. Now, on the opposite side of the square, they were conning the English books in the library. Tauchnitz editions lined the walls, relieved by illustrated books in German which purported to reconstruct the splendours of Tiberius’ villa before it became a ruin. Tiberius lived in a fairy palace apparently, of no known architectural style. It had Gothic windows and minarets. There were books in every European language; but chiefly there were books by Compton Mackenzie, Norman Douglas, Edwin Cerio, and Axel Munthe. Miss Prune did not look at these. Her attention

was taken up by the French works. Some of them certainly had striking covers.

Whilst her mother was in conversation with the League of Nations bookseller, Miss Prune furtively took down a volume. *Venus Damnées* it was called. Miss Prune examined the illustrations with startled but progressive interest.



Miss Albino sat on a grey rock near the summit of Monte Telegrafo. It was a central vantage-point, and although she was not very high up, she commanded bird's-eye views of most of the island. She could see Mrs. Skimlit, for instance (Mrs. Skimlit was unmistakable), tirelessly toiling up the final stages of Monte Timberio. If she looked the other way she could see a carrozza, with two people sitting in it, winding along the cliff road to Anacapri. The horse was undoubtedly maltreated.

But Miss Albino for once was uninterested in the sufferings of her dumb friend. She made no effort to recognise the occupants of the carriage, though she might have done, and paid no attention to Mrs. Skimlit's zigzags upon the unequal stairway.

It was on this grey rock that Miss Albino's boy friend, laying his straw boater on the grass, had popped the question long ago, in 1912.

She tried to visualise the scene, as she had often done before. Usually he had worn a cycling suit, with strong boots, dark stockings, and a tweed cap. The coat had a belt and shoulder straps of tweed. Surely he could not have worn a boater with that ensemble? And yet she distinctly remembered the boater. Perhaps he had put on his best suit in order to propose.

Miss Albino felt that she ought to remember every detail of the scene, how he had knelt down (had he knelt down?), and the look of kindness in his merry eyes. He had merry eyes with slanting eyebrows. She knew this, for she had phrased the description verbally to her heart. She had told herself so twenty years ago, and her heart, a willing scholar, had written down the words. But now her imagination failed her. She tried to visualise the face. In vain. The phrase existed, but not the face behind it.

Miss Albino constructed several mental eyebrows (they had been his greatest charm) slanting at different angles. They had slanted in a sort of inverted V, if only she could picture it. And underneath had been the merry eyes. 'Merry'—'Eyes.' It conveyed nothing.

Perhaps it would flash upon her if she concentrated on the rest of the face. A lovely face—lips, nose, slanting eyebrows, merry eyes. She ran through the category of features common to the human face.

A catch arrested Miss Albino. His eyes were merry and his eyebrows slanting, but had he worn a moustache? Straining, straining into the past, Miss Albino yearned towards her only swain: struggled to reconstruct him, to evoke his flesh and blood from the disembodied dead. (He was married now, and lived in Wembley.)

It was curious, but she felt no resentment that he should be married; it was strange, but she could not picture him in the least; it was most annoying, but she could not for the life of her remember his upper lip.

The sun shone; the lizards, scared by her approach, came out again and flicked among

the boulders; Miss Albino, with a troubled expression, reconstructed moustaches on an immaterial tailor's dummy.



Tea-time passed, dinner-time approached, and the professor was still arguing in Morgano's with Mr. McInvert. The bottles of Spumanti were empty, and Mr. McInvert was a fierce opponent.

'It's all very well,' he said. 'It's all very well. The Science of Not Falling in Love doesn't exist. There is only one cure in that direction, and that is to shut yourself up in a barrel and go over Niagara. Even then you might meet some enthusiastic Blondin or Houdini. The only way not to fall in love is never to meet anybody at all.'

'Sir,' said the professor, 'I agree with your statement in a broad way. But I maintain that the science exists for all that. Ultimately the only cure for several maladies is death, but that does not prevent us from prescribing treatment. Your cure for the malady of falling in love is the surgeon's; mine the doctor's. I do not pretend to cure it, but I hope to alleviate it. I maintain that it is unnecessary to forgo the society of all beings whatever. One need only eschew the society of attractive beings. So long as one can keep up a high standard of perception and study to spend every moment of one's life as a critic of rational integrity . . .'

'Do you say that nothing would be lost if love were cut out of life altogether?' asked Mr. McInvert, branching off at a tangent.

'A great deal would be lost. Perhaps the title of my science is misleading. I ought to have called it the science of Not Falling in Love with the Wrong People. As I was saying, so long as you are painstaking in keeping your critical standards towards humanity at a high *mental* pitch. . . .'

'Oh no,' said Mr. McInvert. 'Oh no. This is just fizzling out. You may as well admit that there isn't such a science——'

'An *applied* science,' defended the professor, 'not a theoretical one. . . .'

His argument was waved away.

'If you must have a science, consider the far more important and practical one of Falling Out of Love. Nobody can help getting into it——'

The professor shook his head.

'—but the great thing is to get out of it. That's where a rational cultivated man can find food for speculation. . . .'

'Fundamentally,' said the professor, talking very fast so as to get ahead of his opponent, 'we are in agreement. I myself have made a study of this second science, as well as of the first. I still maintain that it is the inferior study, but I admit that it is more amenable to regulation. It is also more tangible and interesting. The first necessity for the cure of love is, of course, honesty. A man who suffers from love must be able to sit down and momentarily subdue his emotions. Like Richard's critic of poetry, who is to consider the great cosmic facts of man's isolation and insignificance before reading the poem, the lover must honestly align himself with life before turning to his present position. . . .'

'It is a beneficial exercise,' exclaimed Mr. McInvert, who had regained his breath, 'to

put oneself outside the whole affair, to criticise the situation as if it existed between two acquaintances, instead of between oneself and ones beloved.’

‘. . . He must consider with open eyes his life-long pursuits and possibilities—he must think how much of his life he spends in sleep, in eating, in work, in sport, in evacuation even: he must try to sum up the years of patient and often pleasant existence against the days and hours of passion: he must regard his financial and social position with the peripeteia in them which unsuitable love might accomplish: lastly, and in the light of these considerations, he must dispassionately assess his relations with the person he loves.’

‘How many lovers,’ put in Mr. McInvert, ‘have maintained the happy relation all their lives? He must quietly face the fact that three out of every five love affairs are over in a year: that four out of every five have changed into a less vital relationship within a couple: that nine out of ten do not survive, except as stingless habit, the period of middle life.’

‘Exactly,’ said the professor. ‘And he must perform this exercise twice or three times a day.’

‘Like deep breathing, it should at least be repeated night and morning. Relief is obtained only by the most gradual degrees.’

‘Between the exercises he will fall back into the fiercest tortures of body and emotion. . . .’

‘In fact he will fall back into love. . . .’

‘But with each successive exercise he is keeping a hold on life. . . .’

‘He is keeping his safety catch in working order!’

The professor leaned forward and slapped Mr. McInvert on the back, knocking over one of the bottles. Then he shook him warmly by the hand.

‘You understand the cure,’ he said, like a philosopher.’

Mr. McInvert released his hand with dignity, searched for his hat, stood up.

‘I understand it,’ he said, ‘better than you do. I know it doesn’t work.’



At the hotel they were wondering what had happened to Anne and Mr. Pupillary. In the ruined fortress of Monte Solaro Mr. Pupillary was wondering much the same thing. Now that Anne, flushed with half a bottle of Chianti, was leaning her head upon his shoulder, as they sat with their backs to one of the crumbling loopholes, it dawned upon Mr. Pupillary that she loved him. What ought he to do?

Mr. Pupillary was too polite to do anything. He could scarcely inform a young lady that he was not in love with her, after she had gone to the length of putting her head upon his shoulder.

It was a ticklish position. Mr. Pupillary remembered a dreadful experience of his adolescence, when, returning from a hunt ball in the back seat of a car, the lady next to him (she was ten years older than he was) had asked him to take something out of her hair. She had securely entangled it there before she asked. Then she had put her head on his breast so that he could reach it better. Then her hair had come down.

Mr. Pupillary felt hot all over at the recollection. His only defence had lain in complete rigidity. That defence was open to him in the present case. But what a fool he

had felt! And he did not want to feel a fool again.

Besides, he was happy. He wanted other people to be happy too. He was in love, and knew the value of love. If Anne really was in love with him, she would be so terribly pleased if he were kind to her this one evening. He was bound to make her unhappy sooner or later, when he told her about Costanza, so why not give her one happy memory to look back upon? Love was so lovely that it was surely better to have a little of it than none at all.

Anne said: 'Oh, John, isn't it lovely here? It is so nice.'

Mr. Pupillary pressed her waist as tenderly as possible.

She asked for a kiss. Her avid lips met his retreating ones for a moment which was bliss for her: for him a collection of calculable seconds. Was this right? Was he doing it properly? It solved the question for the time being at any rate.

Chapter 18

MR. MCINVERT and Miss Prune stood side by side on the cliffs of Monte Timberio, looking across the miles of intervening sea towards the Sorrentine peninsula. They thought in silence, and on different subjects. It was a lovely afternoon.

Poor old Tiberius, Mr. McInvert reflected, had stood on this very spot, cut off from humanity and betrayed by men. Over these very cliffs, or similar ones (the exact spot was naturally doubtful, since the fact had never occurred), he was supposed to have flung his victims, whilst his mercenaries below waited in rowing boats to bang the last sparks of living out of them with oars. Here, where this ridiculous statue of the Virgin now sarcastically stood, Tiberius' palace had looked out over the bay. He had lived here for ten years, an ordinary and an old man; knowing that he was alone, knowing that he was believed a monster, knowing that his poor harmless hobby of astrology would be set down to a kind of classical witchcraft. He had been stoical, solitary, blameless: and it had not availed. All those years of restraint had been wasted. In spite of all that continence he was believed a fiend.

Obviously it was not worth it. Mr. Pupillary, so the professor reported, had claimed that the only way to deal with life was by living it; and he was right. It was no good shutting oneself up in a voluntary prison, as the old Emperor had done, mentally and physically. The only thing was to do what one wanted, anyway to try it; and blow the consequences.

Besides, what joys there were in life if one could grasp them! Love, that malady of which the professor boresomely drivelled, was an exquisite bitterness. Like death, it was the only illness known to all mankind. Young and old, rich and poor, danced splendidly, unanimously, to its piping.

The shining sun, the blue deep distances of the scaly water, filled Mr. McInvert with confidence, with delight, with the desire to communicate his joy. Surely even Miss Prune had loved! He turned upon her in a rapture.

'Miss Prune!' he exclaimed. 'Have you ever been in love?'

But Miss Prune had been thinking too. That book, *Venus Damnées*, and those pictures! They had been horrid, but somehow . . . She had been compelled to dream about them. And, if books of that sort could be published, perhaps the crime was not so very singular, so very peculiar to herself. It made it somehow less dreadful that lots of people should do it. Perhaps—even—lots of people did it—more than once? Without being professional whores, she meant, quite ordinary people. And, in any case, once the damage had been done . . .

Miss Prune, looking towards the peninsula, had tried to distinguish Positano. That, if she could make it out, would be the place where Dr. Arnold-Browne was sitting or standing now. It had not been so bad. Perhaps, when she got back . . .

It was at this moment that Mr. McInvert broke in upon her thoughts.

Colouring joyfully, Miss Prune threw herself into his arms.



In Morgano's the professor sat alone. He was in the habit of talking to himself, if there were nobody else to talk to. He might have felt nervous about it anywhere else, had he been in the habit of feeling nervous, but here it would merely be attributed to genius.

The latest of the two mistresses of the Duca di Cavallofaccia, who had intellectual leanings, watched the professor's soliloquy with evident admiration. She sat next the duke (the other mistress sat on the other side), drinking Vermouth. The duke was a dear, though stingy, but one could scarcely call him intellectual. This Englishman, on the other hand, who talked to himself and drank Spumanti . . . She wondered who it was. Il Bernard Shaw, perhaps. It could scarcely be the Prince of Wales.

The professor looked depressed.

'Of course he was right about the safety catch,' he remarked, shaking his three beards, 'it's inadequate by itself. But he gave me no time to mention the safety valve. That's the more important aid, after all. I ought definitely to have brought it up at the beginning. I must get Mr. McInvert to read the thirty-eighth chapter of Genesis.'



Mrs. Skimlit had gained her way at last. Quite a large party, under her leadership, danced upon the waves outside the blue grotto. They were in small boats. The boats shot into the tiny tunnel one by one, whilst the occupants lay upon their backs and stared upwards at the rocky arch. It was a solemn introduction. Once inside they were rowed about on a brief tour of inspection.

Everybody took a proper interest in everything. As they were paddled about on the sublit aquarium of colour, everybody noticed how blue it was. When they had been decanted again into the open air, having enriched the *regno d'Italia* by any number of lire, everybody remarked that it was quite a fairy scene.



Mr. McInvert peered in furtively through the glass windows of Morgano's. Seeing the professor, he let himself in, looking hurriedly over his shoulder and ordered a glass of brandy. The professor raised his eyebrows.

'Feeling ill?' he enquired.

'No,' said Mr. McInvert. 'That is . . . no.'

The professor seemed to feel that something was required in the way of conversation.

'Talking of invalids,' he said, 'how is the bluebottle?'

'I don't know.'

'Not dead, I hope?'

Mr. McInvert made an effort to adjust himself to the subject.

'No, I hope not. I left it at Positano.'

'But it will starve.'

'I don't think so. I left it in a matchbox on the window-sill, with a piece of biscuit

soaked in water and a little jam. I made holes in the matchbox so that it could breathe.'

'The jam was thoughtful,' said the professor. 'I suppose bluebottles are rather fond of jam?'

'I believe so.'

Mr. McInvert sounded dubious and distracted. The professor cleared his throat.

'About that discussion we were having——' he began.

Mr. McInvert laid a hand upon his sleeve.

'Another time,' he said. 'I don't feel like a discussion at the moment. I've had a shock.'

'If it wasn't the bluebottle . . .'

'No, it wasn't the bluebottle. It was Miss Prune. It was that ridiculous girl Miss Prune.' Mr. McInvert's voice became vibrant with indignation. 'I was talking to her on Monte Timberio, when she suddenly threw her arms about my neck and offered to go to bed with me.'

'And did you?' asked the professor.

'No! Good heavens, no. I didn't know which way to turn.'

'But surely you must have done something to provoke this outburst? Your natural charm would account for it, of course, but the suddenness . . .'

Mr. McInvert said: 'I simply asked her, in a perfectly general way, whether she had ever been in love. Without a moment's hesitation, and before I could do anything to prevent her, she leapt into my arms and began to undo my buttons.'

The professor looked interested.

'How far did she get?'

'Only the top button. I wrenched myself free, pushed her over a boulder, and ran back here as fast as I could.'

The professor thought it over.

'You will have to apologise, of course.'

'But I didn't do anything.'

'Exactly. So you must apologise. You can't go putting leading questions of that sort to young ladies promiscuously, and then doing nothing about it. You've been trifling with her affections.'

Chapter 19

THE return to Positano was a repetition of the voyage out, in circumstances, at any rate. The same vessel churned the water with the same uneasy stolidity.

But in atmosphere the trip was different. A feeling of excitement, of tension which even the professor's monologues could not counteract, pervaded the ship.

Miss Albino stood well forward, waiting for the first glimpse of Positano. For her, Capri had been a failure. The problem of the moustache had never resolved itself. Her beau had completely dematerialised, dissolved with time, and now only the dear hotel and the dear dumb animals remained to her. She waited anxiously for the first glimpse. Would there be a letter for her, a letter from the Podestà? Was she to stay in Italy, or must she go?

Miss Prune steadfastly kept the deck on the opposite side to Mr. McInvert. What a fool she had made of herself! What could he think of her? He had pushed her over so roughly, and run away so quickly, that he was evidently a Sir Galahad. What a mistake!

And yet Miss Prune was unrepentant. Now that she had been separated from Dr. Arnold-Browne, she knew her mind. The pictures in the book had helped considerably. She wanted to see the doctor again, very much, as quickly as possible. He was forgiven, entirely forgiven. No matter what it cost, no matter whether it was right or wrong, Miss Prune definitely wanted to take up photography seriously.

She stood next to Miss Albino, peering ahead with equal fervour for the land. There, when they rounded that next bluff, would be the hotel. There would be the hotel, and in the hotel the window, and in the window Dr. Arnold-Browne. What times they would have together!

On the opposite side of the bridge Mr. McInvert waited with equal enthusiasm. The period of repression, of words and laws and arguments, was over. In an hour he would be back at the ravine, ready to chance his luck, ready to essay his hopes of heaven. And really he thought there were hopes. Straining forward in a fever of expectation, Mr. McInvert counted over the hints of affection, the gifts accepted, the smiles exchanged.

The professor was standing with Mr. Pupillary and Anne at the stern of the vessel. Mr. Pupillary, for the first time, felt really grateful for the professor's flow of precept. He was on his way back to Costanza; he was tremendously happy; he wanted everybody to be happy; but it could not be denied that Anne was becoming a problem. She had shewn signs of wanting something more than his kisses. She had disconcertingly asked how much he loved her. What did one say in that case? Mr. Pupillary had said that he loved her very very much, that he thought she was sweet. But, he had said, but . . . And the fear in her eyes had silenced him. Perhaps, he hoped, the 'but' would be sufficient. It was a beginning. Next time they were alone together he would increase the conjunction to a phrase: 'but, at the moment . . .' So it would grow, he hoped, from phrase to clause, from clause to sentence, breaking the situation to her gently.

It was kind of Mr. Pupillary to take all this trouble when his own heart was lost. He did it quite sincerely. He saw now that it had been madness to begin, but he must do his best. The future would look after itself. Meanwhile, screened by the barrage of the

professor's conversation, he schemed about Costanza.

'The fort,' said the professor, pointing astern to the rapidly diminishing island, 'which you visited last evening, is one of the parts of Capri which has always attracted me. For one thing it is so high up, and so absolutely unconnected with any notorious form of vice, that few trippers trouble to visit it. At least not the midday trippers. During the daytime there are usually two or three people there, but they don't stay long. It's more a place for the afternoon walks of the real residents—indeed of the peasants themselves—than for the tourist trade. And then the place has an attraction of its own. Seldom can one have the pleasure of visiting a battlefield in which the English have been so decisively, so impossibly vanquished. I'm a patriotic man myself, but it is refreshing to be allowed to realise that all the battles fought by English troops have not been victorious. You saw yourselves how impregnable the place seems to be: a battlement, one would say, surrounded by precipices. In my recollection there wasn't a single approach which was not completely commanded, and only one approach which seemed accessible to any but Swiss guides. One would have said that the only way of capturing that fortress would be by siege and starvation. Yet the English were inside it, and the French, swarming up the faces of the cliffs, carried it by assault. I have my own explanation.'

Mr. Pupillary hastened to encourage him.

'What is your theory?' he asked.

'I believe it was a case of vertigo. The English marksmen, leaning over those enormous and terrible chasms, felt their bones turning to water and shot astray.'

'In any case,' added the professor, 'our army in the days of the French wars was not a very brilliant one. Minorca, when it was taken from us in 1756, was under the command of an Irish lieutenant-general who was eighty-four years of age and suffered from gout. The governor, all four regimental colonels, and forty-one commissioned officers were on leave in England.'

'Extraordinary!' exclaimed Mr. Pupillary, hoping to elicit further stretches of information. So long as the professor talked he could go on thinking about Costanza; and, moreover, he would be safe from Anne. But this unaccustomed enthusiasm put the professor off his stride. He was ready to lecture against opposition, but encouragement unnerved him. Looking anxiously from one to the other, in fear of sarcasm, the unhappy academe relapsed into silence and presently moved off towards Mrs. Skimlit.

Anne looked about her quickly.

'Kiss me,' she said. 'Nobody can see.'

The party was landed in two boatloads. The first contained Mrs. Skimlit, Miss Albino, the Prunes, and Mr. McInvert. They hastened up the steps, and were half-way to the hotel before the second cargo grated on the beach.

Mrs. Skimlit went straight to her room. She took off her hat, plunged the hatpins into the pincushion, gave her hair a couple of expert sweeps with her ivory hairbrushes, put some eau-de-cologne on a handkerchief, and lay down on the bed. It was beneficial to rest for half an hour before luncheon. It increased one's appetite.

Miss Albino stood in front of the letter-board, holding a grey envelope. She opened it and read the letter. Then she went upstairs and sat on her bed. Her prominent pale eyes looked out of the window sightlessly, without wavering. Every now and then she read the letter again carefully, from start to finish.

Miss Prune left her mother to go upstairs alone. She ran to the smoking-room and looked in, and there was nobody there. The proprietor was standing in the hall.

‘Can you tell me,’ she asked, ‘whether Dr. Arnold-Browne is in?’

The proprietor spread his hands in a deprecating gesture.

‘The doctor,’ he said, ‘I am sorry, he has left us yesterday. He has been called away on urgent business to England.’

‘Oh,’ said Miss Prune. ‘Is he coming back?’

‘No,’ said the proprietor. ‘He did not say so.’

‘Oh,’ said Miss Prune. ‘Oh!’

She groped her way upstairs.

Mr. McInvert went up to his room and put his hat on the bed. He would brush his hair and go out to the ravine. Meanwhile, one last augury of his fortune . . . If the bluebottle were alive the day was his.

Mr. McInvert lifted the matchbox cautiously. It was ridiculous, but he was afraid to open it. Perhaps if he shook it, just a gentle shake, the creature would buzz: would betray its living presence without compelling him to take the final step. Mr. McInvert shook the box. Silence. He had not shaken it hard enough. On the other hand, if he shook it too hard, the biscuit would be rattled from side to side and might crush the bluebottle.

Mr. McInvert put his thumb to the end of the box and pushed it tentatively. Then he shook it a little harder and listened. Something had scraped inside.

Mr. McInvert opened the matchbox resolutely and looked his fill. The bluebottle, partly roasted by the strong sun of the window-sill, lay on its back in a litter of jam and biscuit crumbs.



Anne Menzies laughed and chattered with Mr. Pupillary, whilst the professor entertained Mr. and Mrs. Menzies, all the way up from the beach. Mr. Pupillary wished that Anne would shut up, or at any rate walk faster. From the boat there had seemed to be no work going forward in the ravine, and he burned to know the reason.

They entered the hotel as Mr. McInvert came down the stairs. The proprietor was waiting for them.

‘Why,’ asked Mr. Pupillary, ‘have they stopped working in the garden?’

The proprietor beamed with affable philanthropy.

‘Ah,’ he said. ‘To-day is a *fiesta*. To-day I have given all the labourers the holiday to celebrate a marriage.’

Chapter 20

NIGHT fell, and Mr. Pupillary was still walking on the beach. The stars and the waning moon came out, lighting the ruined mill obscurely. The scent of the garlic flowers, where he had trampled them, reached subtly into his consciousness, presenting in the warm shadowy air vistas of unbearable reminiscence. The grey sand crunched and crumbled under his feet, found mysterious entries to his boots. It was all right, Mr. Pupillary kept telling himself, it would pass. This sort of thing had happened before. It was a natural pain which time would heal. Human paths were in the habit of intersecting and parting again. Time and change would work the oblivion which was still beyond imagination, and Costanza would be a separate identity again: never to be the same at meeting, never to be met. It would be odd to have no part of her in his life, though he had never had much.

Mr. Pupillary clenched himself to face it. Costanza and Andrea who played the *Torna a Surrient'* on the pipe . . . Here was another impossible possibility lost; but it would be forgotten, but it would be recovered from. Costanza would really dim, would fade, would detach herself in due time. He would become himself again.

Nothing was more certain than that, if only he could hold himself till then, a totally discrete life would re-create itself.

And yet it had happened. The time would come when the arms which had wanted to hold would be past hope of holding, effectually prevented by time and space, and the un-kissed lips would be parted beyond the hope of kissing. There would be love no longer. But it had happened. It could not be unhappened or obliterated from the mysterious storehouse of past time. It would stay there the same and unaltered when his mind had altered its outlines for himself. Those beautiful loyalties were to be passed on to the muniments of the House of Fame: there to survive as lovely as ever, as fresh as ever—the eyes and arms still reaching, the possibilities of happiness still true, still lost and lovely, by themselves.

Mr. Pupillary, brought up against the ruined wall, halted in an agony of recollection. In there . . .

The professor's voice broke upon him from the darkness, behind the red light of a cigar.

'Ah,' it said, 'there you are. Come and sit on the terrace like a Christian.'

'No,' said Mr. Pupillary. 'I don't want to.'

'Then I shall stay and talk to you here.'

The professor took Mr. Pupillary by the arm and walked him among the garlic flowers.

'What a lovely night!'

'Is it?'

'The stars are beautiful.'

'Yes.'

‘I perceive,’ said the professor, ‘that you are upset about this girl Costanza. But is it worth it? Love, you know, is not the only thing in life.’

‘No,’ said Mr. Pupillary.

‘If I may venture to say so,’ continued the professor, ‘it is not even the most important thing. Life, obviously, is the most important thing in life. So we shall have to put breathing, the heart’s action, drinking, eating, the function of the bowels, higher in the category than love. You can live without loving, but you can’t live without breathing.’

‘But what is the use of living without loving?’

‘Of course,’ said the professor. ‘You’re in love, and your mind’s disordered. Try to think back a few weeks. When you first came here you were perfectly contented to live, weren’t you? You found us all capable of supporting life. We were as busy as bees. There was the Drawing Room feud against the Smoking Room. Everybody was cheerfully occupied. Not a day passed without a quarrel or a scandal or an intrigue. All that busy normal occupation has been vanquished by the spring. But it will return.’

‘Are you trying to comfort me?’

‘No, I’m trying to distract you. If your mind has something to chew on your emotions will be less likely to run amok. Consider love as it has been devastating this hotel. It will give you mental exercise. Has it occurred to you that yours is not the only raging heart? We have been experiencing something like the plague in Boccaccio. Love in all its forms, lustful, romantic, strange, sublimated, or transferred, has been ravaging our whole society. It has been an impressive spectacle. Mrs. Skimlit at one pole, and I myself at the other, we have raised our heads above the flood. Why has Mrs. Skimlit escaped, and why have I? I leave you to consider. In the middle, at the *via media*, the Menzieses and the Joneses have stood unshaken: normal, happy, and consummated. The rest have been swept away. You might have observed, if you had not been struggling to keep your own head above the torrent, requited love and unrequited: love understood and love misunderstood, perverted and diverted: comical, situational, in one case tragic, or merely moony.

‘Why do you suppose Miss Albino has been packing? Was her treatment of love the right one? For whom do you suppose Anne Menzies has been waiting, whilst you tramped the sands? What evil has she done? What was that light which has just gone out in Mr. McInvert’s room, and where was his mistake? What about Miss Prune and Dr. Arnold-Browne? As a great writer has expressed it, where is the fallacy between Stalky & Co. and Stalky & Co-respondents?’

‘And then again,’ continued the professor. ‘The plague has not been disproportionate. The Cowfolds have been but mildly inconvenienced, and the four ladies from Devonshire, why were they immune? There must be morals to be drawn from all this. I can’t think what they are.’

‘I don’t think it’s very comforting to know that lots of people are miserable besides myself.’

‘The commonness of the disease makes it unimportant. One knows that one will recover.’

‘Of course one recovers. But I don’t want to recover. When I have got over this I shall have got over being happy along with being miserable. I shall relapse into unconsciousness.’

‘I enjoy my own form of unconsciousness,’ said the professor.

Mr. Pupillary struck his head with his fist.

‘Oh God,’ he said, ‘what’s the good of talking about it? I don’t enjoy it. I would rather be dead. Don’t you see that I loved Costanza with all of myself? It was the best kind of love: what you called sentiment, that day on the beach.’

‘Very well,’ said the professor, ‘but she didn’t love you. You will have to try again.’

‘There won’t ever be an again.’

‘Fudge,’ said the professor.

‘I’d rather be dead.’

‘Then kill yourself,’ said the professor.

Mr. Pupillary failed to avail himself of the invitation.

‘Suicide,’ said the professor reflectively, ‘has always struck me as a good thing—for those that commit it.’

Mr. McInvert climbed over the railings where he had slain the lizard, noted in the starlight the now decaying stalk of solitary asphodel. Asphodel was the flower which bloomed in the Elysian fields.

He took off his coat, folded it carefully, and hung it over the railing. Then, spreading his arms as if he were Miss Prune going for her daily exercise, he dived head foremost on to the rocks below.

The professor turned the body over (it was recognisable by its boots) and searched the waistcoat pockets. There, sure enough, was a letter addressed to himself.

He read it by the light of a cigarette-lighter.

DEAR PROFESSOR,—I have repeatedly attempted to confide my troubles to various members of this hotel, yourself included. If I have not met with rebuff I have met with evasion, or downright misunderstanding. But now I absolutely insist upon being given a hearing.

You will find in my bedroom a full statement of my case addressed to the coroner. I should be obliged if you would read this first and then hand it to the proper authorities. . . .

The professor folded up the letter and hurried back to the hotel, with Mr. Pupillary upon his heels. He ran up to Mr. McInvert’s room and seized the manuscript. There were about fifty pages, closely written.

The professor tiptoed down the stairs and put them in the smoking-room fire.

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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 *They Winter Abroad* by T. H. (Terence Hanbury) White (as James Aston)]